

Sermon for 11 June 2023 @ Bethesda UMC/ Baltimore

Second Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Genesis 12:1-9; Psalter 767:1-12 UMH (*Response 2*) Psalm 33:1-12; Romans 4:13-25; Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

“Ordinary time”

Since last December, we’ve been using the church calendar to train ourselves in basic Christian behavior.

From Advent, when we focused on Christian waiting and expectancy; through Christmastime, when we thought about birth and new life; on into Epiphany and its emphasis on world connections, like the Three Wise Men from afar; on into Lent and its practice of confession and forgiveness and regrouping; through Eastertide and its Great Fifty Days of celebration; into the amazement of Pentecost and the double miracles of global understanding and inner peace, we have had something to work on, to study and get better at.

We summed all this up last Sunday with the Trinity, expressing God as Creator, Redeemer, and Holy Spirit.

Now we begin the season of Ordinary Time, the other half of the Christian Year. It will last until Advent 2023, when the next Christian year begins a new cycle.

We’ll punctuate the ordinariness with a few national holidays, like next Sunday’s Father’s Day, and then the Fourth of July’s focus on American uniqueness, and September’s Labor Day --- but we will be facing the fact that lots about life with Jesus is the opposite of one way or another --- It’s just plain Ordinary Time. “Nothing special ever happens to me...”

To start, this year the Bible gives us Abram --- before the Ten Commandments, or any Law, before the Jews thought of themselves as a people. All we hear today is God calling to this pre-Abraham guy to leave home and kindred and head out where who knows? ...”where I tell you ...” and he did.

That’s it. Go where you’re sent by life.

That’s a lot of life, isn’t it? Go before you know --- but go where you believe you should. How ordinary is that? How ordinary has it been for you ... how typical, uncertain and yet responsive to your own deepest instincts?

Next we get Psalm 33 ... because even in Ordinary Time we follow the Word --- as we study Scripture the meaning is clearer, that’s basic Jesus talk – and Psalm 33 says God is in total charge, and that’s GOOD ... so live by that.

Then Paul's letter to the Romans echoes Genesis, and uses Abram's faithfulness --- he's Abraham now, he's Type A of following God's direction folks. Jesus has been with God since the beginning, that's what he represents, faithful humankind from the start of time...

And finally the Gospel we're focusing on this year, Matthew, tells several stories. One has Jesus calling a fellow who works for the Romans as a tax collector, to follow him, which he does; then it shows the religious, God-fearing people of that day, the Pharisees, challenging Jesus because he'd asked someone who works for the non-God-fearing, powerful Romans, and for eating and discussing life with them ... sinners, in other words, non-Ten Commandment folks. Jesus replies, "I'm not here to straighten out good folks. I'm here to help sick folks, mistake-makers, off-the track types." God's interested in self-development, improving yourself, doing better with what you've got and who you are.

Then a highly respected Jewish man, leader of the synagogue, comes and kneels at Jesus' feet and says to him, "My daughter has just died. Come, bring her back to life"... and before he can follow through, a woman who's had hemorrhages for 12 years comes up and touches Jesus' cloak from behind, saying to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well..." and Jesus turned and saw her and said, "Take heart, daughter, your faith has made you well..." Trust in goodness is everything!

And you all know the rest. The official's household sneered at Jesus when he told them the daughter is only sleeping... and the young woman was healed.

Ordinary time.

Like our lives, which are mostly ordinary...

They're NOT. Every moment is full of special events. All the time we get direction; and if we follow it, the whole thing has the chance, the potential, for miracle. Hope is never pointless, unless it's selfish, and misplaced... and knowing Jesus in the point of it all, just like God told Abram before he was ever Abraham ..." You'll hear what to do. " Those who follow the calls day by day, using the habits we've learned during all those training seasons we've cycled through every year as worshiping believers, new life, even resurrection from the dead, can come to pass, because, as Jesus puts it in the Gospel of John, the Kingdom of Heaven is IN YOU.

Ordinary Time.

Jesus!

Praise the Lord!

Follow me.

Amen.

