

PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious God of all time, we praise you for your goodness. You created us individually and know what courses we follow in our lives, where we will meet trouble, where we will meet joy, and how you call us throughout it all. Open our ears and our hearts, loving Creator, to hear those things we don't particularly want to hear, to walk in the places we'd much rather not, to reflect upon the lessons that can be the most painful but necessary. We often confuse our mission to follow you as one of comfort and pleasure. Where we follow the great God of all creation, we think we will have things easy. Although we follow the God of all creation, help us remember that the way of the Savior Jesus Christ is way that often goes against the grain of what we want and expect.

With you, Gracious God, all time is meaningful. We do, however, fall into cracks of time when it just becomes plain and boring. It becomes ordinary, and therefore, worth throwing away simply. But Ordinary Time helps us redefine and rediscover the extraordinary. Help us to take hold of Ordinary Time as a way to order our lives into faithful discipline. We are your people; lead us in this time to respond to the many seasons of the church. Some are shorter than others, but all live deeply in richness. Lead us to live into the season and time for each and everything. We pray all these things in the name of the Lord of all time, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray...

SERMON

We've gone through the entire church year. I know there are seasons that you enjoy much more than others, but all are necessary. All contribute to who we are as people, human beings, and as Christian followers. But there is one season left. Now, we come down to... what is now, the season of Ordinary Time. Ordinary Time, as we calculate it,

simply falls outside of the “big events” of the church year. Open up your bulletins and take a look at the upper left hand corner. You’ll see the date, followed by something that says “Proper 16.” That means that we are in the 16th Sunday of Ordinary Time. Three of these Sundays fell in between Epiphany and Lent. The other 13 weeks have fallen after Pentecost. This will continue until November 24th this year when we celebrate Christ the King Sunday. Then the Christian year ends; we enter another Advent.

The name is a bit misleading. Ordinary Time is not really about being ordinary or boring or whatever the name may imply. “Ordinary,” from the article “Ordinary Time is Ordered Time,” by Dwight Longenecker, has its roots originally with the word “Ordered.” It’s essentially a way of distinguishing and ordering the time that we are not in an event-based church holiday or season like Christmas or Pentecost. As mysterious as it may seem, it is not just about being leftover time. It has its own rich inherent meaning as the season of the Church. As we celebrate Ordinary Time, let us discover what it means to live it out in two ways: living our Ordinary Time individually with greater discipline and as the grand body of the Church in recognizing not only what we do but how we do it.

If you’re like me, then you’re always looking for the next big thing. There’s going to be a holiday coming up, there’s a weekend, there’s another day off, there’s a special activity, friends or family are coming to visit, and whatnot. There’s football coming, and I’m getting tired of preseason. Notice how much of that time absolutely disappears when we are looking for that next big thing to come along? The time spent in the middle seems ordinary. Why is it ordinary? Because we consider the big things “extraordinary,” so the rest must just be “ordinary.” Is that how we approach our own personal “Ordinary Time?” Or should

we take a lesson from another meaning of “Ordinary Time” and make that ordinary stuff extraordinary? Sometimes we need to create the extraordinary.

If we look at our two scripture readings, there is a thread flowing throughout. That would be that in every time, there is the appropriate and the inappropriate. The Byrds made our first scripture popular with their song “Turn Turn Turn.” James says we just can’t get ahead of ourselves when we are planning our lives. Everything must come in its time. When we talk about everything in its time, we might be discussing a disciplined life. Discipline is a word that we don’t know what to do with today. For some, it’s equivocated to good behavior or staying in line, enforced by an authority. For the Christian, it must mean something different. It must mean that we orient our minds, hearts, and time to God’s work with intention and purpose, recognizing we need to do things in the right time. For example, we can’t grow in our Christian lives without ordering ourselves and our time to faithful reflection, study, and action. In the same way, it’s like living by an agenda. I’m married to one who does all the time. Every moment, when it is sensed to be limited, is meticulously planned. When we plan well and do things in the right order, we do more, grow more, and get more done. This is good discipline and ordering.

Indeed, Ordinary Time is about observing many of the things we learned and putting them into a discipline using its other meaning as “ordered time.” We learn so many things here in church, hopefully all attuned to assisting us live throughout the human condition. The human life is complicated, and one intention of Christian discipline is to focus our actions and faith toward faithful expression of these parts of life, from joyful to absolutely hopeless. Indeed, each week throughout this series about the church seasons, we discussed something new that each season focuses upon. For example, in Advent, we discussed

faithful anticipation and what it means to live in the present. With Lent, we focused on a return to prayer, almsgiving, and fasting. With Holy Week, we recognized the necessity of darkness in our lives. In a way, the seasons before are the lessons that we take in and, in Ordinary Time, we make them our own. When we get to Ordinary Time, our aim is to put lessons into discipline. We learn how to live them out. We learn once again how to live into and faithfully be the human creatures that God so lovingly created.

We look forward to all kinds of things individually. The church is the same way. What are we thinking about all throughout Advent? Christmas. What are we thinking about all throughout Lent? Easter. What are we thinking about all throughout our regular services? Lunch. But it goes deeper than that. We must observe Ordinary Time as individuals, but with everything in the Christian life, it all comes back to the church and our communal life. As we said, we must focus on what we have learned in each season of the church year and develop once again a greater sense of discipline in the Christian life, and the tasks of the larger church are just as important. As we think about the church's seasons, they follow the coming, life, death, resurrection, and direct aftermath of Jesus' life. These all are important things but not the whole picture.

Last week, we talked a lot about the birth of the church, how it calls us to be a diverse body and open-minded for the work of the Spirit. But Pentecost does not cover the entire story. The church's life goes far beyond that holiday. The church has grown, theologized, learned, and fostered many rituals since that important day of Pentecost. The church has gone from persecution to being outright one of the most recognized institutions in the world. The church has gone from the earliest followers of Jesus Christ to 2000 years later of followers and saints. There's a lot that doesn't fit into the scriptural stories.

Ordinary Time is the space to celebrate and renew the church's life together, says "Ordinary Time is Ordered Time." Ordinary Time is about the church lived out past the life of Jesus, past the time of Pentecost, and past the time of scripture. Ordinary Time observes the church past, church present, and church future.

It's not just that we are together. Any social group can be together. As we celebrate the church, we must consider how we are doing what we are doing. How do we think of the so-called "regular" Sunday? Could it be like this church sign that I saw on the Internet, trying to invite people into the church? It said, "Do you know what Hell is? Come hear our preacher!" Thanks to all those concerned that this never showed up on our front sign. But things can get very familiar that we don't see what we are saying anymore, just like the sign. How do we find God when we arrive in the middle of summer, and nothing we would call particularly exciting or adventurous is happening that Sunday?

Instead of just going through the motions, the calling is to bring new energy to the familiar. The old phrase is that the devil is in the details, and that can certainly be the way with the church. We must always look at the details in how we are doing what we are doing. Ordinary Time, despite its name, is not the time when we let things get overly ordinary but explore the extraordinary within the ordinary. This is the season of the church, when we order ourselves in how to be church once again. It's not that we pray; it's how we pray. We are called to pray authentically, to bring our real selves to God. How do we observe communion? Is it about taking the bread, eating it, taking the cup and drinking it, and returning to our seats, or is it about a serious contemplation and discipline of who we are as Christ's followers? How are we affirming our faith? Do we read through our Affirmation of Faith with the intention of bringing ourselves back to the roots of our faith,

and what we do when we serve our God. It's not that we sing; it's how we sing. It's not about singing well. It's about singing lovingly to the Creator of the Universe. It's not that we hear the message; it is how we hear the message. Do we act on the message or do we let the message just be something nice we leave in these walls? It's not that we are together; it is how we are together. Do we chat about the weather or what we saw at the store the other day, or do we dig deeply and seek to be with one another in love and support in a way the world doesn't recognize? This is the season of the church, the time when we take everything that we have heard before and put it to use. This is the final season of the church season because it is where we are and where we go from here.

We may have come to the end of the church year as a series together, but that only means we start again. Grace is cyclical. It happens over and over again, and our task is to keep working at it. We try, we may glean some new things, we may fall on our faces, but the great thing is that we get another chance the next year. Don't let the church year pass you by. Don't let yourself be mired in the obligations that take you away from church that you forget what it means to have the church seasons and holidays. I hope this journey we have undertaken together has given you a little more energy and direction for celebrating these many church seasons. In the midst of it all is Ordinary Time. It is not ordinary, but ordered. We saw how we can foster greater discipline in our lives and to focus once again on the daily life of the church. Our mission is to be the radical presence of Christ on earth. That has to take place in the highlights of the church year of Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and so forth. It is just as important when we don't have something big to celebrate, when we are just in the middle of the ordinary times of our lives. In the ordinary is the time to reconsider and live more fully into the needed order. Thanks be to God. Amen and Amen.