

Extraordinary

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Maundy Thursday

April 9, 2020

First Presbyterian Church, Luling

I said last Sunday that the people used palm branches to welcome Jesus to Jerusalem, because that's what they had. When they looked around to see what was available that might be a sign of celebration, there were palm trees and there were palm branches. Completely ordinary to them. Some of us may even have palm type bushes and tree growing in our yards, or flourishing in pots in a sun room or back porch. At least in our climate, they aren't really exotic. They're ordinary.

When Jesus was baptized, he went to an ordinary river, the Jordan. Yes, it had some religious significance and background, but just looking at the Jordan River, it isn't particularly spectacular. Kind of like a river here, not huge, not crystal clear and sparkling. An ordinary river with ordinary river water. And when we baptize a child or an adult, most all churches use water from the church's kitchen sink. Maybe occasionally someone will have been to Israel and dipped some water out of the Jordan River, but usually not. Usually it's plain old ordinary water.

When the disciples and Jesus gathered around the table for the Last Supper, it's a holiday meal, a Passover meal, so in that sense it's special. But what they eat is regular food. Bread. Wine. Nothing that required a trip to a specialty grocery store, or a far away land. It's the food they ate every day, that accompanied their meals. It's ordinary. Every culture in the world has some kind of bread: pita, naan, tortilla, pita, pumpernickel, baguettes, Mrs. Baird's white sandwich bread, sourdough, and of course the sweet Hawaiian bread that usually sits on our communion table in the sanctuary. I like bread. But it's an ordinary thing, made out of ordinary ingredients. For the disciples and Jesus, wine was an ordinary drink, not something to be saved for a special occasion. And when we gather around the table, though we put the bread on a shiny silver plate and the juice in a lovely pottery chalice, though the little cups are filled with painstaking care, the bread and juice themselves are plain old ordinary bread and juice. Anyone can find them at HEB, at least under normal circumstances. Presumably people purchase them for uses other than communion. Ordinary bread and juice.

And when Jesus, as John tells us, knelt down to wash his disciples' feet, he used plain water, a basin, a rough towel, the work and implements of a servant. It was ordinary work, with ordinary things, an ordinary task.

This is probably an occupational hazard of being a preacher, but I have a weird tendency to see the holy in everyday things. I think I've told you before that when Anna was in the NICU, her physical therapist would remove casts from her teeny tiny stinky feet every few days, and then wash them ever so tenderly and gently. And every time she did so, I pictured Jesus, ever so tenderly and gently washing his disciples' feet. And then when each of the girls were infants, we would bathe them in the kitchen sink. And we would run plain ordinary tap water, just the right temperature, over their heads, and it would feel like a baptism, a new birth, a new beginning, each time. And have you ever noticed how many of our meals draw us together and nurture us, the way communion does?

What makes the palm branches extraordinary is the one who rides over them. What makes the water extraordinary is the one who is baptized in it, and the one in whose name we baptize. What makes the bread and wine extraordinary is the one who hosts the meal. What makes the basin of water extraordinary is the one who washes feet.

And what makes the one who rides over palms and is baptized and hosts a meal and washes feet—what makes that one extraordinary is the love he incarnates, the love he embodies.

And so maybe worship tonight feels pretty ordinary and not special and plain. Maundy Thursday is my favorite worship service of the year. I love everything about it. And there's no question that this year is different. Maybe you're sitting in your favorite chair, the ordinary worn out one, where you watch tv and snooze after lunch. Or maybe you're sitting around your ordinary kitchen table, where you've eaten countless meals and played card games and shared conversations with your family. You've washed your hands a million times, with plain tap water and soap, for at least twenty seconds, just as instructed. You've gathered an ordinary cracker or slice of bread or maybe a leftover dinner roll. You've poured some juice or fruit punch or milk or water or wine or something into an ordinary glass. And this meal, though weird and unusual, doesn't feel extraordinary.

But what makes it extraordinary is the same love, made real in the same person, who made that water and bread and wine extraordinary and holy before. That same love that laid down his life for his friends. That same love that we now

can show our neighbors. That love, no matter how many times we receive or recognize or share it, is extraordinary.