

The Holy Ordinary – Mark 1:29-39, Isaiah 40.21-31, and 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Pastor Caitlin Trussell with Augustana Lutheran Church, Denver, on February 7, 2021

Shuffling into the kitchen in cozy pajamas. Eyes focusing just enough to get there but stepping on the dog bone anyway. Choosing a favorite mug, chipped after years of use – the right shape, color, and substance to hold the heat in as long as possible. Pouring steaming, fragrant liquid. Sipping carefully to take good care – warm, tasty, comforting, energizing. The day begins...a moment of the holy ordinary. A moment so normal that if you blink (or spend too much time on the social medias), you miss it. There's a similar Jesus moment in our Bible reading today. If you blink, you miss it.

The guys had a long morning at the synagogue. Getting back to Simon's house, maybe they're tired and hungry, looking forward to a warm meal and a peaceful place to put up their feet and plan their next move. Only it wasn't peaceful. They found illness at home. Simon's mother-in-law was "in bed with a fever."<sup>1</sup> A lounging lunch was a longshot. Well, thank God for Jesus! He took her hand, lifted her up out of bed, and the fever left. She served them lunch after all! Simon's mother-in-law recovered and dished up the holy ordinary. If the guys hadn't missed her absence due to fever, they might have missed what it meant for her to serve them. The same Greek word for "serve" is used a few verses earlier when the angels "waited" on Jesus in the wilderness.<sup>2</sup> I wonder if Simon and the guys had a new awareness of the holy ordinary too.

Walking into my mother-in-law's home was like encountering the holy ordinary in the work of the angels too – warm, fragrant food filled with love...although if I'd said that angel-bit to her she might have kicked my keester to the curb. I point this out NOT as a moment to idealize and prescribe a self-serving notion of Biblical womanhood where homemaking is sacralized as women's work over and against other vocations. I point this out because Jesus makes the holy ordinary possible in this story. I'd argue that he makes the holy ordinary his priority in this story. This unnamed mother-in-law was Jesus' second healing in the Gospel of Mark and faith was not required. He simply healed her, and she went about her ordinary life...her holy, ordinary life.

Extraordinary moments capture attention and inspire imagination but it's the holy ordinary moments that form the bulk of our lives. I watched an interview of Paul McCartney that gets at this a bit. Stephen Colbert asks Paul how he deals with the emotional connections that fans have with him. He describes the normal guy that he is at home, "slobbering out, watching television, like anyone."<sup>3</sup> "Slobbering out" sounds like the holy ordinary equivalent in a life of extreme celebrity. These extraordinary extremes dominate the culture. Perfect example in

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 1:29-30

<sup>2</sup> Mark 1:13

<sup>3</sup> "How Paul McCartney Handles Fans' Emotional Connections." The Late Show with Stephen Colbert. September 24, 2019 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdGIGWlgxTk>

today's match up between the youngest and oldest playing quarterbacks to have won Super Bowls. Extraordinary moments push our mind's eye beyond what we think is possible and allow us to celebrate.

The trouble with these extraordinary people and moments is not found in and of the people and moments themselves. The trouble is with us. Our imaginations become limited by societal definitions of "winning." Limited imaginations that turn Isaiah's sacred scripture, about God's encouragement of the people beleaguered by their capture and exile into Babylon, into fight songs for sports team. The extraordinary overshadows the holy ordinary, demanding attention like the demons in the Bible story. Jesus made small work of those, too. Silenced them. And went to bed. He woke up the next day at O-dark-30 to hide and pray. Simon and Company found him, followed him, and proclaimed his message of good news with him. This isn't to say that the disciples don't get distracted by the extraordinary – just wait until next Sunday's shiny Jesus mountaintop transfiguration. Rather, it's to say that the disciples kept their eyes on Jesus and the win of the good news.

Eight years ago last week, I was ordained to the call of Word and Sacrament and could be called "Pastor." It was wonderful evening here in Augustana's Sanctuary. Close friends, long-time neighbors, Augustana folks, and family from near-and-far shared that moment with me and the Holy Spirit. It was an extraordinary moment in my life. That same evening, I was installed as a Pastor with Augustana. The following years have been filled with the holy ordinary moments of a pastor – visits in homes and hospitals, phone calls, ministry committees, worship, preaching, charity, and justice. A call rich with meaning and little fanfare. Moments that I couldn't have imagined even a few years earlier. During ordination and installation, there was a moment when Gretalee and Mel Johnson stood at the pulpit on behalf of everyone else and announced, "You have been called to be among us to proclaim the good news." Every pastor has this announced by their congregation. It's an extraordinary announcement. It's also an announcement that can be misinterpreted as pastors are the ones who proclaim the good news.

But one of the things that tugs at my mind about this Bible story in Mark is that the ordinary moments were created by Jesus with what was available to him, with what was normal to him, with what was ordinary to him. It got me to thinking that what we often describe as radical or outrageous grace is simply ordinary to God. So ordinary is the good news that it takes people from all walks of life to announce it in all kinds of ways. One way was through the band of misfits that Jesus calls his disciples. Another way was Simon's mother-in-law who popped up from a fever to serve lunch. Another more real time example is the pile of ordinary things at the communion altar – diapers, wipes, feminine hygiene product, socks, and underwear – for ordinary people who need them.

We've become so used to the extraordinary but what would a world be like where everyone had holy ordinary moments all day, every day. Everyone's equal worth is simply assumed. No

one even thinks about whether or not to give when something is needed because there's plenty to go around. That would be extraordinary wouldn't it? And yet, the message here is that's simply the way it works in the ordinary good news of Jesus. That's how much Jesus loves us. People can breathe, serve, live, and love as the holy ordinary way of God. Thanks be to God and amen.