

The New Ordinary

John 21:1-14
May 4, 2025

First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson

Ellen Zvorsky of Pottsville, PA, discovered an image of Jesus Christ in the lint trap of a sewing machine. It seems the machine has a built-in vacuum that sucks lint off the sewing surface as garments are being stitched. It was in the vacuum tube that she found the postage-stamp sized image of Jesus formed in the layers of lint.

She removed the image of Jesus and kept it wrapped in white gauze, telling only a few people about it. "I thought people would think I'm a nut," she said.

Looking back, Zvorsky says, "It's like an omen, I guess. I just can't imagine why something like this would happen to me. And it's just lint, it's fuzz. I don't understand it, but it's got to mean something."¹

This "Jesus sighting" was reported by a religious satire magazine, which speculated that perhaps what it means is that God has resorted to working "low-budget miracles.

Low-budget or not, for Ellen Zvorsky Jesus showed up that day in the lint trap of her sowing machine. Which begs the question, where does Jesus show up for you and me?

Is it only during the most intense moments of life – the highest highs and the lowest lows? Or does Jesus, does God, does the Holy Spirit show up for us also in the ordinary moments of life.

In our New Testament lesson, the disciples are going about their ordinary lives when the Risen Lord shows up for a third time since his death and resurrection. In telling us about it, John says, quote, "... He showed himself in this way," and then John tells us the "Jesus sighting" story we just heard read.

What does John mean when he says Jesus showed himself in "this way," as opposed to the other way we heard about last week, when Jesus showed the disciples his hands and side that were pierced by the nails and spear?

Well, the wounds on his hands and side are the marks of his death, his sacrificial death undergone for us and for our salvation. That's the first way Jesus showed himself to his disciples, pointing to the gift of salvation, for us and for all the world.

¹ The Door, September/October 1997.

If the first sighting points to salvation, what does this sighting point to? Well, let's take a look. John tells us that Simon Peter was with the other apostles when he turned to them and said, "I am going fishing," and they say to him. "We will go with you."

Peter and his brother Andrew and James and his brother John were all fishermen back when Jesus called them to be his apostles. So here they're just doing what they normally do, going about their non-apostle business.

Perhaps they were bored when they decided to spend some time doing this very ordinary and routine activity, fishing. Perhaps they were anxious and little afraid about the times they were living in, with no Jesus to lead them in their discipleship ministry activities. Perhaps they were just plain hungry or broke, and needed to catch some fish to eat and to sell.

No matter why they decide to go fishing, it certainly isn't because they see it as part of their calling as disciples of Jesus. And yet, this is when Jesus draw near to them once again as the Risen Lord.

We so often think that the Lord is nearest to us during church – here in worship, over there in the Parlour, out there in the community when we're doing churchy things. But maybe, just maybe Jesus is also with us during ordinary times – when we're at home with our family, out with our friends, in the community running errands.

Of course, we believe and know that Jesus is out there and everywhere, at all times. But how often and how fully do we experience the Lord in those ordinary moments of life?

If the answer is not often and not very fully, then we're missing out, aren't we? We're missing out on some quality "Jesus time," some amazing God-moments, all because we're not looking for Jesus in our ordinary moments, while doing our mundane chores and errands, slogging through yet another boring stretch of time.

After the disciples had slogged through a particularly unexciting night of fishing – with nothing to show for it – John tells us that Jesus stood on the beach but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. They weren't looking for him to show up at such an uneventful moment.

But show up he does, saying "Children, you have no fish, have you?"

"No," we don't, they say. And Jesus says to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." And of course they do; they catch more fish than they could have hoped for all night long.

Here we see that Jesus is always there for us, to point out the amazing abundance all around us, even and especially in the midst of our fear of scarcity. And all we have to do –

to tap into these miracle-moments during our hours of drudgery – all we have to do is look and listen for Jesus pointing us in the right direction, turning our attention to the God-moment at hand.

Of course, that only works if we're not busy filling our ears and our eyes with all the noise and commotion of the world. No, we have to filter out the voices that say, "There's nothing going on here, nothing special happening, so let's fill these moments by killing a little time."

Don't kill time; use it. Use those ordinary moments to look and listen for the Lord, for where God is doing amazing things right before your eyes.

Look and listen no matter how long that might take, and no matter how boring it might feel, and how unproductive it might seem – because God is in every moment. We just have to look for him, and learn to appreciate the sacred God-moments that come even and especially at the most ordinary times, during our most ordinary activities.

After Peter and the other apostles cast their net to the right side of the boat, as Jesus told them, they haul in 153 fish, to be exact – that's just one of many ordinary details in this story that John chooses to write down as something special.

After pointing his disciples to this amazing catch, this amazing-yet-ordinary moment in the lives of these amazing-yet-ordinary fishermen-turned-apostles, Jesus does something even more amazing.

Jesus invites them to breakfast, which, as we heard during the Children's Message, is in many ways an ordinary thing to do. "Come and have breakfast," he says. What is more ordinary than that? We eat breakfast each day, right? And yet, Jesus takes the ordinary and makes it sacred, for those who bother to look for it, to listen for it, in the ordinary activities of life.

Here, Jesus is just an ordinary guy – none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" says John, because they knew it was the Lord. They knew it was Jesus being just an ordinary guy on the beach that day.

An ordinary guy who came to them "and took bread and gave it to them and did the same with the fish." An ordinary moment made sacred by Jesus coming to them – coming to us – as an ordinary guy cooking ordinary food on an ordinary day, turned sacred, as they sat on that beach and communed with the Risen Lord.

As Jesus says in another ordinary story called the Parable of the Good Samaritan, "Go and do likewise;" go and encounter the Lord, encounter your neighbor, encounter the world as if you were encountering the sacred, for in Christ, in every moment of your life, you are. Every moment is sacred, for those who at all times and in every place take a moment to look and listen for the Lord. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Great Fisher of Souls, deep in the hearts of all of us, way down in the darkness where no one else can see, there is that place we rarely mention or even think about, the place of past hurts and future fears. We strive to live our lives without letting it consume us.

But you know us through and through and are no no stranger to dark places. You yourself have plunged into the infinite darkness of death and come back, as the rising sun returns at the break of day.

And so, at the weary end of every night of fruitless striving, you await us, stoking the fire of warmth and acceptance and offering that blessed invitation, "Come and have breakfast."

Thank you, Lord, for inviting us to draw near to you just as we are, that we might set aside any pain and fear, knowing that with you, our future is certain.

We pray your spirit of reassurance and hope for those dealing with medical issues and other life struggles. We pray for our country and those who are full of doubt and fear about the future. We pray for those who lead this country, that you would provide them wise and godly counselors.

Give leaders clarity to know what issues are most important. Soften the hearts of leaders to hear and understand the needs of the communities they serve. Bring a spirit of harmony and righteousness, Lord.

We pray all this in your name, as we raise our eyes to heaven and our voices in song praying the prayer that you taught us:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.