

Year B, 2nd Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 5)
June 6, 2021
The Reverend Dr. Brent Was

“The crowd came together again, so that Jesus and his disciples could not even eat.”

That is such a run of the mill kind of image, isn't it? So many people crowded around that they couldn't even eat. A workaday scene. So normal. So ordinary.

Take a breath with me. Late spring smells good, doesn't it? Maybe close your eyes. Listen. Cars going by. Birds singing. Gentle rustling of people in pews. Feel the hard wood of the pew on your sit-down-upon. Did bare oak ever feel so good? It is just one Sunday morning in Maine. (Or North Carolina, maybe New Mexico, just different birds and more luxurious seating).

Yesterday morning I sat at our kitchen table writing this. I listened to the ducks splashing in their pool and spotted the pair of cardinals who are finally regulars at the feeders. As I sipped my coffee, pet the dog(s) and watched the grass grow, I reveled in the relative quiet. Windy and the girls are in Massachusetts for a funeral. That's one of the principal reasons why we moved to Maine; so that we could go to funerals of distant relations. The coffee and the quiet and the cardinals and the growing grass, family obligations... each are wonderful, especially the coffee (I did learn how to make good coffee in Oregon). These things are wonderful, and wonderfully ordinary.

Ordinary has multiple meanings. Ecclesiastically, Ordinary refers to a Bishop, Bishop Brown is our Ordinary. The term is from old canon law and refers to how jurisdiction of a specific geographical area is “permanently and irremovably annexed to” a Bishop. (That is why we have a Canon to the Ordinary, a Canon to the Bishop, their chief of staff more or less). Ordinary also defines the unchangeable things in the Mass, unchangeable seasonally, that is. “The Lord be with you – And also with you/ Lift up your hearts – we lift them up to the Lord...” We say that every Mass, no matter the season. It is part of the Ordinary. And this term also refers to certain seasons of the year. Some seasons are feasts, some seasons are fasts, and some seasons are _____.

On Ash Wednesday we are invited to the observance of a Holy Lent. Lent is a time of fasting and special devotions. There is purple and the cross might be shrouded, and the flowers maybe are toned down, all aids in keeping our eyes on the prize for which Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself. It is a training program, spiritual boot camp, it is preparation... for Easter? No, Easter is a feast seasons, it's a party, a celebration. So is it preparation for Pentecost? No, Pentecost commemorates the action of the Holy Spirit, Her inhabiting of the church. Those disciples with

flames on their heads and mysterious tongues in their mouths were in a posture of receiving, not giving.

No, all of it, the waiting for Our Savior in Advent; His arrival at Christmas; the revelations revealed in Epiphany; the austerities and practices of Lent; the joy of Easter; the fire of Pentecost; the whole cycle of the seasons, the movement of life marked by the practice of the Christian calendar, all of it prepares us for what, for all practical purposes, begins today, and which extends over half of our year, the season after Pentecost. This is not a time for feasting; not a time for fasting; it is a time for living. This is Ordinary time.

I love the calendar. The colors. Like our Ordinary Time green? A generous soul is helping us get a Marian Blue Advent set. I love the gold frontal we that has been up for the past year, but it doesn't quite fit with any liturgical season, though nor does it not fit. And there is so much more. Moving from Eucharistic Prayer A to B to D in the high holy seasons. (We're using A now, the ordinary one). Carlton changes the service music seasonally, the Gloria and the Sanctus. I truly love the changes in the salutation: "Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins/His mercy endures forever"; "Alleluia. Christ is Risen./The Lord is Risen indeed. Alleluia."; "Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit..."

This past year, with so many things out of synch with normal, especially the passage of time – those weeks and months sure blended into one another this past year, I was especially grateful for the liturgical calendar. It helped me keep time. It gave structure to time, the seasonal, cyclical structure of time that humans need.

It is this, the calendar and the lectionary, and how those things concretely (and properly) steer our life of common prayer that gives my life order if not more meaning that you might imagine. Jesus makes me Christian; it is this stuff that makes me decidedly Anglican.

To be clear, this is an Episcopal Church. That is how we are organized, that is the name of our organization, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. The form of Christianity we adhere to is Anglican. Like if you are Lutheran, you follow the path laid out by Martin Luther, but you are a member of the ELCA or the Missouri Synod. Just making sure we're on the same sheet of music. In an ordinary year, an ordinary transition, we would have worked terminology stuff in the first couple of months together. We're getting to it now. How ordinary!

This whole past year has been anything but ordinary. For far too much of the rest of the world, it is still far from ordinary, the pandemic is raging in the global south. And here, things are changing, and generally for the better. I heard a health official comment that if you are vaccinated,

the pandemic is over for you. If you are not, it is still raging. 10 deaths were reported in Maine on Thursday, all of them unvaccinated.

But here. For most of us. It is June. We're eating from our gardens. (Just spinach now, maybe some arugula and some immature radishes, but more is coming and those first salads...) Summer friends are returning. Boats are in the water. The grass is growing. We're at church, and we're having coffee hour. 8:00 is back. How ordinary.

So we are dialing it back a little here at St. Francis by the Sea Episcopal Church. Normalizing. Returning to Ordinary Time. We have been on crisis footing for 16 months. Now we are back. Church is going to look like it does now from now on. (Give or take a few tweaks here and there). We're passing the collection plate. We're receiving Eucharist at the rail. We're still using the little cups, but they're not so bad. I'm starting work on reestablishing the Midweek Eucharist. Probably at 10 on Wednesdays. Let me know if that time is bad. And there has been talk about contemplative prayer... making a time to pray together in silence. I'm think about Friday mornings. If you are interested, let me know. I'm making visits. At church, at homes, for lunch, picnics, walks, at coffee shops, on boats! Give me a call! Especially if we haven't spent time together.

And here, our Sunday place together, we're going to make a few adjustments. A new rector always brings habits and practices with them. After a year I finally get to share them with you all and translate how I did things by myself in Bill's carriage house to this beautiful altar in this lovely space with you all. Things might feel different, like me facing with you all in the same direction for the Gloria at the beginning of the service. We'll have a bit more solemnity, more reverencing around the altar. Not so much bowing and scraping, the holy groveling some of us tend towards, but more reverent, worshipful in our quite, subtle, Anglican way. This is God's house and we should carry ourselves as such.

I do use the word "Mass" for the Holy Eucharist some times. I know this displeases some folks. But you know my history. I was formed liturgically by an Anglican monastic order. Words like that are engraved in my heart. So is, gasp, the Hail Mary. Besides, Mass is our word as much as it is anyone else's, it's in the Book of Common Prayer as one of the names of the Sacrament of the Table. And I don't know, calling me "Father" is at least as Roman Catholic sounding as using the word "Mass" for how we pray. But if it does bother you, bring it to me, not Barbara. She's Roman Catholic. Complaints of that sort could be offensive.

Gosh, it is great to have ordinary problems!

It is ordinary time! I'll be back to straight up lectionary preaching come next week. This past year has been one great big pastoral concern. The trauma of the pandemic, the upheaval of political and racial violence, the dismantling of democratic institutions like voting, and the loss of authority by media and public servants such as public health officials. We didn't need any more challenges this past year, even the challenges of a lot of our scripture.

So in an ordinary Sunday I might get into the trauma that Adam's blaming of Eve has caused. Or what binding the strong man is all about. Or that blaspheming the Holy Spirit is about saying things about God that are untrue, such as claiming that something is of God, is holy when in fact it is not. Or claiming that God is X when you know very well God is not X but is rather sparkling. That is what Jesus declares is unforgivable, lying about God and God's action and presence in the world. There are some juicy things in the papers that those teachings might be applied to, and thus will be preached on, now that we are back in Ordinary Time.

And some of it will be challenging. And some of it will be uncomfortable. Or new. Or not what you are accustomed to. And I have the capacity to learn, to adjust to a new way to be together. As do you. And we are off to a great start! If we can be here in as good a shape as we are after this past year, goodness gracious, this is a good time to be in Blue Hill; it is a good time to be at St. Francis.

My role here in your midst is incredibly ordinary. My sole job is to love God and to love you. Everything that I do or try to do rises from that root. Even if I don't know you yet. Or it is just in passing yet, or just on Zoom, I love you with that big broad stroke of Christian love. And now, the vaccines are making it possible to get to know each other, that big love of God can become more specific, focusing on the parts of you that make you you. All the more to love you with! And all the more that we can love and serve God in Christ with the Holy Spirit together, here, now. Ordinary time. What a beautiful thing. AMEN