



**“ORDINARY PEOPLE”**

**SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 42: 1-9; MATTHEW 3: 13-17**  
**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**

**January 12, 2020**

The Rev. Dr. Marcia W. Mount Shoop, Pastor

**Isaiah 42:1-9**

42:1 Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

42:2 He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;

42:3 a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.

42:4 He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

42:5 Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it:

42:6 I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations,

42:7 to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

42:8 I am the LORD, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols.

42:9 See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

**Matthew 3:13-17**

3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.

3:14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

3:15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

3:16 And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water,

suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

3:17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

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It wasn't too long after dinner that it would start. The nightly ritual of putting small children to bed.

I was often exhausted by that time of day, after hours and hours of chasing a little girl who started to walk at 9 months old and refused to take naps, and answering the constant questions of four-year old boy who seemed to be curious and a burgeoning expert about anything and everything.

Turn on the water and rinse out the tub. Turn on the water again and get the temperature just right. Not too hot and not too cold. Mary Elizabeth goes first. She stands there on her sturdy little legs peering over the bathtub delighted to see it filling up with water. She throws in the toys one by one and savors each splash.

Finally there are so many toys in the bathtub that they cover the top of the water and I lower her into the warm confines of her evening bath.

The echo of my voice against the tile walls and the undulating water—narrating the plastic fish's journey into the toy net, asking questions to feed her fascination with the ocean of bobbing toys surrounding her. Where's the grey shark? Where's the blue shark? Uh oh, what happened to the red boat? There it is under your little toes.

The captivating and joy-inducing sound of a child's laugh washes over me.

Ordinary time is sacred time—moments of paying attention, of being present, of taking care, of meeting needs, of being cherished.

These are the kinds of moments that gift our lives as human beings with connection and with purpose—simultaneously mundane and Holy—building trust and relationship, composing a story of loving presence over time.

Ordinary people doing ordinary things in trustworthy, attentive ways changes the world.

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John the Baptist was a walking, talking revolution.

Bursting out of the wilderness with a message the world needed to hear—change your ways or your greed and distortion will destroy you, it will destroy us.

And people listened to John—he had a growing following by the time Jesus of Nazareth comes along to partake in the baptisms that John was doing in the Jordan.

These baptisms were unique to John’s ministry even as ritual washings or purifications and initiations were a part of many different traditions in the early Mediterranean world. John’s baptisms were a one-time act—not a repeated ritual of purification or washing like some other examples we can find from the same period.

John’s baptisms were clearly delineated as for the remission of sins—a sign of a new way of being in the world. John’s message was clear: repent or be subject to divine judgment with withering consequences.

There are not many things in Jesus’ life that come with historical confirmation. But his baptism by John in the Jordan does. We know it happened.

And frankly it is a bit of a theological problem for the early interpreters of the faith—especially as Jesus’ status as Messiah, as Savior, as God incarnate becomes a stronger and stronger belief and becomes doctrine.

The later the Gospel account, the higher the Christology became—coming to its highest and most robust expression in The Gospel of John, that is both the latest Gospel and the most clear and unequivocal on Jesus’ fully human and fully divine status.

So the theological problem, even the theological embarrassment, for the early interpreters is why a sinless Jesus gets baptized by someone clearly baptizing for the remission of sins? And why the Savior of the world gets baptized by a person of lesser status, a revolutionary from the wilderness?

Matthew’s account is one that is later than Mark’s. The Gospel writer of Matthew adds some dialogue to Mark’s account that seeks to answer these troubling questions. In Matthew John protests and Jesus insists—this baptism is a necessity—a fulfillment of tradition, an act of obedience to God’s will for Jesus’ identity and connection to John’s lineage—Jesus needed John and John needed Jesus to fulfill all righteousness—to obey the will of God.

In Matthew, John knows the import of who Jesus is. And the crowd there at the Jordan seems to hear the voice of God along with Jesus—“this is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased” echoing the word of Isaiah’s first song of the Suffering Servant—Jesus is the Son of God, the Suffering Servant—the one sent to save us, the one who serves, the one who suffers out of boundless love for the world.

And baptism emerges as a sacramental act—an ordinary act used for extraordinary purpose, sacred purpose, sacramental purpose-sign and seal of God’s boundless love for God’s beloved children.

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Remembering our baptisms means remembering our identity as children of God.

In Presbyterian practice, baptism means nothing without the community, baptism is an act of the community—both of our sacraments are, Communion and Baptism.

Both form and feed us with the truth that we are called to let define us—each and every one of us are children of God, loved and accepted, cherished and embraced by Divine love.

A love that saves us from ourselves—saves us from isolation, from distortion, from the ways we mistaken ourselves for anything other than beloved children of God. When we live in communities that honor that sacred identity we all have, we inhabit a very different world than we would if we don't have a community that remembers who we are and reminds us who we are.

Ordinary people doing ordinary things can change the world.

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That's really the beauty and gift of Christianity—God taking on flesh, living in the ordinary, reaching out to us, transforming humanity through ordinary moments turned to sacramental purpose. The power and purpose of the ordinary to carry God's saving love for the world—that's really who we are. God consecrates our every day by filling each and everything we do with the capacity to heal us.

And our Presbyterian polity is born out of that sacramental impulse, to trust that God inhabits the ordinary—ordinary people called to be who God made us to be together.

Today we are ordaining and installing 13 new officers in our community. They inhabit these new roles of Deacon and Elder in our midst not by being placed above or apart from the community, but by simply being themselves. They are called because of the way God made them. They are called because our community sees how God made them and believes that the gifts God gave them can help us be the community God intends us to be—a source and force of mercy, justice, and revolutionary love.

Ordinary people doing ordinary things can change the world.

Can you let the gift of the ordinary wash over you with its extraordinary capacity to show each of and all of us our sacred purpose on this earth?

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“Mindful” a poem by Mary Oliver<sup>1</sup>

Everyday  
I see or hear  
something  
that more or less

kills me  
with delight,  
that leaves me  
like a needle

in the haystack  
of light.

It was what I was born for —  
to look, to listen,

to lose myself  
inside this soft world —  
to instruct myself  
over and over

in joy,  
and acclamation.

Nor am I talking  
about the exceptional,

the fearful, the dreadful,  
the very extravagant —

but of the ordinary,  
the common, the very drab,

the daily presentations.

Oh, good scholar,  
I say to myself,  
how can you help

but grow wise  
with such teachings  
as these —  
the untrimmable light

of the world,  
the ocean's shine,  
the prayers that are made  
out of grass?

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Some nights there was no time for a bath—we'd been out too late chasing lightning bugs or playing kick the can in my neighborhood. Four children at the end of the long day—no doubt my parents just needed to get us to bed.

On nights like that, after hours of barefoot play, my sisters and I would all sit down in the upstairs bathroom and one of my parents would wash each of our feet, feet marked with the rich Kentucky ground we lived on. Designated "foot rags," one for each of us told the story of our day.

"Just look at these little feet," my mom would say. "They are just filthy! Just think how much they played. Just think of all the places they have been. Just think of the day they've had."

She'd tell us about the importance of our play, of our day as she was washing our feet—using our own special foot rag to clean between our toes and get our feet just right for a good night's rest.

Ordinary moments filled with sacred possibility—putting together sensations and connections that transform us, that transform the world we call home. Prayers made of grass and dirt, prayers made of water and bread, prayers made out of Holy mundane moments that tell a story of love over time.

Ordinary people doing ordinary things can change the world.

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(walk to the Font and then to the Table).

Ordinary time is sacred time—moments of paying attention, of being present, of taking care, of meeting needs, of being cherished.

The way we see each other, the way we make and keep life together, the way we aspire to be Jesus followers, the way we remember who we are at this Font and around this Table—these are the moments that define us.

Look around—can you see us? A beloved community overflowing with the beautiful promise of ordinary people doing ordinary things that can change the world.

Thanks be to God.

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## Communion

This is the joyful feast of the people of God. A place where the lost are found. A place where we come as we are—carrying our burdens, our brokenness, our gifts, and our promise—trusting in a God who meets us in something as ordinary as breaking bread and sharing a cup together.

As we gather around this Table that feeds and transforms this family of faith and the world, this Table that embodies radical welcome, that teaches us the gifts of abundance, of mercy, and of right relationship, I invite forward those in our number who God has called into ordained leadership in our community.

Ordained and Installed: Christi Mobley, Jessica Graham, Anna Hamel, Keith Prince, and Annie Cole (ELDERS) Jeff Curtis, Martha Ensign Johnson, Cathy Froehlich, Bill Ryan (DEACONS)

Installed: John Legerton (ELDER) John Curry, Jeane Smith (DEACON)  
Beth Robrecht will be ordained and installed at a later time.

I also invite Ruling Elder, Paul Rogers, to come forward to ask questions of the congregation on behalf of the Session.

These siblings in Christ have been prompted by the Spirit's movement in this congregation to use their gifts to help lead us and to help care for us. We celebrate their yes to God's and this congregation's call even as we remember those whose churches and denominations have denied them the ability to live out their call through ordination. (turn and point toward the shower of stoles)

(go to script for ordination)

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1 Mary Oliver, "Mindful," from *Why I Wake Early*. (Beacon Press, 2005).