

Finding God in ‘Ordinary Time’

Despite my growing up in a ‘low church’ tradition and never having heard of the lectionary before joining the URC, the Church year makes sense to me. Beginning with expectant anticipation at Advent, passing through the joy of Christmas and Epiphany, a brief hiatus and then the moderation and reflectiveness of Lent and Passiontide, right the way through to the jubilation of Easter, the celebration of Pentecost and then... ‘Ordinary Time’.

Of course, we get a taste of ‘Ordinary Time’ in that brief hiatus between Epiphany and Lent, but after Pentecost - stretching out for months and months over summer and autumn until we start again at Advent – Ordinary Time.

When I think of ordinariness, a range of different words and phrases come to mind:– run of the mill, normal, routine, uninteresting, humdrum, mundane, everyday. At face value, the word ‘ordinary’ doesn’t seem to communicate much of a positive image about whole swathes of the Church year (33 weeks in total). If we were trying to sell Christianity, no advertising executive would come up with the phrase ‘Ordinary Time’.

But, rather than advocate for a wholesale revision of the Christian year, I’ve been wondering if it’s ‘ordinariness’ itself that’s got an undeserved bad rap. There seems to be an ever-insatiable appetite in our culture to rid our lives of the ordinary and to live continuously at the pinnacle of happiness and fulfilment. And who doesn’t want to be happy? I certainly do.

It’s hard not to be affected by our flashy world, where everything that is novel or new is valued over and above all that is old or ordinary. I wonder who hasn’t at some time or other been excited about the latest smartphone or car or book or TV show (or or whatever) which advertisers promise will make us happy and change our lives?

I think that the challenge we face is when we cease being able not just to tolerate the ordinary but also to find joy there. Because, quite simply, a whole lot of life happens in Ordinary Time; the school run, work, homework, chores, church every Sunday, dare I say it?

The origin of the term ‘Ordinary Time’ has nothing to do with ordinariness. In fact, it is rooted in the Latin *ordinalis* referring to numbers in a series. Traditionally, the weeks of Ordinary Time were numbered. But regardless of origins, all this ordinariness got me thinking, “How do we live our Christian lives in the times and seasons when there is no feast or occasion to celebrate? Where do we find God if not on metaphorical mountain tops or through peak experiences?” Yes, God has revealed Himself in big, obvious ways – to Moses in the burning bush, to Samuel who heard God’s voice at night, to Mary through the Angel Gabriel. But God is also the God of the everyday Who journeyed in the wilderness day in, day out for 40 years with the Children of Israel. God is the God Who bore with His servant David over years and years as David tried (and often failed) to do right. God is the God who Walked this earth for 33 years – yes, doing amazing things, but also living life in Ordinary Time.

As things quieten down for the summer and our minds are set on holidays and rest, and then in September back to the usual routine (and kids - close your ears - school), I wonder how we might seek God in Ordinary Time. Pastor and author Greg Boyd says in his book, *Present Perfect: Finding God in the Now*, that it’s simply a matter of paying attention to the presence of God all around us. I like what Greg Boyd has to say but, in all honesty, more often than not, I’m too caught up by the distractions of ordinary life to pay proper attention.

However, opportunities to experience God truly are all around, whether that be in the garden on a sunny day, in the face of a friend or stranger, through a job well done, in prayer or devotions, in the fun of a game with friends, and even in rest, because yes, remember, God is a God Who rests!

I'm so glad and excited to be journeying with you as a student minister for 6 weeks this summer. I'll be joining in various different church activities and leading some worship services. It may well be Ordinary Time, but God is present among us now as ever and an experience of God's love is assured, if we can but attune our attention. Summer sunshine, on the other hand, is much less guaranteed!

God bless,

Jonnie Hill