

**SERMON:** The Beauty of Ordinary

Let us pray. Lord, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our strength and redeemer. AMEN

I love the Olympics. I watched the swimming, diving, track and field and gymnastics qualifying competitions in advance of the Olympics. And then I was glued to the coverage from Tokyo, from opening ceremonies where Naomi Osaka lit the Olympic cauldron, to the closing ceremonies where they announced that the next summer games would be in Paris in 2024.

And in between the opening and closing, it was gripping to see all of the efforts by the athletes competing. It was inspiring. The back stories are often uplifting and tug at our heartstrings.

We pump our fists and cheer when our favorite athlete reaches the pinnacle of years and years of training: when they stand on the medal podium and see the flag of their nation raised.

They, and if we're honest here, anyone, even those who don't win medals, who makes it to compete at the Olympics are all **extraordinary**, aren't they?

We look with awe at those people who are extraordinary in their field: not only Olympic athletes, but also the pianist who deftly plays an incredibly difficult piece by Chopin; the artist

who sees a block of marble and sculpts it into a magnificent statue; the author who writes a novel so compelling that it quickly shoots to the top of the New York Times best seller list; the reporter who wins a Pulitzer Prize for their reporting, the scientist who develops a life-saving vaccine, or the actor who wins the Academy Award for their work in a film.

As parents, and especially as grandparents, we consider our children and their children to be extraordinary, don't we?

So what about those of us who consider ourselves .....ordinary? Is that something to be concerned about, to feel a bit ashamed about?

It seems that more and more people strive for a life that is anything but "ordinary" these days. We live in a society that is fueled by an idealism that we create through social media, where the lives we look in on are anything but ordinary.

We carefully curate the pictures we post on facebook and instagram to create the illusion that we have a charmed, if not perfect, life. Would it be so terrible to realize that we have many, many days that are....ordinary days?

In June of this year, I saw a sign at a local elementary school congratulating their graduates....it said "Congratulations, Class of 2021. Now strive to be magnificent!"

Reverend Paul Zwarich wrote, "I think we are scared of settling for a life we label "ordinary," because living an ordinary life, with an ordinary job, car, house, family, and

**lifestyle surely wouldn't be enough. We ask ourselves, *"Is this going to be enough? Will other people be impressed with my life?"***

**Pastor Rich Anderson notes that "Sometimes our expectations are a bit unrealistic.**

**He tells the story of a young engineer fresh out of MIT, reaching the end of a job interview. The human resources director asked him; "And what starting salary were you looking for?"**

**The engineer said; "In the neighborhood of \$125,000 a year, depending on the benefits package." The interviewer said; "Well, what would you say to a package of 5 weeks paid vacation, 14 paid holidays, full medical and dental, company matching retirement fund to 50% of your salary, and a company car leased every two years – say a red corvette?"**

**The engineer sat straight up and said; "Wow! Are you kidding?" The interviewer replied; "Yeah, but you started it!"**

**Often in a Sunday morning sermon we hear ourselves exhorted and challenged to do great things-extraordinary things.**

**And while I believe God can do great things in our lives, I also believe that God sometimes does His most powerful work in our ordinary lives, in ordinary times.**

As pioneer missionary William Carey once said, “Expect great things **from** God, and attempt great things **for** God.” The disciples were just a rag-tag group of ordinary people who responded to Christ’s call. But our God is an extraordinary God who uses ordinary people to accomplish his work in this world.

At the top of your bulletin, this Sunday is described, as Pat said at the beginning of our announcements this morning, as the 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost.

But this season is also called ordinary time in the church’s liturgical calendar and it is the longest season of the church year. It comprises 33 or 34 Sundays, or about 60% of the church calendar.

Do you know why it’s called Ordinary Time? Because nothing special is happening. It’s not Advent or Christmas, it’s not Lent or Easter, and it’s not Epiphany or Pentecost. Ordinary time also reflects the rhythm and tempo of our lives.

This season gives us the freedom and opportunity to meditate on the mighty works of God through Jesus Christ without all the accompanying “busy-ness” of holidays. It’s a time to grow in our faith in response to God’s invitation to follow Jesus. It’s a time when “nothing else special” is happening.

I believe that God asks us to immerse ourselves in this ordinary time and then live as his **disciples**.

**Remember the Bible stories that we learned as children....the ones in Scripture where people were called by God to do something special for him. Those people were just like you and me, just common, ordinary people.**

**Moses was living on the back side of the desert, a total failure as the prince of Egypt, and God called him to deliver a nation.**

**When Goliath was taunting the Israelites, everyone discounted David, a teenage shepherd boy. But God didn't! And David defeated the giant and became the king of a nation.**

**How about Nehemiah? He was living in Persia in complete obscurity serving as a cupbearer and God called him to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem.**

**Mary was a teenage girl living in Nazareth when God called her to be the mother of the Messiah.**

**And Simon Peter would have lived and died an ordinary fisherman except that Jesus called him to establish the church.**

**Ordinary people all, empowered by God to do extraordinary things.**

**I enjoyed this illustration that Pastor Anderson shared of giving our lives to God. He says, "We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking a \$1,000 dollar bill-and yes, although I've never held one in my hand, or even seen one, I looked it**

up and there actually is such a bill. We liken our giving our all to the Lord by laying that \$1,000 bill on the table, and saying, “Here’s my life Lord, I’m giving it all.”

But the reality is that God sends us to the bank and has us cash in the thousand dollars for quarters. We go through life putting out 25 cents here and 50 cents there - listening to the troubles of a neighbor, attending a committee meeting, spending time volunteering in an assisted living home or leading a Girl Scout troop, filling the Little Pantry on the steps of the chapel, volunteering to teach Sunday School-small gestures that many consider ordinary-no big deal, certainly none for which statues are erected or medals are earned.

Usually giving our life to Christ isn’t glorious, it isn’t extraordinary – it’s done in all those ordinary little acts of love and service, 25 cents at a time.

So let’s talk today about being faithful in the ordinary. That is to say, being faithful in the normal every day to day living.

It is easy today to get caught up in thinking we must be **doing** “big” things for God, **feeling** “big things” for God or **experiencing** “big” things for God. It’s easy for us to want to go from one big event to another big event.

Many tend to give their attention to those who are able to fill stadiums and church buildings rather than those who minister in a quieter, devoted faithfulness.

**You see, when we begin to focus so much on all the big moments, I believe that we lose the power of everyday, ordinary, quiet faithfulness. The power of the Gospel is not always communicated most clearly in stadiums or churches that seat thousands.**

**It is communicated most clearly when followers of Christ are living out a life of faith in our everyday lives, when we are being a witness of the abundant blessings in our ordinary everyday lives.**

**The power of the Christian Life is so much more than all the big moments that we experience. The Power of the Christian life is in the ordinary everyday moments.**

**That is what we find as we read our Bibles – we find the power of everyday ordinary life moments.**

**Those Biblical moments that we read about... shepherds taking care of sheep on the hillside, the moments of the farmer harvesting, the moments of Jesus and the disciples walking from this city to that city sharing the message of God's love, or of dedicated family members taking care of a loved one day after day. What is really happening in the ordinary moments is that God is working around us, on us and in us.**

**In the midst of our going to work, raising our children or grandchildren, washing the dishes, mowing the yard, fixing meals, sending a get-well or sympathy card, folding the laundry, going back to school shopping, things are happening.**

**We may not always know or feel it, but things are happening on the inside of us and on the outside as well.**

**We have to learn how to enjoy the everyday, the ordinary, pace of things. We have to understand that the Christian Life is not a sprint. It is not even a marathon. It is a life long journey that God has designed to take us through this life to fully experience everlasting life.**

**The truth this morning is that we don't need to worry about being special or extraordinary. Even if we don't feel it, we are already special. We are already God's masterpieces. We are already children of the Lord God Almighty. We are already Citizens of Heaven. We are already united with the Lord in our hearts, minds and souls.**

**Remember the saying: God doesn't call the qualified, God qualifies the called.**

**So, enjoy your job. Take care of your family. Clean your house. Read your Bible. Attend worship. Pray. Seek to do good. Love your family – your spouse, your children, your grandchildren. Be generous. Laugh. Enjoy your meals. Be honest. Be kind. Live each day the best you can.**

**Tomorrow is Monday. Another Monday. The start of another work week. Another Monday set aside for work, and chores, and errands. Just an ordinary day, filled with extraordinary opportunities to do God's work, during ordinary time. Thanks be to God. AMEN.**