

(In today's lesson in Matthew Jesus cures the sick and feeds 4000 with 7 loaves and a few fishes, then in the Revelation, we have wars breaking out in heaven. These were not ordinary times).

According to our church calendar, this week begins what we call Ordinary Time – the time between the Day of Pentecost and the first Sunday in Advent. Six months of Ordinary Time, as well as a brief period between Christmas and Lent. So a majority of the days in our church year are spent in Ordinary Time—much like our individual lives.

We live in a culture that seeks—yea demands—exciting, extraordinary places to dine, to vacation, to worship. The Church is certainly not immune to the consumer culture mentality that insists we look for the most exciting, most fulfilling, personally satisfying place to worship. It should meet our need for “spiritual enrichment” and “personal fulfillment”. If it doesn't, we'll go down the street or across town or even to the next city, looking for the parish that “meets our needs. A bit of an insult to the Gospel...

When I look out at this congregation of Calvary Episcopal Church this morning, I do not see people searching, so much as I see a faithful remnant who have decided this is their place---and they will remain., I see Bill Parsons, the oldest communicant of Calvary, and a member longer than any of us, who with his wife Lucy, drives 40 miles each way to worship in the parish that is his home—since the days of Father Lawrence, the priest who taught several of you what it means to be a committed Christian, worshipping at Calvary—all your lives.—he was an example of what it means to be faithful.(For those who might be looking for an example of faithfulness in the old testament, I would remind you of the story of Jonah, who failed the test. God told him to go to Nineveh, where he did not want to go, so he took a ship in the opposite direction. And of course he got thrown overboard and a whale swallowed him...but that's a story for another time)

Faithfulness, ultimately, does not demand that every worship experience, nor every priest, nor every church committee, be exciting. Every Sunday cannot match the Easter, or Pentecost, or Christmas celebration. Every Sunday will not bring in crowds who are seeking “a really exciting worship experience.”

But what every Sunday brings is an occasion to come together as Christ's flock in this particular place, to worship, reconnect, to keep going—to love our brothers and sisters who are on this journey with us, and have stayed through the trials and heartaches that Calvary has faced and overcome.—and still overcoming.

It is tempting in times of conflict and chaos to walk away. But the beloved community, if it is to be found anywhere, is here. Especially this week, and recent weeks past, we are mourning the loss of four beloved members—Bill Cleveland, Rae Holt, Richard Nettum and just last week Lucy Crisp Perry. They were a part of this congregation and will be mourned and missed as long as any of us have breath.

But this is who we are—a congregation living in community with each other, celebrating our victories and grieving together during our pain and loss.

We can delight when we are blessed with spiritual peak experiences, but much of life is lived on ordinary plains and in the valleys. The real test, then, is not how well we respond to God on the mountaintops, but how well we trust God in the valleys and dark places, even if sometimes, God seems absent.

We will be in Ordinary Time for quite a while. And most Sundays, now that the threat of pandemic is passing, we will show up, worship together, have Eucharist and cling to the notion that we are the beloved community—and that we will continue to be here for each other—that we are faithful. We will do this throughout this ordinary time---and, God willing, throughout our journey in this place. It is the least we can do. Sometimes, it is the most we can do.

Amen.