

Sermon for 30 June 2024 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: 2 Samuel 1:1,17:27; Psalter: Psalm 130, p. 848) ; 2 Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43

“Ordinary time.”

Remember when I reminded you we were leaving the half-year when the Christian Church has various holidays and seasons such as Advent, Lent, Eastertide, and the like? And that was somewhere around Memorial Day, with the Feasts of Pentecost and Trinity Sunday. Then we entered the other half of the year, known as “Ordinary Time,” which we’re in now, and will last right up to Christ the King Sunday at the beginning of Advent next October?

Ordinary time. Like what we live all the time. Giving us a chance to read stretches of scripture that define periods in our religion’s history, as well as significant moments in part of long periods. Like what we’re living now: Big changes. We were just discussing yesterday how dramatic our politics are this summer, with speculation on this and that, from the Supreme Court taking over the role of Congress, to the end of democratic elections in the U.S., to you know the conversations we’re hearing and sometimes having these days.

Yet we go about our usual ways, and all the drama we discuss seems in the news only for many of us, and it almost seems ordinary... in a chaotic kind of way.

Today we’re hearing Israel’s progress into living under a king. We’re on the second one, David, in the first lesson. David has been scared off by the first king, Saul, and here he gets news of both Saul’s death in battle, and also Saul’s son Jonathan’s son, fighting the Philistines. David grieves, and we’re given a chance to meditate on human government, and how significant and yet distant and separate it is to our life in general.

Psalm 130 is a classic reflection on the frailty of life even if we live under a strong and just political system. That’s part of weekly worship: Giving us tested reflections to help our meditations. Every day I read selected passages of the Bible and spend quiet time listening to the thoughts that come up. I’ve done this for so long it’s a way of life, no matter what I’m living through, or where my country, state, city, and family seem to be headed.

Then the Apostle Paul speaks up, in part of a letter he’s writing to the little church in Corinth he recently helped found. He’s a guide in a new direction, being both a life-long Jew and a convert to the new community called the Way, after the prophet Jesus came back from time alone in the desert and announced that God was doing a new thing through him and those he called and those whom they called after he lost his life to the Romans. Paul is focused in this passage on a collection he’s helping gather from some of the little churches he’s formed, and he says some noteworthy things we never say too often: Such as, “Those who have need should share with those who need help, so that those they help can share with still others”....It’s a definition of group life Jesus taught, which he learned from his own Jewish teachers: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

We really can't do better than these teachings, no matter how busy, or how glad, or how broken, our lives are at any particular moment.

Then one of Jesus' biographers ... Mark by name ... closes our reflections for today, with a couple of short, powerful views of Jesus at work as a teacher, healer, representative human being. First he has a seriously ill twelve-year-old girl whose parents beg Jesus to come to her bedside and break the spell of death. He agrees, and on the way there, a desperately ill woman touches his robe in hopes of being healed, and when she is, he feels it and tells her he knows what has happened, and credits her with faith in life's healing possibilities (through God's work in Jesus, we understand Mark to be saying).

In both stories, Jesus is breaking the Jewish rule not to touch certain persons. Jesus is lovingly enlarging his own people's religious boundaries. The girl has already died, and the bleeding woman is considered unclean by her flow of blood. A new thing is happening to human life. It is still based on love. Jews had long taught, "Love your neighbor as yourself," but now a dramatic new illustration of this is appearing. Mark knows how awesome this is, how upsetting, and how much rearranging it calls for all up and down the line of things. Thus he has Jesus tell the girl's parents not to say anything about it. We understand Jesus is buying time - he expects to be challenged and but that's more of the story than Mark is ready to reveal on this occasion.

These are our reflections for this Sunday of Ordinary Time. Let us use them in the days ahead as helps in our own neediness, and as calls to kindness in the many moments that come to each of us, day by day, moment.

In the name of Jesus we say it.

Amen.