

Let me ask you a question: the last time you had guests over, you offered them some water. How did you serve it? Was it from a bottle, or was it specially filtered? Did it have ice? Perhaps you served it with a wedge of lemon, or if you're one of those really fancy kinds of people, you added a twist of lime. I went to a brunch not too long ago and was served filtered water from a carafe containing a colorful assortment of floating berries. In Germany, a neighbor always poured drinking water from a large, glass pitcher half-filled with special pink and white purifying crystals. At our house, I think we last offered carbonated water in an etched glass tumbler ... or maybe it was a Mickey Mouse cup, I don't quite remember who was serving it. Why, I wonder, do we go to such effort? It's just a cup of water.

This passage from Mark's Gospel is one that I've read and studied many times. But until this past week, I never took the time to really look at the Greek version of the text. The word translated as *defiled* is from the Greek word *koinos*¹. It means *common* or *ordinary*.² But like our English word *ordinary*, it has a clear negative connotation. Depending on which version of the Bible you read, it is translated as *defiled*, *unclean*, *profane*, or *impure*.

We know that that *ordinary* simply means having no special quality or interest. One of many, not unique. But why is that a bad thing? What is it about ordinariness that makes us deem a thing unworthy? Is it because there's just so much of it that we deem it to have little inherent value ... and therefore consider it boring?

¹ <https://biblehub.com/greek/2839.htm>

² Yes, it is the same root of the Greek word for *community*.

From a faith perspective, shouldn't we feel a sense of solidarity and unity sharing in that which is common or ordinary? After all, our current liturgical season of Pentecost is called *Ordinary Time*; we gather and join in prayers from an *ordinal*. As a people of faith, shouldn't we see ordinary things as beautiful as we all get to share and enjoy and be blessed by them? Rather we assign it a negative connotation and consider ordinariness to be mediocre ...we place it in contrast to that which is categorized as special or good.

So the disciples had not gone through the traditional ritual of washing and preparing to eat. Their hands were "ordinary," not ritually distinct from the hands of those who did not know God. Remember, this tradition of washing hands before eating wasn't born out of a desire to be sanitary. Back then, hygiene wasn't a thing. Sometime way long before, someone probably noticed that people who washed their hands were generally a lot healthier than people who didn't, and so hand-washing became a normal practice among that group of people. Traditions, rituals, and beliefs about hand-washing inevitably developed: when you should do it, how often you should do it, how you should do it. As time went on, there was a clear religious expectation that the faithful of God would go to great effort to be as clean as possible ... as pure as possible ... again, not because cleanliness itself was valued (they had no scientific awareness of viruses or bacteria), but because it was deemed to be an important way of honoring God.

Therefore, the scribes and Pharisees are baffled: how can one claim to be a devout child of God if a person's identity isn't defined by the notion that cleanliness is next to Godliness?

Jesus confronts this superstitious theology by clarifying that it's better to have unclean hands than an unclean heart. He argues that his friends might be unwashed, but that makes them no less holy. Social standards, Jesus teaches us, are not the same as God's standards.

Jesus further points out that there is nothing outside a person that by going in can make a person unholy, but the things that come out are what make a person unholy.

I heard a motivational speaker years ago talk about interior transformation. She said something along the lines that what happens to you in life is – on a cosmic scale - irrelevant. Despite your best efforts, circumstances beyond your control cause you extreme hardship or you experience some sort of trauma. Or perhaps you win the lottery or in some way you experience unbelievably good fortune. Or maybe nothing has happened – your life is common, boring, ordinary. Whatever your situation, the event that happened (or didn't happen) is ultimately of no importance. What is important, she said, is how you choose to go forward – what you choose to do about whatever situation you find yourself in. Her point was not unlike Jesus': it's not what goes in that counts, it's what comes out.

This morning, I am struck by what God must see in this ordinary Sunday morning moment: ordinary younger people with ordinary older people, ordinary Republicans with ordinary Democrats, ordinary binary individuals with ordinary non-binary individuals, celebrating the same ordinary liturgy, kneeling side by side to pray ordinary prayers and break ordinary bread together just as Jesus taught us. A whole lotta ordinary put together ... I'd call that pretty extraordinary.

I'm tempted to say that the hard part is just showing up. Because at 5:30 when my alarm goes off so that I can get showered and my hair can be dry by the time the first service starts ... yeah, that's hard. But the real trick is doing **this** [joining together in community] **here** [in our hearts] and **there** [in the world]. The trick is internalizing what goes on here – offering my ordinariness and your ordinariness to God so together we become something more ... something special that unites with God's extraordinariness - and living it beyond this campus.

Showing up is important, but our faith calls us to more than just going about the ritual of Sunday mornings. Our faith calls us to be mindful of what comes out of us – we are to resist things like fornication, theft, murder, and so on. We’re to be mindful how we respond when we hear that juicy bit of gossip, what emotional responses we cultivate toward our friends when scrolling through social media, what websites we visit when our spouse isn’t looking, how we spend our money, how we speak to one another when we’re upset, how we choose to nourish or deprive our bodies. Because **this** [church] means very little if we’re not living it in **here** [in our hearts], or **out there** [in the world].

Joining (or rejecting) the extraordinary work of being the body of Christ in the world doesn’t have come through grand gestures. Offering a guest a glass of water – regardless of how it is served - is one small, ordinary example of offering hospitality.

I’ll end with a sweet story about true love often being characterized by the mundane and ordinary. It’s about a wife’s love for her husband, but it could easily be a story about God’s love for us. It goes like this: On his 50th wedding anniversary, a man was asked to reflect on his understanding of love. The gentleman sat quietly for a moment, then said, “You know what love is? My wife has been cooking me dinner nearly every night for 50 years. My wife isn’t the world’s best chef, and I don’t necessarily like everything she cooks up. I couldn’t tell you what food I was served more than a night or two ago, but do I know that I have been well fed for a long while. Thanks to her, I am strong and mostly healthy. So much so that I have the energy to get up and get to work each morning and go about the business of living.” He patted his belly and said, “50 years is a long time. The menu from one day to the next may not stick in my mind, but that food sticks to my bones and it shapes the man I am today. That’s what love is.”