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***Anything but Ordinary - Week I
Easter Sunday – Lit Year B
Delivered April 8, 2012***

Happy Easter. Thank you for carving time out of your schedule to be with us today before brunch or Easter egg hunts or whatever else you have planned. This is our first year at the cow palace for Easter so it is a little out of the ordinary for us, a little different.

Ordinary is defined as “of no special quality or interest, unexceptional.” It is run of the mill. It is normal or the customary way of doing something. There are times for us when we like ordinary and times when we don’t. There are times in my life when I want ordinary. Ordinary can be comfortable. There are times when I just want comfort. Depending on your personality, you may like a certain level of stability and normalcy in your life. Having normal in our life can give us a sense of stability and peace. Part of us likes the ordinary. We like normal.

I like to keep my life pretty ordinary with the same routines. I like quiet ordinary nights in front of the television or in winter sitting in front of a fire. I have a routine throughout the week that I like to keep.

We all have routines that we are comfortable doing. And even if some of our ordinary and normal practices are not working for us, we can become attached to them.

On the other hand, the ordinary can become incredibly boring or monotonous. When our lives just go round and round like a big merry go round and everything is the same this year as it was last year that can become kind of monotonous. Ordinary day after ordinary day can become kind of boring. We feel like we are stuck in a rut and want to break out of it. There may be some things in your life that have become ordinary to you that you don't like.

Maybe you feel like you have an ordinary marriage or just an ordinary job and you are looking for something more exciting. Sometimes we develop habits that become ordinary that we don't like too much and wish to break. If ordinary isn't working for us, it can become oppressive.

Easter is about the celebration of something extraordinary to save us from the ordinary. When normal wasn't working for the world, when the world was caught up in the same old same old that led nowhere God decided to do something extraordinary that hadn't been done before. God saw that the ordinary practices of most people were leading them into dead ends and so he did the extraordinary.

He sent his Son into the world. Jesus lived on this earth for 33 years, spending most of that time living an ordinary life. Then he went public. He taught like no one ever taught. He lived like no one had ever lived and he loved like no one had ever loved. He had insights into life that people had never heard before. He told stories that forced people to challenge their assumptions about God and how life worked. He had an ability to attract crowds and crowds of people as all great leaders do. He had an ability attract people young and old. He could speak with the most educated of people in his

culture as well as the people who were on the margins of society – like the poor and the sick and people who were simply hated by the rest of the society. People who were nothing like Jesus liked him and wanted to be around him because there was something extraordinary about him.

Peter in the first reading says he went about doing good and healing people and acting with God's power. When people heard him speak and encountered Jesus they were amazed by him and impressed that he spoke with authority, he spoke with wisdom as if he knew how the world worked.

There is no record in the Gospels of people meeting Jesus and being bored by him or believing he was ordinary. Often in our popular culture Jesus is portrayed as this vanilla, milquetoast, wimpy, nice guy. Unfortunately, that image has been projected because many Christians have given a picture of Christianity of simply just becoming nice because Jesus was nice.

People didn't encounter Jesus and think he was nice or ordinary. They met him and they wondered at him or were amazed by him. Others walked away meeting Jesus healed of their diseases and healed in their hearts convinced that he was the Messiah, the Son of God. Many of the religious leaders of the day became incredibly angry with him when they met him. In fact, he was so extraordinary that they found him to be a threat to their power and so they collaborated to kill him but no one walked from Jesus thinking he was simply ordinary.

So God sent Jesus into the world, who lived an extraordinary life. Then Jesus did something even more

extraordinary. He did something that had never been done before and has not been done since.

To show he was who he said he was and to help us break out of the ordinary, he allowed himself to be beaten and whipped and then nailed to the cross. He allowed himself to be completely and utterly look foolish and to look like he had lost. Then, three days later he rose from the dead and conquered the grave.

Easter is about the celebration of the most extraordinary event in history – the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. If you boil down Christianity to its most basic level, you could say it is essentially three things. One, it is a belief that Jesus is the Son of God. Two, it is a belief in an event – Jesus rose from the dead. He conquered the grave. And third, and this is the most relevant thing for us. The third part of Christianity is that because Jesus rose from the dead because he conquered death, we can also conquer death in all its forms, we can conquer the ordinary trials and tribulations of life through his power.

The same power that rose Jesus from the dead is available to you and to me. Now here's the twist. Access to Jesus and his power doesn't come from anything extraordinary. Believing in Jesus and his resurrection doesn't often come from any extraordinary experiences but through ordinary circumstances and practices.

To help us understand that, we are going to look at the 20th chapter of John's Gospel. The Gospels are accounts about the life of Jesus. There are four accounts or four different people who wrote about the life of Jesus in the bible:

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We are going to look at John's Gospel

John writes, "Now on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb." Jesus died on a Friday. Saturday was a Sabbath which for the Jewish people meant they could not do any work from Friday at sundown until Sunday morning. Jesus died late in the afternoon on Friday so in order to bury him, two of his friends quickly wrapped him in some linen clothes and then placed him in the tomb. In the culture of that time, it was usual to anoint the body with perfumes but because the Sabbath was coming they did not have a chance to anoint Jesus' body properly.

Mary Magdalene, who was close to Jesus, was going to the tomb of Jesus not expecting a resurrection, not expecting anything extraordinary, but to simply anoint his body. She was doing something that would have been the ordinary custom of the day. But when she gets to the tomb, which was sort of like a little cave with a rock rolled across it, things are not as she would expect. The rock that covered the tomb had been rolled completely away. When she looked in the tomb, the body was gone, it was missing.

So Mary runs back to Peter and the apostle John and says, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Mary sees the tomb is empty, but she doesn't jump to the conclusion Jesus has been raised from the dead. She assumes that Jesus' body has been stolen. So Peter and John run to the tomb, they make a mad dash to the tomb to find out what had

happened, who stole the body. Like Mary, the apostles did not expect a resurrection of Jesus. They were essentially hiding, scared that now that their leader had been killed, they were next.

But when they came to the tomb they saw Jesus resurrected and Jesus in all his glory with great big flashes of lightening and thunder. And they believed that Jesus rose from the dead. Actually, that is not what happened.

Verse four says, “They both ran, but the other disciple (that’s John) outran Peter and reached the tomb first; and stooped to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.” So John runs and kind of glances in and sees that Jesus isn’t there, but there are some of the cloths Jesus body had been laid in.

The next verse says, “Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself.” So Peter goes a little deeper into the scene and observes it a little more carefully. It would be like you come home or go into your office and things are a little out of place or look different and you started to examine it a little bit more. So this is different. Robbers wouldn’t come into the tomb and take the body, leave the cloths and neatly put this napkin, which was a material that neatly covered the head back in its place. Robbers would steal cloths and leave bodies.

The next verse says, “Then the other disciples (This is John) who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed.” The idea that John is communicating here is this

deepening insight into what they are looking at. First the disciples glanced at the seen. Then Peter takes a closer look and begins to think about what is seen here. Then John takes in the whole seen and he perceives, he understands that the only explanation can be that Jesus has rose from the dead. The only people that would have had a motivation to move Jesus were robbers and what he saw made it clear that it wasn't robbers. The only possible reason the tomb was empty was because Jesus rose from the dead.

John believed the tomb was empty because Jesus had risen from the dead. He had conquered the grave. John looked at some ordinary things and realized something extraordinary had happened. As you read through the Gospels, you find that although Jesus does appear to the apostles and they become witnesses to the resurrection, he does so in very ordinary ways. He shows them the nail marks in his hands. He eats with them. He takes a walk with them and talks with them. Jesus rose from the dead and conquered the grave, but he didn't do magic tricks to prove he was risen, he showed them in very ordinary ways that something extraordinary had happened.

This is what Easter is about. Easter is about the celebration of the most extraordinary event in history that has the power to change our ordinary lives through seemingly ordinary methods. We see this is what happens to the apostles who followed Jesus. When Jesus was crucified his closest followers ran away from him. Peter denied even knowing Jesus right before his crucifixion. They were hiding in their rooms scared to death that they were next. Then these ordinary guys who were mostly fishermen, went onto do extraordinary things. They encountered the risen Christ and

came to believe in him and their lives were changed and transformed. Suddenly they began boldly preaching about Jesus and his resurrection. God started using them to heal people. Eventually this group of people turned the world upside down. So that two thousand years later, we are here celebrating the event of the resurrection.

Easter is about the most extraordinary event in history that has the power to change ordinary lives.

Easter is about the most extraordinary event in history that has the power to change your life. The power of Easter can change the ordinary things about your life that you don't want to be ordinary.

If it has become ordinary in your marriage that you don't talk to one another and don't communicate with one another and are at a dead end, Jesus' resurrection has the power to bring your marriage from death to life. Maybe it has become ordinary for you not to talk to your kids or carry on a real conversation with them. Maybe it has become ordinary to drink more than you want to drink. It may be ordinary for you to run around incredibly busy all the time and you want to stop that habit of constantly running around but you can't seem to get off the treadmill. Ordinary may not be working for you, but you aren't sure how to get out of your ordinary routine.

What has become ordinary for your life, that you wish wasn't ordinary, that you wish wasn't normal? If ordinary isn't working for you anymore, the same extraordinary power that brought Jesus to life is available to you. And

here's the thing, that power is available to you through some very ordinary practices.

When you look at successful athletes, they often have very ordinary schedules. They practice over and over again routines that lead to extraordinary results. My favorite example is Michael Phelps who talks about laps in the pool and that is what he does day in and day out. However, his ordinary practice leads to extraordinary results.

We access the extraordinary power of Jesus through some very ordinary practices.

Easter is about the celebration of the most extraordinary event in history that has the power to change our ordinary lives. Over the next few weeks, we invite you to join us as we talk about how some ordinary practices in our lives can bring an extraordinary transformation and change in our lives.

If your ordinary isn't working, if you want to see some extraordinary results, join us next week online or at our campus on Ridgely Road.