

## **2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1**

4:13 But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture--"I believed, and so I spoke" --we also believe, and so we speak,

4:14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence.

4:15 Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

4:16 So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

4:17 For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure,

4:18 because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

5:1 For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

## **Mark 3:20-35**

3:20 and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat.

3:21 When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind."

3:22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons."

3:23 And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan?"

3:24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.

3:25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.

3:26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come.

3:27 But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

3:28 "Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter;

3:29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"--

3:30 for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

3:31 Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him.

3:32 A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you."

3:33 And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?"

3:34 And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!

3:35 Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

“Stuck in the Middle”  
The Rev. Lisa J. Durkee  
June 6, 2021

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

In creating the simple, two-column table for our kids this morning, arranging choices into simple yeses and nos, I found myself remembering the way that my younger daughter, Emma, loved organizing things when she was little. She especially loved sorting games when they were introduced in pre-school. Maybe some of you also find that you love organization: certain places for certain things on your desk—paper clips in one container, post-it-notes in another—you know what I mean. Some of us are most comfortable, too, when our days are arranged similarly, crossing off tasks when they are completed on our lists. Our lives and the lives of our ancient forebears are similarly arranged in recognizable units that we can look *past or beyond*, if not actually cross off. Pagan holidays centered on the visible and palpable changes evident in nature and our own modern calendars follow a similar structure. We also focus on birthdays as markers, or on academic or fiscal years. We in Maine recognize the two seasons of July and winter. Today is June 6<sup>th</sup>, and the first Sunday in what we call Ordinary Time in the liturgical calendar, which is a way of looking at our lives as reflective of God’s movement in them.

Last week, as we gathered together for the first time in so very long, we celebrated Trinity Sunday. In fact, given that we had a technology glitch, we are hearing today two of the hymns that celebrate the trinity, while our new hymn for today also helps us celebrate our unity in family. Ordinary time is the longest period in the church year—a long stretch between Pentecost, when we celebrate the gift of

the Holy Spirit in its descent on the disciples fifty days after Easter, and Christ the King Sunday, which is the last Sunday in the liturgical year. Following that, we have the first Sunday of Advent, when we began to make ourselves ready for Jesus' birth. I'm sure you are all in some way familiar with the various significant days in the Church that happen earlier in the liturgical year—we have Christmas, and then Epiphany; Ash Wednesday and Lent, leading up to Easter.

For many of us, these special days in the year in some way define our faith. For many Christians, their church attendance is limited to the days whose names they know well—Christmas and Easter, particularly. For others, they might go to church more frequently during Advent and Lent, because there are so many reminders in the secular world that these are significant times. Our shopping calendars often correspond pretty closely to the liturgical calendar in this way. We spend more time in department stores during the high holy seasons somehow. But what about Ordinary Time? What are we to make of our church lives in the many weeks between high holy days?

We might begin by asking about other middles. I hope you'll smile with me to consider a silly one first, as I remembered singing as a kid and recalled after a conversation with Ann just this week: "A kid'll eat the middle of an Oreo first, and save the chocolate cookie outside for last." Yes, I do know the rest of the song, but I'll spare us for now. Let's just leave it to say that this is one middle we all sometimes yearn for. Other middles are difficult. In her book, *Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis*, a woman with whom I studied in a writing program some years ago, Lauren Winner, writes about what she calls the beginning of the middle of her spiritual life, noting that it is a time filled with tension. For her, as she struggles through the end of a marriage, before some of the new beginnings from which she

determines her joy, she remembers some middles with some negativity. She writes, “I begin to notice that *middle* rarely denotes something good. Middle school—when girls turn mean, and all kids turn miserable—is that “wasteland of our primary and secondary landscape,” the “crack” between grammar school and high school.” Not everyone has that experience, though, and I still remember learning with surprise that my daughter Keira loved Middle School, and that it was primarily a great time.

In any case, later in this same chapter, Winner begins to recognize that some middles have this potential for greatness. In what I learned is her typical metaphorical way, she likens the possibilities for her life to what happens in what is called “the middle game” in chess. Where there is a standard repertoire of openings for a chess game, it is in the middle game where one’s creativity and subtlety take over, where as she puts it, the tactical daring takes place. Much later in the book, as she grows increasingly aware of and comfortable with what it means to be resting in the middle of her life, Winner finds a new metaphor that may help us to understand the extraordinary nature of our Ordinary Time. Nineteenth century art critics speak of the importance of the “middle tints” when laying color on a canvas. While the eye quickly moves to the bright colors in a painting, and also quickly recognize the most basic colors as necessary bases, it is the colors in the middle of the spectrum that are laid down before the dark colors and before the lights. As one critic wrote at the time, “nature’s landscapes are mostly all ‘middle tint,’ in which she will have as many gradations as you please.” Isn’t that true of our lives, as well?

We have our extreme highs and extreme lows, to be sure. We celebrate the births of children, and we mark the end of life with mourning. But these are the

occasional markers of lives forged in the middle, day after ordinary day. To call something regular or ordinary does not mean it is not important, though. The significance of our lives isn't created from our birth and our death, but by what we do with the middle. The same might be said of Jesus, though our liturgical year is formed around the bright color of the events surrounding his birth and his death. Rather, what we take into our own lives from that of Jesus is what was so extraordinary about his daily life, recognizing that our own lives are changed when we accept the possibility of normal greatness.

Between his death and his birth, Jesus taught us what God desires for this world. Jesus showed us the reign of God and all its glory. We heard about it in the scripture lessons this morning. **Jesus healed; Jesus taught; Jesus forgave.** We can do likewise, beginning with the extraordinary gesture of forgiveness. We also can look with hope at every event, at every morning, knowing that there is the possibility of changed lives, as we remember the lives that Jesus changed with his acceptance of every person, regardless of their background. That offers us hope for this world. We can accept every person, regardless of their background, knowing that God is about the business of recreating lives.

We also can look at some of the occasional bright colors in our regular lives and recognize God's presence in them. What can make our liturgical Ordinary Time appear to be *biding time* has more to do with us and our vision than with God's ever active presence. I would like to close this morning with a quotation that arrived recently in my daily online meditation. Frederick Buechner writes: "A wedding. A handshake. A kiss. A coronation. A parade. A dance. A meal. A graduation. A ritual is the performance of an intuition, the rehearsal of a dream, the playing of a game. A sacrament is the breaking through of the sacred into the

profane; a ritual is the ceremonial acting out of the profane in order to show forth its sacredness. A sacrament is God offering divine holiness to men and women; a ritual is men and women raising up the holiness of their humanity to God.”

Between high holy days in the Christian year; between Jesus’ birth and death; between our own births and deaths are sacrament after sacrament; is God’s divine holiness, present in every moment when we can open our hearts to see it. We pray this morning for our Communion to be what we say in the United Church of Christ is an “outward sign of an inward Grace.” May it be so for us, and may grow in this Spirit of God’s renewing love.