

Chapel, September 18, 2013
HAIL TO THE ORDINARY
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We are drawn naturally to the extra-ordinary, the extraordinary.

I recently read about a developer who has broke ground on a 210 story building in Changsha in central China.

210 stories!!...twice the height of the Empire State Building.

Moreover, his plan is to complete the work in 4 months.

Now...that is extraordinary...and probably even more extraordinary if it stays up.

Or we hear about 64 yr. old Diana Nyad setting a world record by swimming from Cuba to Flordia. Now there has been some carping about that feat...she wore a wet suit or whatever...but I don't care:

If you can swim for 54 hours in shark-infested waters at age 64, well, that is extraordinary.

And in Scripture

We often focus on the extraordinary.

Outrageous Noah building the ark and surviving the flood

Little David slaying the giant Goliath

Daniel outlasting the den of lions

Like you, my eye is drawn to the spectacular, the extraordinary.

But a danger is all this focus on the extraordinary can cause us to overlook the ordinary.

Our Psalm (104) today celebrates the earthly, the everyday, the rhythms of creation. God is portrayed as the great providential power behind all of nature.

But it is also a celebration of the ordinary.

Water to quench the thirst of donkeys

Grass for cattle

Wine to gladden human hearts

And even stoney cliffs for the badgers (!!!)

And much about our lives is ordinary as well.

Early in the period of Augsburg's Lilly grant on vocation we brought on campus a speaker who challenged our students with a dramatic and even, at times, over-wrought speech:

"You have ONE life...
and what wild and outrageous thing are you going to do
with that ONE life???"

He was right...he was speaking to the natural idealism of students, summoning them to a life of ADVENTURE.

Do something extraordinary! He was saying.

And...we do need those sorts of inspiring messages.

BUT...let's not overlook the basic realities of our lives. Much is ordinary, routine and mundane.

In fact, God must love the ordinary. The writer Jerry Sittser put it this way:

Anyone who survives to the age of 80 will live about 29, 200 days or 700,800 hours. Of those hours, a person will spend roughly the following:

2000 hrs. brushing his or her teeth

204,000 hrs. sleeping

43,800 hrs. eating

58,400 hrs. doing chores

and about 87,000 hrs. doing routine jobs at work, like putting things in folders and then trying to find them again, calculating grades, and writing tedious reports.

But that doesn't mean the ordinary isn't important. The ordinary is a gift and it is important to do these tasks well.

We know that unless we pay attention to the ordinary...the wheel of life tends to wobble and wander off its path.

A roommate leaves unwashed dishes in the sink

A student paper is left unread for 2 weeks

A call is not returned

No one wants to live in communities where behavior like that becomes routine.

And sometimes those things we consider ordinary aren't so ordinary.

A few years ago I was at a wedding of Auggies and a former student came up to me and said that my comments on a paper led her to change her career path.

To this day, I can't recall the assignment, the paper or my comments.

So...folks...blessed is the ordinary! It is part of God's good creation. As Luther puts it:

God's gifts include "food and clothing, home and family, daily work and all that I need from day to day..."

Pretty ordinary stuff. In fact, our lives are crammed with ordinary stuff.

Not the stuff of fist-pumps, headlines. Nothing to gain the attention of the paparazzi.

But it all matters, from the badger's stoney cliff to that list of emails you still need to answer.

The good Lord is bound up in all of it, working his good and mysterious will through the ordinary.

And, if you think about it, that is extraordinary.