

1st Pres San Bernardino

“Offended by the Ordinary”

2Kings 5:1-14

2/15/09

baptism of Addison Rose Keiper

Rev. Dr. Sandra R. Tice

She simply refused. She would not, and God help you if you tried to make her. Jan was a character- a tiny, cranky, opinionated older woman who *did not like* lots of things that the church did. One of them was the congregational baptismal promise. She simply refused to say ‘We do’. I asked her why one day, foolish young pastor that I was, and she launched into a furious lecture about how incredibly OLD she was (she *was* old) and that she would not even BE HERE while this child was growing up, and she thought the idea that SHE, who did not even KNOW this child personally, should make some sort of PROMISE was RIDICULOUS.

I’ll give her this much: These are astonishing, promises we make: To live our lives with a love for God that is contagious.

But I will say to you what I said to her:

Sure these are breathtaking promises, But ultimately, **like most breathtaking promises, they boil down to small, faithful actions.**

Daily prayer and watching for God’s presence. Showing up for adult Ed. Or to teach church school or bring food or welcome folks at the door. Small, faithful tasks like pouring coffee or lifting your voice in song.

These are ways that God comes to us, and uses us for good, day by day.

This is how we shape a life: our own, or a child’s- with things like Hospitality, Spiritual depth, Integrity.

Because these lofty things we long for so deeply are built brick by brick and step by step, with small, ordinary actions.

Naaman does not get this.

Naaman shows up in his limo with his entourage.

He wants a lightning bolt, an epiphany, (and also a royal welcome.)

He gets instructions that are, well, frankly boring.

He is asked to do something Ordinary, and he is Offended.

What does it mean to be a member of this community?

On one hand, committing our lives to the Way of Christ is the most important decision we ever make,

On the other, becoming part of a faith community like this one for a season in our lives may be simply one of many faithful steps to which God calls us.

In the new member classes for the last year or so, we have summarized our expectations this way: **Worship +2+pledge.**

We hope every active member is regularly opening their heart to God and the rest of us in worship, and involved in at least 2 other things: one that feeds their spirit, and one that allows them to be of service. And we hope every one of us has a stake in this ministry by pledging. Worship+2+ pledge. It's easy to remember- But it sounds like what Elisha asks Naaman to do. **Ordinary.**

Here's a little secret: Presbyterians believe that there is a boring way to get whole. Oh, there are times when we experience healing and transformation in ways that are dramatic, and life-changing, There are mountaintop experiences and epiphanies- and we rejoice in them. But they are not our goal- we do not seek after more & more dramatic, emotional experiences of God.

We have ordered our common life together believing that repetitive dunking in a modest river is every bit as likely to bear fruit in our lives as going over Niagara Falls in a barrel or running whitewater rapids on a raft.

In fact, **we believe that the healing presence of God most often comes to us in daily faithfulness- in ordinary ways.**

The things we long for most deeply are built step by step and brick by brick.

it is daily faithfulness that God asks of us.

But sometimes, like Naaman, we find the falls and the rapids more appealing.

A friend of mine **ran summer camps for decades**, giving generations of Presbyterian college students a chance to practice ministry and live in Christian community.

She once observed that she would have no trouble finding a member of staff who would "lay down their life for their friends". What she was looking for was one who would pick up their socks for them.

Like Naaman, we're excited to do something Big, Dramatic, Shocking, Sacrificial.

Were less inclined to do the small, humble, ordinary tasks out of which Hospitality, Spiritual depth, Love, and Integrity are built.

It is this kind of daily faithfulness to ordinary things that produces a hero like pilot Sully Sullenberger.

And it is our obsession with the glamorous & dramatic that produces a 'hero' like A-Rod.

Our Culture has Naaman's disease- and we have it big time. Not leprosy, but being Offended by the Ordinary.

We are obsessed with The New and The Next.

We are seduced by the dramatic, the desperate, the death-defying.

And sometimes that makes it hard to choose the ordinary, daily actions where God is waiting for us, longing to bless and heal us.

People who are consumed by addiction, in desperate need of having their lives saved may show up to a 12-step group. And what they hear there, essentially, is

One Day At A Time...Easy Does It...keep coming back, it works.

And sometimes, they are Offended:

"Did you HEAR me? Do you understand that I am being eaten alive by this monster of a disease? I need a miracle here!"

Like Naaman said, "I thought that for ME, he would come out.... And call on God.. and do a miracle."

The truth is that breathtaking commitments like Parenting are often about changing diapers, driving to and fro, saying no, washing dishes, showing up. And Marriage: taking turns, communicating clearly, saying you are sorry. Or college: showing up for class, doing the homework, turning in the paper. And so it is with baptismal promises.

And here is the grace: **there is healing, and love and deep satisfaction in these tasks. God is waiting for us there, if we are paying attention**

- Dick Cooper was in his nineties when I was a new parent, and spoke to me with tears in his eyes about what it was like to be greeted by the toothless smile of a wet and wakeful baby in the middle of the night when he went to change a diaper. I knew that child was twice my age when I heard the story, but the blessing in that unglamorous task was alive for my friend still.
- Once my friend Rex and I found a card in a pew after leading worship, on which a visitor had written a note, saying that we could never know what it meant to them on that lonely morning in a difficult season to have someone grasp their hand and look in their eyes and

offer them the peace they so desperately needed- the peace of Christ.
I've never looked at that part of worship the same way since.

This is what Naaman discovered, and what we have come to know:
God's breathtaking promise is Healing and Wholeness.
But the New and the Next are not where that Presence dwells.
The Holy One is present in the Ordinary.
And any river will do: **any** ordinary task, undertaken with a prayer of
"where are you in this?" Will be a place where God will meet us.

So let us, today, not be offended by the ordinary. Let us make and keep the
promise that Jan could.
Let us say, when we are asked on Addie's behalf, "We do!"
Amen.