

“The End of Ordinary Time”

Psalm 50:1-6; II Corinthians 4:3-12; Mark 9:2-9

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Much of life is ordinary. Our days are often characterized by routine: when to rise, pray, work, rest, eat and sleep. This is not a bad thing although, in the wake of Valentine’s Day, we would hardly consider ordinary life romantic. Perhaps our culture’s fascination with reality T.V. and the 24 hour news cycle is rooted in our ordinary lives.

Despite the lack of adventure, ordinary time is filled with the presence of God. Time without hype, without themes, without agendas is time to consider that God comes to us in the ordinary and routine interactions of our days. Perhaps this is why seven and one-half of the 12 months of the year are designated by the Church as “ordinary time.” The six weeks from Epiphany to Ash Wednesday and the six months, June through November, are ordinary.

Yet ordinary time eventually ends. I remember years ago when the venerable cookie company, Pepperidge Farm, changed its slogan from “Pepperidge Farm remembers” to “Never have an ordinary day.” If you haven’t blocked pop-up ads on your computer, a quick scan will reveal how advertisers count on the extraordinary: “*Could the antichrist be alive?*” it asks, then answers its own question “*Join the ‘Left Behind’ Prophecy club.*” Maybe I’m jaded but it sounds a little to me like “*Will the Hoover Dam break?*” Let’s set up a lawn chair, pour a lemonade and sit back and wait.

Yet not only does ordinary time end, we need the high moments and festivals. The story of the Transfiguration is one of those high moments. It puts us on notice that something is about to change. Jesus, the itinerant preacher who has been teaching and healing throughout Galilee, is shown to Peter, James and John as the transcendent Christ. On the mountain top with Elijah, the greatest prophet, and Moses, the greatest lawgiver, we are given an unmistakable message. As we sang moments ago:

“The law and prophets there have place, two chosen witnesses of grace; the Father’s voice from out the cloud proclaims his only Son aloud.”

Mark pictures Jesus as the culmination of the law and prophets. For those who choose to follow Jesus, ordinary time is ending.

We live in times like these, time measured not only by “*chronos*,” chronological time; but also by “*kairos*,” time of the opportune moment. Will we escalate combat operations against ISIS? Will the Supreme Court rule to establish marriage for people regardless of sexual orientation as the law of this land? Will Justin Bieber be a good boy? (Okay, scratch that last one.)

In my role as pastor I am conscious that, in the lives of individuals, ordinary time is ending all the time. A parent dies. A couple marries. A child is anxious about their parent’s troubled marriage. A baby is born. A surgery is planned and implemented. We move to a different job, a different community, a different church, a different self-awareness. These are life-changing, *kairos* moments.

“Let us build three dwellings,” says Peter in the *kairos* moment. At the moment of greatest intensity, Peter’s fear and need to say *something* comes out sounding foolish and contrived. Build dwellings for *what*, Peter? To hold in the luminous presence of God? To have something to explain later what is inexplicable? To somehow add glory to the eternal glory of the Creator of heaven and earth? It sounds ridiculous but only if it’s not us convicted of doing it.

Everyone has their own reasons for belonging to church and being in worship. For me—underneath the tradition and theology and robes, and the reminder of Jesus that where two or three are gathered he is present—underneath all that is the reminder that God is not a Vermont Teddy Bear; not only a very present help in time of trouble, not only our light and our salvation but also the Sovereign Lord of Heaven and Earth at whose Voice the nations quake. Christ is, in the words of today’s Epistle, the *imago Deus*, the *image of God*, shining in our hearts so that others may know that God’s glory is revealed in Christ.

And you know what? We're a hot mess. We do all sorts of stuff that does anything but let others know that God's glory is revealed in Christ. And we fail to do those things that would proclaim Christ as Lord. You know it and I know it. As the Rev. Cliff Knechtle has said on this program "Give Me an Answer," "*You've done it and I've done it. You and I have done at times what we've known to be wrong.*"

But here's the good news. It's actually Good News in two parts. The first part is Paul's reflection in the Epistle. Describing our relationship with this luminous, Sovereign God whom we imperfectly represent, he says "*But we have this treasure in clay jars so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.*" Our imperfections keep us from mistaking our power for God's. Our imperfections, in the words of this week's reading from The Upper Room Disciplines, keep us humble.

The second part is Jesus himself, who—although he is named by God as beloved Son—does not count equality with God as a thing to be grasped. Rather, in his extraordinary love he gives his very life on the cross as a gift that redeems us all.

These two realities—a humility that reminds us that God is God, and a love that reminds us that God, being God, will love us to the end—strip away the non-essentials. We realize how quickly *chronos* passes us by; that ordinary time is always ending, how urgent it is to find *kairos* in every moment.

A tale is told of a tourist's visit to the 19th century Polish rabbi, Hofetz Chaim. The tourist was astonished to see that, except for a simple table and bench, the rabbi's home was only a simple room filled with books. The tourist asked, "*Rabbi, where is your furniture?*"

Replied the rabbi, "*Where is yours?*"

"*Mine?*" asked the puzzled tourist. "*But I'm a visitor here. I'm only passing through.*" Replied the Rabbi Chaim, "*So am I.*"

So say we all. Ordinary time is ended. Let us live in the light of the companionship of the transcendent God revealed in Jesus Christ.