

“What’s Ordinary About the Kingdom?”  
Dr. Stephen Borger

Luke 7:11-17

When I was working with Pastor Thelander to set a date for my visit and opportunity to share in a message we had first looked at the date May 26. I was excited when thinking I might get to preach on Trinity Sunday. Call me crazy but I do enjoy a challenge. However, that date did not work out and so we changed the date to today June 9. When Pastor Thelander confirmed the date with me he informed me that this would be the beginning (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday) of “Ordinary Time”. Oh, sure I thought, that is really appropriate. Who better to start “Ordinary Time” than the D.S.

I suppose it is not a surprise to very many of you that I have not been overly initiated into the world of liturgy and the “church calendar”. Although in the past 10–15 years there has been a renewal (and in some cases a brand new introduction) in the Church of the Nazarene to the historic church year, liturgy and the lectionary, for most of my 62 years in the church in has been rarely recognized. In fact in the Church of the Nazarene (for the most part) the term “church year” is usually interpreted as the financial and statistical year, and the church calendar is more in tune with Hallmark than Canterbury, liturgy and the Book of Common Prayer.

Pastor also mentioned that this time is known as “Kingdomtide”. Now that sounded a little more intriguing a little more exciting. So I began my research and I found a blog that encouraged me. On this “ecumenical website of resources and reflections on liturgy, spirituality, and worship” a Mr. Peters wrote; “*There is nothing ‘ordinary’ about ‘Ordinary Time’.* *Ordinary Time is not about common, regular, mundane, or run of the mill.*” So...maybe this wasn’t a devious plan to remind the DS how rather uninspiring is his work. So began my journey toward today’s message. I also found out that the term “ordinary time” has more to do

with “ordinal numbers” than anything else...just in case you have been wondering. I am though still intrigue by this idea of “ordinary time”.

The Gospel passage is Luke 7:11-17. The story is rather ordinary to the reader or hearer. Jesus and his disciples are going to another village and a crowd of people are walking along with them. The name of the village was “Nain” in the Plain of Esdraelon. About all the Bible encyclopedia says about Nain is that it is where Jesus performed this miracle. When the group traveling with Jesus reached the city gate they were met by a funeral procession. Funerals were and still are rather ordinary. The death of a loved one is not “ordinary” for those of us who personally experience it but they do happen. I don’t think a day goes by without at least one obituary in the newspaper. It is an ordinary, everyday occurrence. Jesus was observing all that was happening and stopped for he noticed the mother of the young man they were carrying was a widow and he had compassion on her. Now, this is where the story becomes not so ordinary.

Those who were there that day and those who first heard Luke’s account would have received the story as somewhat familiar (ordinary). Most of them from their childhood would have heard the stories of Elijah and Elisha. Elijah’s story is our OT reading for today (I Kings 17:17-24). The story of Elijah comes out of the prophet doing what prophets do. He was following God’s instructions. Elijah was hiding out from Ahab and Jezebel because he had stopped the rain. Because he stopped the rain the brook near the cave where he was hiding dried up which is what happens when it stops raining. So God told Elijah to go to Zarephath and a widow would take care of him. The prophet meets the widow at the town gate and asked her for a drink and “while she was at it bring him something to eat”. Then the story becomes not so ordinary.

The widow informs him that she is not the “rich widow” he might have expected but was actually so poor she was gathering sticks for a fire to make herself and her son their last meal. Elijah declares the power of God would provide flour and oil unending. But then before this incredible blessing could be fully realized the widow’s son dies and she blames Elijah. The prayer and action of Elijah revived the son and the Septuagint (Greek OT) uses exactly the same phrase in I Kings 17:23 that Luke uses in Luke 7:15; “gave him back to his mother”. They had heard this story before (to say nothing of the story of Elisha).

Albeit a very familiar story, there are extraordinary connections in this story to the Kingdom of God. It is a declaration of the Coming of Christ. (7:16) ***“A mighty prophet has risen among us,” and “God has visited his people today.”*** This is one of the stories referenced by Jesus to John the Baptist in next week’s Gospel reading. Jesus answers John’s question and declares the Kingdom is at hand. This story gives light to both the coming and the nature of the Kingdom of God. The coming of the Kingdom of God is with power and might but it is a power to offer justice and mercy to the hurting, poor and needy. The crowd that witnessed the miracle join in the declaration....again their words recorded by Luke; “a mighty prophet has risen among us” and “God has visited his people today”. In the midst of their very ordinary lives something extraordinary was happening.

This story is a declaration of the Compassion of Christ. The compassion shown by Jesus in this story is to be the main activity, purpose, focus (whatever word best communicates) of the Church which becomes the example and the living-out-of-the-Kingdom people of God. As we also wait for the already-not-yet Kingdom to come we (the Church) are to live and give this compassion. This was not just the death of a young man which in every way would be and is sorrowful but it was the death of a widow’s only son.

This is a story declaring the Consummation of ALL things in Christ. In this story we are given a brief peek into the power of God. This is the power of God that raised the dead only son of a widow to life and “gave him back to his mother”. As Easter people we anticipate what it foreshadows. This is just a glimpse of the power of God that raised Jesus from the grave. It is also of interest if not significant that this little ordinary village of Nain sits at the edge of the Plain of Esdraelon and across the Valley of Jezreel one can see the place called Megiddo. This is a place where many wars and battles had been fought. It was in John’s apocalyptic vision of the consummation of history the place called “har-Maggiddo” or Armageddon. Very extraordinary things can happen in very ordinary places.

Jesus taught the disciples to pray; “Your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven”. Have you noticed the “Kingdom” breaking into your life in any extraordinary ways? Will your heart be filled sometime this week with compassion resulting in acts of grace and kindness in a most unexpected place? There really is nothing ordinary about the Kingdom....except that it comes right into our ordinary lives.