

SERMON FOR AUGUST 6, 2017  
TEXT: GENESIS 2:7  
THEME: THE ORDINARY LIFE

<sup>7</sup> then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

In the name of Jesus:

The earth weighs roughly  $5.972 \times 10^{24}$  kilograms. But less than 30 grams of the entire weight of the earth is an element known as astatine. It is the rarest of elements on the periodic table. It has never been seen directly, because gathering enough of it together would cause it to self vaporize from its own radioactive heat. As soon as the protons of the element come together---poof, it is gone.

If God were to use physical material to deliver salvation, He would certainly use something spectacular, wouldn't He? Eternal life would come through rare elements. Forgiveness of sins would be delivered by means of a multi million-dollar medication. Salvation would come through the powder of ground up unicorn horns. Right?

Wrong! God uses ordinary material to perform the most extraordinary works. God works through stuff, ordinary stuff. He takes ordinary stuff and combines it with the power of His Word, and does the extraordinary. No ground up unicorn horns. No special ointment developed in a laboratory. No rare elements. God delivers salvation through ordinary means; Lutherans call this the Means of grace. Salvation comes to us through Word and Sacrament.

When God began the human race, He didn't start in a lab. He took dirt. Plain, ordinary dirt. God scooped up that dirt, molded it, and made it into a lump of clay. And

then God breathed into that lump of clay the breath of Life. And man became a living being.

That is how God works; It is how God always works. He takes that which is ordinary and does something extraordinary. To save the world from the Flood, God told Noah to build a big boat called an Ark. When Abraham was about to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, God gave to Abraham a goat caught in a thicket to provide a sacrifice pleasing to God. When the Israelites were in captivity, God sent an ordinary man who stuttered, Moses, along with his brother Aaron, to go to Pharaoh to tell him: "Let My people go." When Goliath raged and mocked the army of Israel, God sent a small boy, David, a shepherd, to slay the giant. God uses the ordinary to do the extraordinary. He always has. He always will.

God saved the world by sending His Son Jesus into the world. God sent Jesus to be born of a woman, a virgin named Mary. Jesus embraced the ordinary throughout His life. He got a job as a carpenter. At His Baptism, Jesus instructed John to baptize Him. John recoiled, saying that he, John, should be the one to be baptized by Jesus. But Jesus was baptized with simple water, in order to fulfill all righteousness. And after His Baptism, the heavens opened, The Father spoke, the Spirit came down upon Jesus' shoulder appearing as a dove, and the ordinary became extraordinary.

Once there was a man born blind. Did this man born blind sin, or was it something his parents did? Jesus answered by saying that this man was born blind so that others would see the power of God. So how did Jesus heal the blind man? Hocus-pocus? Did he pull a rabbit out of a hat? No, instead Jesus took the ordinary and did the

extraordinary. “<sup>6</sup> Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud <sup>7</sup> and said to him, “Go, and wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

Jesus did this stuff all of the time, taking that which was ordinary, everyday stuff, and He did something extraordinary with it! Ordinary fishermen caught an extraordinary amount of fish at the word of Jesus. Thousand were fed when took a few loaves of bread and several fish, spoke a blessing, and then handed out the food. So much food was leftover that the disciples had to collect the leftovers in baskets.

And on the night of His betrayal, Jesus blessed His disciples. How? As they were eating Jesus took bread and broke it, saying: “Take and eat this is my body.” And then with the cup of wine Jesus said: “Take and drink, this is my blood, given and shed for your forgiveness.” Plain ordinary wheat and plain crushed grapes, used by Jesus to give His followers extraordinary blessings.

God always takes the ordinary and does something extraordinary. To save sinners, God sent His Son, who in humility gave Himself up to a death on the cross. Oh, if Jesus wanted to, He could have done something extraordinary. He could have called down legions of angels to do battle with Satan and the underworld. But instead, Jesus allowed Himself to have nails driven into His hands and feet, to be crucified by sinners, for by this means of an ordinary cross God would save sinners from sin, Satan, and death, for cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree.

And then, Jesus body was placed in an unmarked grave, a newly cut tomb. Not a Cathedral, not a mausoleum, but in tomb made of ordinary rock. And it was there that God did something extraordinary!

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup> And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. <sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup> And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come; see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.

That is how God works. It is his MO, His mode or method of operation. From the creation of the human race where he took dirt and made man a living being, to the salvation of sinners in the person and work of His Son, Jesus, God takes the ordinary and does the extraordinary. Is it really that hard to understand?

It is for everyday people. Human sinfulness resists this simple truth. Sinful hearts always want the glitz and the glamour. Sinners want to be saved in a blaze of glory. But that is not how it works. That is not how God works. God saves the world by sending His Son Jesus to die on a cross and then raises Jesus to life again. And God delivers the goods of salvation through what we as Lutherans call the Means of Grace, God’s Word and Sacraments.

Back at the time of the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church at that time believed that God worked forgiveness and salvation through that which was extravagant and expensive, glitzy and glamorous. Churches collected expensive and extraordinary relics, and told the worshipper that God worked through magic and money. It was believed that the bread of the Sacrament held magical powers, in that if you were to eat of the bread used in the Sacrament of Communion, your sick children and animals would be healed of what ailed them. Some believed that drinking communion wine helped heal one of internal bleeding and epilepsy. Forgiveness wasn't free, you had to buy it in what was called an indulgence. Pay for an indulgence and you get a slip of paper stating your sins are forgiven for a certain period of time.

Luther found no comfort in any of this. Rather, Luther searched the Bible and discovered that God worked extraordinary blessings in the lives of His people through ordinary means. Luther reordered the Sacraments, and reduced the number of Sacraments from seven to three: Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Absolution. Luther used the clear teaching of the Bible to show how important Baptism was and in the life of the believer, for Jesus said: "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." In Baptism God uses ordinary water connected and combined with the Word of God to deliver forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, and to give eternal salvation to all who believe in Jesus. Baptism is an ongoing Sacrament, living daily water in your life. You have a new identity in Baptism, an identity that surpasses any sexual, social or cultural identity. In Baptism you have been marked with the sign of the cross and now are God's child. This is why Luther encouraged the practice of making the sign of the

cross daily to remind you how God used ordinary water to give you extraordinary gifts in your Baptism.

God gives to you an extraordinary Gift in the Lord's Supper. Through ordinary bread and wine Jesus gives His true body and blood for your forgiveness. Remember what Luther wrote in the Small Catechism concerning the Lord's Supper: "It is the true body and blood of Christ, under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and drink." In this Supper God delivers the goods of forgiveness, faith, eternal life, and salvation. Listen to Jesus when He says that this is given for you, faith receives what Jesus gives!

And just as God spoke creation into existence, so He speaks forgiveness to you. The grace of God and forgiveness of your sins comes to you through the spoken Word. In Absolution, the public or private speaking of God's forgiveness: "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," God speaks clear and confident forgiveness. When your pastor says your sins are forgiven, they are forgiven, just as if Jesus Himself had spoken these words.

No one wants to be ordinary. We all want to be extraordinary. Modern society today is attracted to show biz. But God's work is a mystery. He has given to you His Word and Sacraments. He binds Himself to them so that when you receive these Gifts of God, God works extraordinary things in your life. So remember your Baptism. Live out your identity in Christ. Commune with God each Sunday at the Lord's Table. Hear God speak to you His Word of forgiveness in Christ. Let God shape your life through these

ordinary means of His Word, Baptism, and Holy Communion. For God works extraordinary blessings through ordinary means.

Amen