



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

Ordinary Things
By The Rev. Sharon Gracen
June 7, 2015

The church year is a cycle of seasons. Each one has its particular character and even its own color. But if you step back and look at the church year, it is really divided into two parts, the seasons and Ordinary time. There are two periods of Ordinary time, one comes early in the year, after the Feast of the Epiphany in January. The Sundays afterward are called just that, the Sundays after the Epiphany. It doesn't last very long, as little as a few weeks if Easter is going to be early, because then Ash Wednesday comes early and we're off into a succession of seasons and feasts, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost and Trinity Sunday. And that brings us to where we are today. We are now no longer in a season, but in the long spell of Ordinary Time. We mark time by how many weeks past Pentecost we are. On your bulletin, it says that this is the 2nd Sunday after Pentecost, up to the 25th Sunday and finally the official Last Sunday After Pentecost, Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday of the church year. Ecclesiastical New Year's Eve. Then a new year begins with Advent.

Well, I don't recall ever having been so glad to get to Ordinary Time. This year has felt very un-ordinary. I'm shocked to find that we're in June. The year has seemed to flash by, but punctuated by periods of intense deceleration and moments that had an out-of-time quality requiring close and careful attention. But we have finally made it to Ordinary Time. The comfortable green is back in its place and it all feels like one big yoga cleansing breath.

I've quoted Carrie Newcomer before, the Quaker folk singer from Indiana who has such a way of seeing the holy in ordinary things. One of her songs is called *I Believe* and it's all about very ordinary things.

*I believe there are some debts
that we never can repay
I believe there are some words
that you can never unsay
And I don't know a single soul
who didn't get lost along the way.*

*I believe in socks and gloves
knit out of soft grey wool,
And that there's a place in heaven for those
Who teach in public school.
And I know I get some things right,
But mostly I'm a fool.*

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*I believe in a good strong cup of ginger tea,
And all these shoots and roots will become a tree.
All I know is I can't help but see
All of this as so very holy.*

She sees holiness in things like jars of jelly put up by careful hands, long letters written on real paper and with a real pen, and that a summer tomato is a cause to rejoice. So I thought that as we reenter Ordinary Time, we might look for the holy in some of the ordinary things we do as a community, starting with our statement that begins with *We believe*.

The Creed that we say is not the only one. In the first 500 years of the church, there were at seven of them. Each creed is the church, or some part of it, seeking to solve a problem of errant belief or to differentiate itself from other parts of Christianity. Most denominations have some statement that sets out the guidelines of belief and behavior. In the early church, disagreements about who Jesus was and wasn't became divisive and at times, deadly. The Nicene Creed was a clear attempt to define what it means to claim Christian faith. The need for it stretched back to the earliest church. Paul wrote about teachers who came around to the churches that he had founded who were telling the flock things that Paul felt were truly wrong. He appealed to them to disregard those other voices and to remember what he had taught about Christ. Paul had provided the very first creedal statement in his Letter to the Philippians, "Jesus is Lord." For Christians to say that, had real world implications in a time when the emperor was "Lord." You either followed Caesar as Lord or risk the wrath of the empire. "Jesus is Lord" encapsulates the counter-cultural nature of Christianity. It says that we follow a different Lord, a different way, a different vision for the world.

But even early on, there were lots of interpretations for the story of Jesus and eventually it was determined that a clear statement of what Christians believed was necessary. The Apostles Creed was the earliest known and the legend is that the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostles to each speak one of the twelve statements in it. We use that creed in Morning Prayer, weddings and funerals.

But of course, nothing stays the same and lots of conflicting ideas about Jesus continued to circulate and in the 4th century, it was clear that some things needed to be settled. The Nicene Creed, which we all know well, is the result of a two great church conventions, in one in Nicaea in 325 and the second in Constantinople some 50 years later. Both of these councils were dealing with ways of thinking about Jesus – some claimed that he was not really human, only appeared to be. Others said that he was a creature of God and therefore, there was a time before he existed. There were many other claims. The church would gather and determine the official position and came up with language meant a great deal to them but not so much to us today; "eternally begotten of the father," "begotten not made, of one Being with the Father," And then, of course, someone would go to jail or worse for having believed the wrong thing.

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The most important thing for us to remember about the creed is that it is not a statement of fact, but one of faith. A very good place to start is to understand the Latin word *credamus*. We translate it as “we believe.” Unfortunately, the understanding of belief in our time tends to get turned into, “we accept as factual.” We hear, “we believe” and think that we are saying, “we claim that these things are facts or that they happened this way.” We are wrong in that especially when we overlook that we are saying “we believe *in*...” In the Latin, the verb *credere* means to “trust in” or “to give trust to.” Marcus Borg, the late Episcopal theologian, said that *credere* – to believe *in* something – happens in the heart, not in the head. It is the difference between saying to someone that you think that they are telling the truth versus telling them that you believe in them. There's a big difference, one happens in the head and the other in the heart? When you believe in someone, you are in relationship with them and you are committing a part of yourself to them. You are putting your faith in them. And you'll probably back it up in some way.

So in this ordinary moment, this thing we do every week, we find a deep moment of faith to take seriously what we are as Christians. To what are you willing to give yourself, to invest in, and what does that look like. This is the kind of work that we do in ordinary time.

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