

Mortimer the militant atheist was being oppressed by his neighbor Norma, but not in the way you might think. She wasn't pulling pranks on him or stealing his cable, no nothing like that. Norma was just one of those aggressively joyful Lutherans. Maybe you know the kind of person I'm talking about.

Norma and Mort left their houses about the same time every day on their way to their separate jobs. *Every* day, Norma would have something positive to say, always incorporating the phrase, "Praise the Lord!" When her bike got stolen, Mort saw that she looked up to heaven and said, "I thank you God that you gave my bike to somebody who needed it more." When one of her overworn tires finally gave out on her '95 Camry, Mort helped her put a spare on so she could get to work on time.

Mort asked her, "You believe in God, right? How could your god let this tire blow out of your car?" Norma smiling replied, "He must have wanted to teach me that man does not live by tread alone, but by every word that comes from His mouth."

This joy just got to be too much for Mort. He couldn't handle it. When he saw that hard times made it so she was starting to visit the food pantry, he decided to prove to her once and for all that there was no God. He went to the store and bought a sack full of groceries and put it on her front doorstep.

When she left the house at the normal time, she saw the sack of groceries and spoke to the heavens with her arms outstretched, "Praise the Lord! You gave me manna from heaven!" Just then Mort jumped out of the bushes and said, "Gotcha! Your God didn't bring you those groceries, I did!" Norma just smiled at Mort and with her outstretched arms said to the heavens, "Praise the Lord! You gave me manna from heaven, and you used the devil as the deliveryman!"

Our God uses unlikely heroes to accomplish His will. But we may ask, 4. Why does the Lord use unlikely heroes? In our Old Testament text from Isaiah: **"Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed."** Cyrus certainly was an unexpected hero to the Israelites. He was the emperor of Persia which is modern-day Iran. This meant He was a non-Jew, and Cyrus did not worship Yahweh, the true God. However, the Lord Yahweh calls Cyrus his anointed.

Jerusalem was conquered and the people of Judah were taken into captivity in Babylon for seventy years. Who would save them? You would assume that God would raise up a leader from among the Jews to rescue them, but instead, He raised up Cyrus, a Gentile, to do His will. If we were God, certainly we wouldn't do such a thing!

But we see that it is the Lord who gives Cyrus success to defeat Babylon. Yahweh levels the exalted places; He breaks down the doors and bars. He gives Cyrus the plunder of the nations.

Often in our lives, do we see the Lord work in ways we wouldn't expect? How has God used unlikely heroes in your life? Maybe it was a friend who was down on his or her luck that when you helped them, it really changed your outlook on life. Maybe it was a boss who was a pain, but in hindsight, you learned a lot from. Maybe it was a family member who was there for you in your time of need. Yet why does God use unlikely heroes?

The Lord answers this question in our text as to why He is using Cyrus, the unexpected hero. He gives us three “so that’s” which help give us a window into the Lord’s mind. The first “so that”: 3. The Lord uses unlikely heroes so that they may know Him. The Lord speaking to Cyrus says He uses him so “...**that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.**” Why use Cyrus, the unbelieving Gentile to accomplish God’s will? Because the Lord is a team player and wants Cyrus on His team.

The Lord works all things for His good, and He employs everyone to achieve these ends. He is even able to use those who oppose Him for his greater good. Think about Mort from our story at the beginning of the sermon. By delivering groceries to Norma’s doorstep, he thought he was disproving God, but in fact, God was using Mort as His servant for Norma’s good.

The Lord is even able to use the evil actions of people like Judas who betrayed Jesus, the religious leaders who plotted Jesus’ death, and the unjust actions of Pontius Pilate who sentenced Jesus to achieve His good will. Even the devil is the Lord’s devil. God can even use the devil’s evil actions for His good purposes.

Why do good things happen to bad people? It’s all by the grace of God. God gives unlikely heroes successes in this life that they may realize it isn’t just by their own powers, but by His, so that they may turn to God and trust in Him. That’s why the Lord did what He did with Cyrus.

Why does God use unexpected heroes? We’ve reached our second “so that.” 2. The Lord uses unlikely heroes so that we may know Him. The Lord continues speaking to Cyrus: “**For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me.**” Even though Cyrus does not know the true God, God is still able to use him to rescue God’s people. Cyrus issued a decree that freed the people of Judah from their bondage and allowed them to return home to Jerusalem and rebuild the city.

The Lord sends Christians unlikely heroes so that we may know Him. This could be something with a nationwide impact such as a non-Christian in government who enacts policies and legislation that supports our practice of

religion. It could be someone we know personally who has shown us great kindness and been a great blessing to us, even if they themselves aren't Christian. I often think of doctors and surgeons. Not every surgeon knows Jesus, but they all enact the Lord's will to heal through the talents the Lord has given them.

We also see Jesus is an unlikely hero. Jesus came humbly to us in a manger, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, and dying a criminal's death on a cross. Jesus is the Lord's anointed who the Father sent so that we may know the Father's love. The Lord sent Jesus as an unlikely hero so that we may live eternally just as Jesus was raised from the dead.

But even in these less obvious unlikely heroes such as Cyrus, the Lord is using them for our good and the good of the Church. Just like Norma who always remained cheerful even in what seemed to be unfortunate circumstances, we too can remain cheerful as we trust the Lord to use all things to support us in tough times.

Why does God use unexpected heroes? We've reached our third and final "so that." 1. The Lord uses unlikely heroes so that you may know Him. The Lord continues speaking to Cyrus, saying He equips Cyrus so "**that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other.**" The Lord doesn't just want Cyrus to know Him, The Lord doesn't just want us to know Him. He wants you to know Him. He wants the whole world from the East to the West to know Him and trust in Jesus as their savior.

Because Cyrus freed the people of Judah to rebuild Jerusalem, Judah became again a place where people could come from all nations to worship the Lord. The temple was rebuilt and the worship life of God's people was restored.

God has used the unlikely heroes of history to achieve His goals of making His name known to the ends of the Earth. The persecution of Christians has caused Christians to scatter, yet like throwing seed throughout a field, those persecuted Christians bloom where they're planted and spread the Gospel to the nooks and crannies they find themselves in. God uses even wicked people to achieve His goals of making His name known, even in spite of these wicked people.

There may be a lot to worry about these days with everything that is going on in the world, our nation, and in our community. But our Heavenly Father isn't wringing His hands. He is in control, and He is raising up unlikely heroes even now to bring the unlikely heroes to faith in Him, to strengthen our faith in Him, and to make it clear to everyone that He is in control even today. Trust in Him to get us through this.

He sent humble servants like Abraham. He sent kings like Cyrus. He sent His Son Jesus. **THE LORD USES UNLIKELY HEROES SO THAT ALL MAY KNOW HIM.** Praise the Lord who uses these unlikely heroes. Amen!