

## **ORDINARY PEOPLE IN EXTRA-ORDINARY TIMES**

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I Cor 2:3

In Moffett's translation of I Corinthians, there is an arresting verse wherein Paul, writing to the church at Corinth, says:

“Are you behaving like ordinary people?” (I Cor 2:3).

When I read those words it struck me with great force, that we have come to a time in the history of our world when, for those of us who are Christians, it is a sin to be ordinary.

It is no longer enough to live nominal  
lives in a time of phenomenal need.

Now there is little necessity in my laboring the point that we are living in extra-ordinary times. All of us know that

“The only thing that isn't changing in this changing  
world is change itself.”

And yet, with all the factors of frustration that pack down upon us I, as a minister, cannot give way to the wave of pessimism that seems to be sweeping over many a troubled soul today, for I have learned that things are never quite so bad as they can be made to appear.

Lucille's younger sister is married to a very wealthy physician. In their magnificent home they have an art gallery. Their interest in art takes a turn toward surrealism. One of their paintings has a man's eye up in one corner, four dark lines streaking across the canvas to something that looks like a disintegrating orange at the bottom. It's called: “A Man Playing The Piano.” When Lucille saw it for the first time, I asked her how she liked it. She answered with characteristic astuteness, “Well, it only goes to show that things are never quite so bad as they can be painted.”

Indeed!

And yet, with all of my natural optimism I cannot get away from a feeling which is apparent to all

of us: we are living in a dangerous and difficult world. Therefore, it is not enough to just be Ordinary People In Extra-Ordinary Times.

The words of Josiah G. Holland are very meaningful when he says:

“God give us men!  
A time like this  
Demands great hearts,  
Strong minds and willing hands.”

It is not enough that we just be ordinary people.

When Governor Morris was United States Minister to the Court of France, he made an interesting notation in his diary. Giving his impression of Louis XIV he said,

“He would have made an excellent king in peace time, but  
unfortunately his ancestors bequeathed him a revolution.”

Ordinary actions were not sufficient.

Well, we too are living in revolutionary times and routine living is not good enough.

In the words of Arnold Toynbee, the great historian, we are called to do what the first generation of Christians did:

“Bring a living Faith to a dying civilization.”

Our primary danger is that of being ordinary, like most other folks, rather than the “peculiar people” our Lord asked us to be.

Of course, there were many ordinary Christians in the church during New Testament times.

That’s what Paul was getting at when he wrote our text.

But the Gospel would never have been launched if it had not been for a host of extra-ordinary people. People who were committed in an extra-ordinary way to a truly extra-ordinary Gospel. There was nothing of the question mark in what they did. Their lives and activities were

symbolized by an explanation point. Because of this, they did extra-ordinary deeds. And so much we!

We have the same superlative Gospel.

The same glorious and reigning Lord

The same challenging and needy world.

And therefore, we must rise above the common things of life about us so we can be to the world that kind of uncommon people it must have to meet uncommon needs.

This means, first of all, that we must have --

### **Extraordinary Faith.**

We must have the faith to say with the psalmist:

“The Lord is.”

We must possess a faith that believes that back of all the perplexities with which we live, stands God.

I’m not talking about that condescending kind of faith which benignly stoops to acknowledge a half-hearted belief in some sort of supreme being. Such a willy-nilly faith will get us nowhere.

What we need is the kind of boldness that made Martin Luther say:

“Here I stand. I can do no other. So help me God!”

But more than that, we must have a faith that not only says “The Lord is,” but also,

“The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.”

We must be motivated in all of our actions by this great affirmation that God is near and will not forsake us.

We often hear people talk about finding God. My friend, God is not lost, we are! The shepherd is not lost, the sheep are! And God is at work in this world reclaiming those who have lost their way.

Oh, I know that sometimes it seems as if God has abandoned us. Our world is not the same

secure little bit of cosmic dust it was a few short years ago. Everywhere throughout the whole of the universe, there is distress. Even the heavens seem to tremble at the sight of Godless men who stride across the landscape with a multi-megaton bomb in one hand and a band-aid in the other.

And we cry out in wild dismay:

“Where is God? Why doesn’t He do something to put an end to this futility?”

Well, never fear my friend, “The Lord is” and “We shall not want.”

Dr. Edward Hughes Pruden is right on target when he says we must never forget that:

“God has a stake in the future and that He is deeply concerned over the ultimate developments of history. We need only to remind ourselves again and again that He still sits on His throne of glory; that he hasn’t the slightest idea of abdicating his Sovereignty to any earthly power; and that He has spiritual resources about which we have never even dreamed.”

Therefore, with this firm faith that the future is in God’s hands and not ours, we need not share the pessimism of those who cry:

“Truth forever on the scaffold  
Wrong forever on the throne.”

For we believe that:

“Back behind the shadows  
In the dark and dim unknown  
Standeth God in all His power  
Keeping watch above His own.”

An extraordinary faith for an extraordinary time.

We also need

**Extraordinary Conduct.**

As someone has said, the world at its worst needs the church at its best. Jesus asked a very pointed question of the disciples of His day that might well be asked of us:

“What do ye more than others?” (Matt.5:47):

In other words,

“Are you behaving like ordinary people?”

In John Woolman’s journal, which is a devotional classic, there is an entry that caused me to stop short and think again about our task as a church. It seems that on a trip he made to the Society of Friends in North Carolina, he noticed that over and over again, in the minutes of their meeting, there was the entry: “No business that required action.”

At first it amused him. Then it hurt him. Finally, it made him angry and he writes: “Why, in the name of Heaven, was there no business that required strong and immediate action? With the sin of slavery and its cruelties all around them, and with the sin of war impending, how could they say: ‘No business that required action?’”

It’s a disturbing phrase. And while we will not find those exact words on the records of our official books, there is always the danger of coming pretty close to those words as far as the big business of the Kingdom is concerned.

There is a real danger of becoming one of those churches which

“sits and sings itself away”

if not to everlasting bliss, at least, to everlasting futility!

Every church ought to have business that requires strong and immediate action.

Jesus did not say, “Meet together regularly every seven days.”

He said, “Go ye into all the world” (Mark 16:15).

We are not saved to stagnate. We are saved to serve.

There is a movement sweeping our country called “Do It Yourself.” It is becoming so much a

part of our American way that there is even a national magazine devoted to it.

Of course, some of the husbands are bitterly opposed to this movement on the grounds that it threatens the peace and comfort of the home.

They point out that when a husband comes home from the shop or office, his loving wife no longer runs to get the slippers, but brings out the step ladder, the paint brush and the trowel. But the most encouraging sign on the landscape is that there is a

“Do It Yourself”

movement sweeping through churches. Christians are becoming involved in spiritual growth and action. If it continues, it could mean a revolution. Better yet, a revival!

Think of what would happen to our American Protestant Movement if all the armchair quarterbacks were out on the field playing ball. There are still too many who sit back in their easy chairs and whine, “Why don’t they do this or that?” never stopping to realize who “they” are! “They” is them! Therefore, the only answer to what they feel are unmet needs is

“Do It Yourself!”

You see, there is no substitute for personal service and conduct above and beyond the call of duty. Dean Charles R. Brown put this truth forcefully when he said:

“The story of the Good Samaritan would have been very different if the Samaritan had seen the wounded man and said: ‘When I reach home, I must send a check to the Relief Corps for Wounded Travelers’; or if he had simply determined to get a ringing resolution passed at the next meeting of the Association denouncing ‘Those roadside atrocities’; or if he had consumed all his philanthropic zeal in writing an open letter to the editor of the Jerusalem Times on the laxity of the Police. In the meantime, the poor, half-dead traveler would have been dead altogether. What

the Good Samaritan did was to take personal care of the wounded men.”

He did it himself!

And that’s the kind of extraordinary conduct we must have if we are to make our mark on the world for the sake of Christ.

You know, as well as I, there are some people who say they love Christ so much they would die for Him, but they stay away from church when it rains. And I say to you, beloved, it isn’t what you say with your lips that counts, it’s what you do with your life that matters.

The world is much more concerned with our demonstration of the Christian life than it is with our declaration of the Christian truth, however great that truth may be!

“What do ye more than others?” our Lord asked his disciples.

“Are you behaving like ordinary people?” Paul inquires of the Corinthians.

Have you been saying one thing with your lips and another with your life?

“I’ll go where you want me to go dear Lord;

Real service is what I desire.

I’ll say what you want me to say dear Lord;

But don’t ask me to sing in the choir.

“I’ll say what you want me to say, dear Lord;

I like to see things come to pass.

But don’t ask me to teach boys and girls, dear Lord;

I’d rather just stay in my class.

“I’ll do what you want me to do, dear Lord;

I yearn for the Kingdom to thrive.

I’ll give you my nickels and dimes, dear Lord;

But please don't ask me to tithe.

“I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord;  
I'll say what you want me to say.  
I'm busy just now with myself, dear Lord;  
I'll help you some other day.”

Someone has said quite truthfully, “All souls are of equal worth to God, but not all souls are of equal use to God.”

How about you? Will you rise to the challenge? Will you contribute that uncommon conduct the world needs so desperately today? And then let me say that along with extraordinary faith and extraordinary conduct, we must also have --

### **Extraordinary Sacrifice.**

A young Chinese Communist stood before the firing squad of Chiang Kai-Shek's soldiers. As the captain gave the order to take aim, the girl cried out

“I'm dying for a cause! What are you living for?”

I haven't been able to get away from it. Maybe it will give you an hour or so of sleeplessness, too.

“I'm dying for a cause! What are you living for?”

It gets under your skin, doesn't it? It doesn't let you rest. Because:

every time you see a cross on the steeple of a church...

every time you hear the story of Calvary...

every time you think about the incredible condescension of Christ who left all of the glories of Heaven which adjectives and superlatives can never describe, for a straw-strewn stable, a life of tragic hardship, and an excruciating death on a cruel, Roman rack...

every time you take communion...



every time you see a lost one die...

every time you think of a world which is staggering under the incredible need...

every time you read of a new baby that was born, and you remember this is not just a body, but an immortal soul...

every time you think of the tremendous thing Jesus did for you and you recall the little you do for Him...

every time—it comes back and hits you where it really hurts

“I’m dying for a cause! What are you living for?”

You remember the time you spent \$10 to see a ball game and then had a glow of pride when you put \$5 in the offering plate.

You remember the time you gave your youngster \$5 to see the latest movie and 50 cents to take to Sunday School.

You remember the time when you said, “No” to a request to teach a gang of Junior boys because...

Well, what was your reason?

Tell me, did you really pray about it?

Did you really ask God to give you the wisdom and strength you felt you didn’t have? Or, did you just say, “No”?

You see, I’m not talking about going to the foreign field.

I’m talking about our Sunday School which should have a waiting list of those who are not only willing, but are anxious, to teach our little ones about the Lord Jesus.

I am not talking about giving up your job to become an itinerate preacher. I’m talking about using your job as a sounding board for the Gospel, so that whatever you do in your work week is the means whereby you pay the bills, but your major concern in life is to live and work for Christ.

I am not talking about mortgaging your home to give money to missions. Or jeopardizing the

welfare of your family to carry on the work of Christ’s church.

What I am talking about is being as fair with God as you would be with any other partner you might do business with. In fact, most partners want 50% of the profits. God says:

“You keep 90% and give me 10%.”

There isn’t a person in this audience this morning that would even think of robbing his business partner by withholding more than his fair share. I can only wonder how many there are who may be robbing God.

“What do ye more than others?”

“Are you behaving like ordinary people?”

But along with the challenge, let me give you a word of hope. I think it is best expressed in an illustration which came to me when I picked up a magazine on a plane while traveling several months ago.

I read how in the case of serious and, in the past, oft times fatal burns, doctors have recently developed a method whereby they take a piece of healthy skin from the body of the burned person. They cut it into infinitesimal pieces and then scatter it over the open wounds. There, the tiny bits of healthy skin begin to grow and multiply. They become veritable islands of healing, stretching out until the entire area is covered, and the wound is healed.

It seems to me that this is the mission of the church. A parable of our place in life. Each of us is to be an island of healing for a broken and bleeding world. By ourselves, our frail and feeble efforts seem small and unimportant. But together, as we stretch and grow, reaching out to bind up the wounds of a suffering humanity, our growing edges join! And when they do, our weaknesses become strength. Our sacrifices become splendid. For we are more than conquerors. We are children of the King! And with a regal bearing, we must be

Extraordinary People for an Extraordinary Time.

How about it, Christian? “What do ye more than others?” Are you behaving like ordinary

people? The little girl who was a Chinese Communist put it in a way we cannot escape:

“I am dying for a cause! What are you living for?”