

Anything But Ordinary
2nd Sunday of Easter
April 8, 2018

Happy Easter.

Welcome to our new series entitled **ANYTHING BUT ORDINARY**.

If you joined us for the first time last week and now are checking us out, thanks for being here. We are so glad you joined us. When these special holy days come around like Easter things at Holy Eucharist are a little out of the ordinary for us, - a little different.

Ordinary is defined as “of no special quality or interest, unexceptional.” It is run of the mill. There are times for us when we like ordinary and times when we don’t. There are times in my life when I want ordinary. Ordinary can be comfortable. There are times when I just want comfort.

Depending on your personality, you may like a certain level of stability and normalcy in your life. Having normal in our life can give us a sense of stability and peace. Part of us likes the ordinary. - We like normal. I like to keep my life pretty ordinary with the same routines. I like quiet ordinary nights in front of the television. I have a routine throughout the week that I like to keep. We all have routines that we are comfortable doing. And even if some of our ordinary and normal practices are not working for us, we can become attached to them.

On the other hand, the ordinary can become incredibly boring or monotonous. There may be some things in your life that have become ordinary to you that you don’t like. Maybe you feel like you have an ordinary marriage or just an ordinary job and you are looking for something more exciting. Sometimes we develop habits that become ordinary that we don’t like too much and wish to break.

Well I am here to share with you this evening/morning that Easter is about the celebration of something extraordinary to save us from the ordinary. Last week we celebrated the most extraordinary event in history. Two thousand years ago, Jesus was left for dead because he was dead. He was nailed to a cross, suffered, died and buried. Three days later, he conquered the grave. He rose from the dead. Every other great leader in history is still in the grave. Jesus conquered the grave. The same extraordinary power that rose Jesus from the dead is available to us as well.

Here's the twist though. That extraordinary power is available to us through some very ordinary means. Over the next four weeks, we are going to look at the ordinary ways God's power takes root in our lives and in our Church. There are ordinary practices that can bring extraordinary results. Ordinary practices that bring about extraordinary change in our lives and that bring about an extra ordinary Church.

To start us off today, let's talk about geese. When we see geese flying in the air and see them flying in V formation, they are able to fly further than if they simply flew alone. It reduces the wind resistance. Does anyone want to guess how much further they are able to fly than if they simply flew alone? They are able to fly 70 percent further than if they flew alone. God put it into geese this realization, if they work together for the same purpose, flying in the same direction, they get further and with less effort. Geese often seem smarter than people.

While geese seem to naturally fly together in V formation, often we try to accomplish things all on our own. This is especially true in a relationship with God. We think we will do better all on our own. We underestimate how much further - faster we can go when working on a team. When it comes to having a vibrant spiritual life or even connecting with God at all, we often try to gut it out all on our own.

The natural pull for each of us is to look to try and get things right on our own. We try and lose weight on our own. We try and work out on our own. You may be trying to raise your family or your kids all on your own. You may have tried to have a relationship with God on your own. While a relationship with God is personal, it isn't meant to be done all on your own.

We tend to undervalue the power and effectiveness of team. When a group of people pull oars in the same direction and work together **then amazing things can happen**. When a group of people focus their time and energy and sacrifice towards **a common goal great results are produced**. On great teams - people benefit from one another's strengths and compensate for weaknesses. These kind of teams are celebrated and are incredibly successful. In the end, everyone on the team wins. The team goes further faster as individual skills are pulled together and many become one. Look at Villanova.

When the Church is working correctly it is a team, working together towards a common goal and a common objective. To help us understand what that means,

we are going to look at the fourth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles written by St. Luke. Acts tells the story of the apostles after Jesus rose from the dead. After the Holy Spirit comes upon the apostles, the Church takes off. The apostles who had been scared to talk about Jesus begin preaching about him publicly. Pretty quickly the Church begins to spread like wild fire as thousands of people begin to believe in Jesus. Peter who had been scared to admit Jesus becomes especially bold in preaching about him.

With that in mind, we will pick up Acts 4. It says,

“Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul.”

So the early Church came together in prayer focused on a common goal.

Acts 4 goes on to say *“And no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common.”*

Now this verse is not an advocacy for Communism or Socialism or any other economic system. What it is saying is that the members of the early Church were so committed to one another, they didn't hold a tight grip on their possessions, but they held them with an open hand. **They were more committed to the community and to one another and their common goal they shared than they were to their stuff.**

The church felt a responsibility for one another. And as they felt a responsibility for one another, their needs were met. Successful teams, successful communities share what they have with one another. They don't look at their talent or gifts as simply for their benefit, but for the benefit of others. They pool their resources together and are able to do more than if they were just working alone.

This is the type of unity we build into the Church. We are pooling our resources towards a common goal. Each week we give in the offering. We are pooling our resources together so that we can make a greater impact. In the offertory, you are committing yourself to this local Church team. You are sharing the resources God has entrusted to you to make a greater impact.

Each week we pool our resources of time and talent together to make an impact. **We continually hear stories of people whose lives are changed not simply because of the message only, or the music only, but because some of you have pooled together to help create an irresistible environment serving in our children's ministry or LIFT or at the welcome desk.**

Last week was an amazing testimony to people pooling together their time and talent and personalities. Trust me without all our efforts, there is nothing necessarily irresistible just have a plain space. If you have seen the worship space without the decorations and the music and the lighting, you know there is nothing appealing about it unless you are a recluse. But last week thanks to many volunteer ministers and pooling our resources together it was an amazing place to worship.

In small groups, you are surrendering your time. You are sharing your life with one another. In giving of your time and sharing your life experience and not just keeping the hard lessons of life to yourself, you are benefitting the other members of your small group. Something extraordinary happens in a Church when people begin pooling their resources together for a common mission and a common vision.

Here's what Acts says,

“And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, great grace was upon them all.”

In coming together and sacrificing towards a common goal they experienced power. The power they gave witness to their testimony. Their testimony that they had come into contact with their Risen Savior and their lives were changed. They were willing to sacrifice what they had so that each of them could become - better followers of Jesus. And from that unity of purpose came great power. The Church is to be a team that comes together with one heart and one mind with the same goal and same vision.

As a Church, it is our vision that we would be a Church of growing disciples, **growing disciples**. In every program we do, we come together for the purpose of being growing disciples. That means we want to be - a little better disciples or followers of Jesus today, - than we were yesterday. Essentially you are coming to encounter God and be changed and transformed by him. It is not coming to check off an obligation or if I get to sit in the seat I want, **but to be changed and transformed**. It is understanding - that although I come to grow, **I will grow most - if the Church is not all about me, if I don't come as a consumer, but as a contributor to the team.**

When we come here each week we are coming in prayer, coming to worship unified around this idea that we are **growing disciples, - growing disciples.**

Growing disciples means that we have come here seeking God, desiring an encounter, a meeting with the living God, the Creator and sustainer of the universe. Even if you are here for the first time or came because of Easter, you would admit that right. The only reason you would come to Church is so you could meet God. The Church while it certainly can offer some advice and wisdom for living, at the end of the day, the only product we have is environments that can help you meet God. Then in meeting God, we hope that we grow as people who have healthy relationships with other people.

There is something powerful that happens when we all come together for this purpose to encounter God and grow closer to him. When we share that goal together, it makes it easier to gain momentum. We are carried forward by the energy and enthusiasm of other people who share the same purpose. The goal we share is to be growing disciples, - **growing disciples**. So the first half of that is - **that we are growing personally**.

Then second we want to share and give testimony as the reading from Acts of the Apostles said to what Jesus has done in our life. We simply want to share what God has done in our lives with people who do not know Christ. Not only as a Church is it our goal to be a Church of growing disciples, a place where people come closer to Christ, **but where more and more people are coming to know him**. Disciples of Jesus help others connect with Jesus or help grow other disciples.

This means our Church does not exist just for us. **Our Church exists for people who are not in our building to introduce them to the person of Jesus Christ.** Our celebration at Mass each week reminds us that we are on the same team. We are working together to grow as disciples and bring other people into a relationship with Jesus. We come to communion or some of you come and receive a blessing, which I must say is an awesome sign of your commitment to this community.

It is a great sign of humility and respect when people come and instead of receiving communion, ask for a blessing. Whether you receive or not, we are reminding ourselves that we are on the same team. We are reminding ourselves that this is not about us. It is about growing closer to the person of Jesus Christ and about sharing the relationship we have with others.

As an application, here is what I would ask you to do. I would challenge you today to take the next step when it comes to being a part of this team, meaning to take a small step of moving from consumer to contributor. For those of you who just came last week and are coming back you get a pass on this.

We understand you aren't even sure if you want to be a part of this Church yet. But if you are a regular - you need to be moving from consumer to team player. For you that might mean becoming a minister of welcome so that we can strengthen our warmth as people come through our doors. For some of you it might mean getting into another ministry like our Kids Ministry Or getting more committed to ministry, serving more often. For others of you it means - stepping up your financial contribution or even to simply begin contributing in some sort of planned way.

Maybe you just need to begin praying for this Church and for the vision of the Church. On your way here, next week pray that God shows up in a powerful way. Maybe you just need to come with a different mindset next week. How can you be more of a team player?

How can you come and make it a little less about you and a little more about being **a growing disciple who is growing disciples**. Over the next few weeks we invite you to join us as we continue to talk about how some **ordinary practices** in our lives can bring an extraordinary transformation and change. And here is my promise, whatever you surrender to the team **will eventually benefit you**.