



---

## A New Normal

*Homily by Lisa Wiens Heinsobn given on June 6, 2021*

Today is the beginning of the longest liturgical season of the church year. We call it Ordinary Time. It begins after Pentecost and Trinity Sunday officially conclude Eastertide, and it goes until Advent begins again four weeks before Christmas. In a certain sense I guess Ordinary Time isn't really a season at all—it's the absence of a special season. It's not Lent, or Advent, or Easter, or Epiphany. It's business as usual.

Except, what can possibly be ordinary about life after Pentecost?

What can possibly be normal after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus? And after the Spirit of the Living God fell upon the disciples and filled them with power and joy and new language?

What can possibly be normal now? I don't know about you, but I sense there is such an intense desire for things to be normal. For us to be done with this pandemic and these masks. For people not to have to choose between making a living, being isolated, or being at risk of a dangerous virus. But what IS normal? After the last year facing so many things that haven't always been clear to us, the danger to the earth and the vast extent of systemic racism in our nation, it

might feel as if things we previously thought were normal were anything but. And some of you have lost loved ones, or changed jobs. It might feel like there is no normal to get back to, in a way. There is only walking forward, into the strange and uncharted wilderness, and they call it ordinary time.

And in the sacred stories of our tradition which are like a map of the human condition, over and over again, we see the people of God walking forward into times like this. We see the courage they had, and the mistakes they made, also the gifts they received from God. We see that the way God calls us to walk forward is often anything but ordinary.

For the people of Israel in the time of Samuel, they were sick of the leadership of corrupt judges, as Samuel's sons were, and so they asked for a king. The reading from today says they wanted a king so that they could be like other nations—so they could be normal—and so that the king would fight their battles for them. What God warns them they will actually get in a king will be someone who enslaves them and takes the best of what they have. But they go forward anyway. In the gospel reading from today, when Jesus and his disciples were garnering such attention that the crowds swarmed around them and they had no even to eat, it says that Jesus' family was so worried about him that they came out to restrain him since they thought he had gone out of his mind. In today's Epistle reading, the Apostle Paul says to the people of Corinth that they can see past our momentary suffering to take hold of that which is unseen, and

lasting, and eternal. He says that our momentary suffering is preparing us for what he calls “an eternal weight of glory beyond measure.” This sounds wonderful, and perplexing, and not ordinary at all.

What all these situations have in common is that God is asking the people to see past the surface, beyond what is apparent. It seems to me that God is asking the people to see with the eye of the heart. In the reading from I Samuel, God warns the people that having a king won't be what it looks like from the outside. In Corinthians, the Apostle Paul is certain that the suffering of now is nothing compared to the vast beauty of what he calls the eternal. In the gospel, Jesus says that the ones who are his family aren't those who think he is crazy, but rather are those who do the will of God. Seeing as God sees, seeing with the eye of the heart, may sometimes lead us in strange directions. But we're not being asked to deny what our physical senses are telling us. We are being asked instead to see the *full* truth of things as they are. To see the things that are sometimes hidden from us, including our own motivations, the stories of people whose voices have been silenced, and the truth of God's active presence everywhere at all times. It seems to me that in these strange times that are anything but ordinary, God is asking us to allow the Holy Spirit to awaken our spiritual senses, so that we can live from the fullness of our whole selves, and not as fragmented beings.

Last week, St. John's hosted a film discussion based on an incredible film called *Stories I didn't Know*. This film centers on a conversation

between a St. Paul woman of Irish descent named Rita Davern, and a Santee Dakota woman named Ramona Stately. Rita Davern was descended from an Irish immigrant who purchased Pike Island in the Mississippi near Fort Snelling more than 100 years ago. And ever since, Pike Island was a favorite place for the family to visit; it was the center of many family stories in Rita's family. What her family never talked about, and that she didn't know, was that Pike Island was originally called Wita Tanka by the Lakota people who had lived here for many thousands of years. That island is located at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers, in a place the Lakota called the Bdote, which they believed was the location of creation itself. Lakota women used to go to Wita Tanka, now called Pike Island, to give birth, because the land was considered so very sacred. After the 1862 Dakota War, it was the place where more than 1600 Dakota men, women and children were held in an internment camp over the winter, with little food and no shelter, and over 300 of them died.

When Rita Davern discovered this, and the fact that the land was essentially stolen from the Dakota, her heart was broken, and she began a long journey of seeking to learn the whole truth about Pike Island with her family. This caused some friction. But it also led to greater humility, and an incredible story of connection between Rita and Ramona. They were joined in their shared experience of love of this land, and in their mutual unflinching willingness to tell the whole truth. It wasn't an either/or experience—either she could love the land she called Pike Island or she could acknowledge what happened

to the Lakota who were driven from and then imprisoned on the land. She could hold both, by seeing with her whole self. In our conversation the other night with Ramona Stately, the Dakota woman in the story, Ramona said that the Dakota understand people to have not just five physical senses, but many others as well including intuition, for example. There is also spiritual awakening. In scripture we might call it putting on the mind of Christ. Teachers in the wisdom tradition call it seeing with the eye of the heart.

To see the whole truth—both the stories we haven't told and also the extravagant goodness of the love of God, which is greater than any other force on earth—is what God calls us to do. Ironically, for us who are followers of the Way of Jesus, this IS what is ordinary. We are called to see the whole truth, that which is hidden because it is shameful and that which is hidden because it is so beautiful ordinary eyes can't perceive it. We are called to be like Jesus, to be conduits of healing we ourselves need and that we pass along to others. We are called to be like the Apostle Paul, able to see beyond our current suffering to the breathtaking majesty of our true connection with all life and with God. We are called to see past the easy temptation of demanding to be like everyone else, as the people of Israel did when they demanded a king, and instead to be governed by the still, small voice of the Spirit. We are called to learn the whole truth of our own histories, and perhaps risk some accusation, so that we can walk forward into the wilderness nourished by love and empowered by the Spirit for repentance and healing.

Imagine taking a look at your life with the eye of your heart, asking the Holy Spirit's guidance to perceive the full truth of things. What that has been "ordinary" might actually be revealed as strange? What that now seems impossible might become the new life-giving normal?

What if it is actually our birthright to experience beloved community across lines of difference, because we are all made in the image of God for connection in all our breathtaking diversity?

What if we are meant to have joy right here and now, even when there is so much cause for grief or anger, because love is ultimate, and the presence of God is everywhere?

What if we can reject the seemingly ordinary ways of the world in order to embrace the extraordinary Way of Love in everyday life?

Let us find this new normal by following Jesus' Way of Love. Let us see with the eye of the heart, and never again accept what is violent or dead as ordinary. Let us surrender to God's Holy Spirit, risking what is new and what is loving, even if the whole world thinks we've gone out of our minds. Amen.