

Study Guide February 4, 2018

Theme: The Ordinary made Extraordinary

Readings: Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-11; 1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39

As we move into the Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany we begin to get closer to Lent. We have used these weeks to look at the various epiphanies that God has shown to us through the sacred scriptures.

In all the passages that we have read and mediated on, God has revealed to you some truth of God's self. As you continue to study God's word, I hope that you are developing a way to read so that you can see God's divine revelations as they seek to reveal themselves to you. Hopefully, this will be an important skill for to use as we transition our focus on the upcoming Lenten journey.

I've entitled this week's message and theme, "The Ordinary Made Extraordinary." The basic idea is that through Christ, Jesus takes ordinary situations and transforms them into something extraordinary. You might notice the reading from Mark 1:29-39 is a continuation of last week's. But instead of being in a public space (the synagogue), Mark moves the action to a private home. And it's in this home that some amazing things transpire.

In your first pass at the gospel reading you might not notice anything too groundbreaking; no major epiphanies so to speak. If you are familiar with Jesus' ministry, what you read here is mostly Jesus doing what Jesus does best; healing and caring for the sick and curing those possessed by demons. I invite you to read it in the way we read the psalm, in the style of *lectio divina* (slow read). And when you do, try to see it through the lens of our ongoing theme of epiphany. What is God revealing to you about God's self in this passage?

It wasn't until I read and meditated on the this passage (verses 29-31 to be exact) over and over again that I was truly able to see the divine revelation that God was giving to me: The Christians Church began, not with the Apostles but with this nameless woman Jesus heals; and it was not affirmed in a holy synagogue, but in a simple home. God takes something as ordinary as a house and transforms it something extraordinary. This was true then as it is today. God continues to bless the simple house church with love and grace so the world can receive the Good News of Jesus Christ. To think, you are a part of that amazing mystery.

Read Isaiah 40:21-31; Mark 1:1-8. The opening chapters of Second Isaiah are poignant poetry, and in this particular passage we are invited to contemplate God in relation to humanity – the magnitude of God's power and humanity's unqualified powerlessness. The author gives us a vision of God who comes with might, arms of strength, and that there is no other being who gives this Lord counsel or instructions. John the Baptist uses the first part of Isaiah 40 to reveal the good news about Jesus. The second part reveals, and reminds us, God is above all others; and no nation or person can come close. Just as John read, I too see a message of hope in this passage. In it we discover our Lord God gives us what we

need; a contrast to the other gods out who only take from us. If you read the chapter closely you will see how, in this poetic tapestry, God takes the ordinary things in our life and makes them extraordinary through his mercy and grace.

Q: What (new) revelation did God reveal to you in this passage?

Q: In v. 28, we learn God does not grow tired. What does that say to you in the way you ask for God's help?

Read 1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Galatians 2:15-21. In this passage, Paul describes the central principle for his ministry: everything he does must be shaped by Christ's death on behalf of others. His daily mantra might be found in his declaration, "For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so I might win them over" (v. 19). Paul did not opt to be an Apostle; it was a divine commission. Jesus revealed himself to Paul; freeing him from the bondage of his past for the purpose of proclaiming the good news. Paul was an ordinary man (with an exceptional theological pedigree) that God used to do extraordinary things with the new and rapidly growing Christian Church.

Q: What (new) revelation did God reveal to you in this passage?

Q: Paul was whatever God needed him to be to get the gospel out into the world. In what ways might you be willing to do the same?

Read Mark 1:29-39. There is just too much to say about Jesus in his story, and so I would encourage you to refer to the sermon as your guide. Suffice it to say, God reveals to Peter's mother-in-law the most amazing epiphany; one that I consider to be the first spark of a great revolution known as Christianity.

Q: What (new) revelation did God reveal to you in this passage?

Q: Think about Jesus' movement, and the method he used to heal. What does that teach you about his ministry?

Q: How does this reading, and my interpretation of it in the sermon help you see and define "Church?"

Slow Read: Psalm 147:1-11. As you reread and meditate on this passage, imagine God speaking directly to you as you sit with a small group of friends some place special.

Q: What special word or phrase did God reveal to you, or put on your in this passage?

Prayer: Lord God, by your holy mystery you brought me into being; sharing with me your divine love and revelations. Send to me your Holy Spirit to enlighten my heart so that I might bend my will towards yours, just as Jesus taught me. For it is in His holy name that I give my whole self, and this time of study and growth, to you. Amen.