

**Ordinary Time, Ordinary Things©****John 6:35, 41-51****August 9, 2015****Dr. Sharlyn Gates**

You may or may not have noticed the heading at the top of your bulletin this morning. It says that this is the 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time. Sounds kind of ho hum, doesn't it? Kind of ... well ... ordinary.

But, according to our liturgical calendar that lists all the seasons of the Christian year, we are in "Ordinary Time."

I admit that I've tended to want something else – something that sounds more intriguing – more interesting – than just "ordinary time" for our worship.

I like the themes of the seasons of Advent, or Lent, or Easter, or Pentecost. But ... Ordinary Time? Just doesn't seem like we have that much going on.

And yet, there is something to be said for times that are ordinary. Can you imagine how it would be if our lives were as busy as we are in the Advent/Christmas Season?

I love having Christmas decorations up and having special celebrations with people; I love to listen to Christmas music and buy gifts and wrap them up with beautiful bows.

And yet, I am ready for it to end when it does. It's refreshing to have the decorations down and have more space again and to just be back to normal, breathing a little easier, slowing down – at least a little bit.

You might have noticed that green is the liturgical color for Ordinary Time (which actually is most of the time throughout the year). Even the color green seems dull to me. I think of Kermit the frog on Sesame Street singing "It's not easy being green."

And yet, I have been overjoyed to see all the shades of green this summer after a long, cold winter. I rode up to Standish with Gordie Dryer for the graveside service of Beatrice Johnston a couple of weeks ago and we both of us commented on how beautiful the trees and shrubs and grass is right now. So much green that tells us our world is alive and breathing and growing.

And that's it, isn't it? Green represents a time for growing. So, in Ordinary Time, we have a little more space, a bit more time for growing in our faith, for being the Church in the world.

It is in our ordinary days that we live most of our life. And really, ordinary time is special simply because it is ordinary – a time without all the focus on one thing – all the hustle and bustle of extra busyness.

And often, it is in those ordinary times of our lives where the ordinary suddenly becomes extraordinary. We mark the milestones in our lives – birthdays, anniversaries, births and deaths. We make memories with vacations, with conversations, with little daily events.

There are numerous times in a day when I might wash dishes or make a bed, or put something in the oven to cook, and suddenly I hear my grandmother's voice – or another my mother's voice – some wise advice that was given years ago when I was growing up and helping in the kitchen.

And that ordinary thing that was said becomes extraordinary because, in a way, it is as if my family is still with me, still giving me words of wisdom. Or criticism, depending on what it was!

When we look at our text today and really, throughout Jesus' life, we find a lot of ordinary things that become extraordinary.

Jesus takes a few loaves of bread and several fish and turns it into a feast for a multitude of people. The ordinary things became extraordinary.

Jesus was always doing that. He would walk through a field of grain and break off a piece and make it into a story that would last for thousands of year.

Or he takes the tiniest seed from the mustard tree and uses it as a lesson on faith.

And now, in today's text, Jesus uses the ordinary food of bread to tell us who he is.

"I am the bread of life," he says. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever."

The ordinary is being offered as extraordinary through the Son of God. What a great invitation to fill up on bread!

I love bread, but it seems that we, who are "pleasingly plump" as my grandmother used to call me, have been warned to not eat too much of that delicious, carb-loaded food.

Almost every weight loss program advises that you turn down the breadbasket. Going out to eat? Ask the server to not tempt you with those warm, aroma filled, delicious, just out of the oven rolls.

But this is different. This bread that Jesus gives is definitely loaded, but not with carbs, not with calories, but with life! When we take communion by intinction, we usually have the bread already cut into good sized pieces, although sometimes it is a loaf offered for us to break off a piece.

As one who is holding the bread – offering it to those coming up – I notice that sometimes people will take the tiniest little piece of bread – almost a crumb to barely dip into the cup. Or they will search for the smallest piece of bread on the plate.

And I want to say right then and there – take a great big chunk of this Bread of Life! This is bread to sustain you in all your ordinary days – in your ups and downs.

This is bread that nurtures and nourishes and keeps you strong for the times when suddenly the ordinary becomes extraordinary and you need the nourishment to sustain you – the energy to get you through until you are able to come again and eat.

When we come to The Lord’s Supper for Communion we take ordinary bread (although I would argue that Vicki Lyles bread is fairly extraordinary in itself), yet, as good as it tastes – as delicious as it is – it is still ordinary bread – and yet, somehow it becomes extraordinary with the presence of the Holy Spirit with us at the Table.

When we think about Jesus as the Bread of Life, it’s really hard to imagine turning that bread down, isn’t it? And yet, in some ways, we do it; we choose other things instead of Bread.

Turning to what Paul wrote to the Christians in the Church in Ephesus, we hear his advise - these words, that also go down in history, just as the words of our relatives who are long gone:

<sup>31</sup>*Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice,*

<sup>32</sup>*and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.*

These are words that were written to Christians – people who make their commitment to follow Christ Jesus. This is a letter written to a Church, not pagans, not unbelievers.

There would be no reason to warn against bitterness and anger and slander if those things hadn’t been happening, right?

It sounds like they were choosing a diet of poison instead of life giving Bread. And those wise words do go down in history for us too, because, if we are honest, we will admit that, in our humanness, we fight, everyday, a battle within ourselves to refrain from criticizing others, or being judgmental, or gossiping about something we heard, spreading rumors that may or may not be true. We have a hard time, sometimes, giving the benefit of the doubt.

We are human. Flesh and blood. Ordinary people in ordinary times. But did you notice that God took the ordinary and made it extraordinary in Jesus?

In Jesus, Immanuel (God with us), we see and hear this ordinary man who is flesh and blood, just like us. God has taken the ordinary and made him extraordinary.

Jesus – a human – was without sin, without the bitterness and gossip and hatefulness. He refrained from it all. Jesus, who lived an extraordinary life in ordinary times, has shown us the way to live – the way to God – the way to life.

And he takes this ordinary thing that we so often avoid, in our diets these days, and he says “Take, eat. This is my body, given for you.” This ordinary bread becomes extraordinary for us, for strength, for life. Jesus said:

<sup>50</sup>*This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.*

<sup>51</sup>*I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”*

Christians - choose bread, not the things that poison our lives, but the thing that gives new life, eternal life. Choose the Bread of Life and live. For in this ordinary man is an extraordinary Savior who takes ordinary bread and makes it extraordinarily life giving.

In these Ordinary Days – and in all your days - eat more bread – and live!

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