

## **Ordinary Time – 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (aka Proper 16A)**

Psalm 19:14 “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.”

Included in the Pebble this week was our brother Robin Williams’ Top 10 reasons why it’s good to be an Episcopalian. They range from the quippy: no snake handling, pew aerobics; to a pithy recognition of a core value of the church: male and female God created them; male and female we ordain them.

Number five particularly resonated with me: “Church year is color-coded.” I have always celebrated the colors, perceiving it as an opportunity to participate in the pageantry and grounding of the service by wearing the appropriate color. I actually rearrange my closet at the opening of each season, so that the current color is front and center.

We are in a green season, the season after Pentecost, a very long season that doesn’t have it’s own, official, name. It is just marked by the number of the Sundays after Pentecost, this being the eleventh. Colloquially, it is known as ordinary time.

The label ‘ordinary time’ was not given to infer a connotation of mundane or boring, but comes from “ordinal” which means “counted time.” It’s not a celebration time, culminating in a feast day, or a marked season of loss and mourning.

Earlier in the year, we have a shorter ‘ordinary time’ period, after Epiphany up to Ash Wednesday, which basically encompasses Jesus’ entire life in an eight week period. I visualize it as time being like a folding book, collapsing upon itself as Jesus grows from an infant, to a child, to an adult, to a teacher -- and then time straightens out again as we engage in Lent, Easter and Pentecost.

Then we are given 28 weeks, nearly six months, of, well, ordinary time.

I have a lot of green clothing.

Synonyms of ordinary include normal, commonplace, usual, conventional, average, familiar and habitual. This is a time of rest, of vacations, taking things easy, finding comfort in routines. It allows for periods of reflection, the deepening of our personal connection to God without dictates established by celebrations and ceremonies. It is an opportunity to walk with God and talk with God as one goes about regular life.

Regular life during this time is one of growth, literally, in our gardens and fields. There is no opportunity for boredom if we keep in mind that every plant is sparkling, irrefutable evidence of the Holy Spirit. A tiny seed produces a flourishing tomato plant that provides delicious fruit to feed many. The environment abounds, even in this time of drought, with variations of green: dark leaves, light leaves, leaves with a different green on top than on the bottom; foliage ranging from yellow-green to aqua tints. All we need to do is pay attention to this: green, God's ultimate neutral.

Attention in our gardens includes careful observation, a watchful eye for pests, for crowding, for withering, responding to the need for pinch here, a trim there. The application of water, that all important quintessential element of life that is water. Through the months of this season, we watch our fields burgeon from tiny starts to blooming plants, providing flowers and food for our tables. The season shifts as the months go by, and as autumn arrives, we enjoy the bounty of the harvest as this year's plant growth diminishes in vigor, awaiting that spark of renewal that will come again.

The same is true in our spiritual reflection. We need to pay attention to our thoughts, the 'meditations of our minds,' pinching and trimming the negative and unkind. The consumption of real water is as vital to our bodies as it is to plants, but for this spiritual allegory, look at water as the Holy Spirit. We are watered every Sunday and have opportunity all week long to revel in this 'water,' Unlike plants, we can't be overwatered.

When I communicated with Sid about my ideas for this homily, his counsel was to “come to a clear understanding of the point you want to make...and get to that point.” So just in case your minds are so full of water and shades of green, this is my point: pay attention. And use all those shades of green and all the water in our environment as a reminder to pay attention, to be awake.

We who live here have another amazing thing to use as a reminder: Morro Rock. It is so easy to take it for granted. It becomes ordinary, just a commonplace part of the environment, hardly registering on our radar as we go about our busi-ness. Reaching back to my youth in a Cuesta College geology class, by definition, our rock is a tombolo, an island tied by a strip of sand to a mainland. On the face of the planet, this phenomena is unusual. Wikipedia has a list of about 50 “important” tombolos. They don’t include Morro Rock. Yet. This rock formation in our front yard is anything but commonplace, it is a rare geological formation. And it provides us with an opportunity, every time we see it, to wake up, to be present, and to give thanks to God.

We of St. Peter’s have an added lift as we make this observation, a bit of frisson, an additional opening in the music of the Holy Spirit, given the name of our church and our “lineage” to St. Peter. As was shared in the Gospel, Jesus blessed Simon for answering his question. He blessed him not because Simon knew the right answer, but because Jesus knew that if the right answer had been revealed to Simon, it was only because Simon had a direct connection to God. Jesus blessed Simon and renamed him Peter, Greek for rock. It is this rock, this direct connection with God that is a key to the continuation of the Word, established into a church. And we can use our rock as a reminder to pay attention to this palpable connection.

There is a theory called ‘depressive realism,’ that posits that the clinically depressed may actually have an accurate view of the world. Certainly a look at headlines indicates that there is a lot of ugliness and misery in the world. We must remember that we have a choice to pay attention to the ugly or to see beauty. Whether we watch the news and the pundits, or listen to a beautiful passage of music or look at piece of art.

I have developed a theory that life is like roses, like the ones today in honor of Doreen’s brother. We have the splendor of the green leaves, the exquisite beauty of the flowers...and, trust me, the stems have thorns. So what are we going to focus on? Obviously, we focus on the flowers, with honorable mention to the leaves as a gorgeous backdrop. We know the thorns are there, but they aren’t our focus. Not to say that there are not times when the thorns of life demand our focus, but here, now, we have the privilege of just focusing on the roses themselves to the glory of God.

Simple attention. Thoughtful attention. Attention to the ordinary. Being aware and awake.

I’ll close with a familiar bit of scripture from Philippians:

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received ...and the God of peace will be with you.