

Sermon for the Last Sunday After the Epiphany
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You may not've realized it, but we're marking a transition point this morning. Today is the Last Sunday of the Season After the Epiphany and later this week we'll enter into Lent. I love Lent, so I'm kinda looking forward to the change, but I'm a little sad to leave so-called "Ordinary Time" behind. Ordinary Time happens twice a year in the long stretches between Christmas and Lent and Easter and the beginning of a new cycle. It gets its name from an old word for a bishop, the Ordinary, which effectively meant they were the ones ordinarily running the show. We named the seasons after the bishop because these two times of year don't have any major celebrations so the bishop's free to travel to her various churches doing bishop-y things. But it's also ordinary because nothing all that special--church-wise, at least--nothing all that special happens. And that's kinda why I'm sad to leave Ordinary Time behind. If the world we've seen up to now is what has become ordinary, y'all, I'm worried about what waits beyond the ordinary.

It's now legal for the Department of Homeland Security to spy on citizens on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.¹ The US Citizenship and Immigration Service now requires every immigrant to carry proof of registration with the government regardless of legal status.² Ukraine now finds itself berated and betrayed by our leadership.³ The House Judiciary GOP's official Twitter account posted a link to the supposedly new Epstein files, but instead of linking to those files, it's a Rick Roll.⁴ Do y'all know what Rick Rolling is? It's an internet prank where someone posts a dummy link, and instead of taking you wherever it purports to, it links to the music video for Rick Astley's 80's hit song, "Never Gonna Give You Up." In other words, when the House Judiciary announced they were going to share new information about one of the world's worst sex traffickers, it was a prank -- a prank trolling people who actually care about holding rapists, pedophiles, and sexual abusers accountable. It's that gleeful embrace of evil, yet again. This is what ordinary is becoming, so yeah, I'm worried about what'll happen when we leave Ordinary Time behind.

There's one more story we gotta talk about. At a town hall in Idaho, things got tense as constituents expressed their frustrations, and one was singled out for exercising her First Amendment rights.⁵ When she yelled along with the rest of the crowd, three men in plain clothes with no identification wrestled and dragged her from her seat and lashed her hands with zip ties while refusing to answer questions about their identity. She thought she was being kidnapped and tried to fight back. Later, it was revealed that the men were from a private security firm, but security in Idaho's legally required to have the word SECURITY printed on the front of their shirts. These goons didn't.

What caught my attention, though, isn't really about her. We absolutely should be worried about her and the goons and the precedent the whole thing sets, but for me today, it's about the rest of the crowd. In the video, no one else moved. There were over 400 people in attendance. While three men attacked a woman for speaking up, not one of them stood up. Many filmed on their phones, which was helpful in its own way, but no one intervened. I'm not suggesting they should've gotten violent, though if any time warrants violence, stopping an apparent kidnapping might. This wouldn't've required violence, though. It was a crowded room with rows of chairs and lots of people. If even one person stood up and blocked the end of the row, their clandestine work would've been disrupted. More people standing up could've clogged the aisles. More standing still could've formed a peaceful but immovable wall. Studying history isn't just for learning what not to do; there's plenty of

¹ <https://www.thepinknews.com/2025/02/26/dhs-lgbtq-kristi-noem-department-of-homeland-security/>

² <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/trump-administration-registration-requirement-immigrants>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XVW5unmuL7I>

⁴ <https://www.fox10phoenix.com/news/house-judiciary-gop-rickroll-epstein-files>

⁵ <https://apnews.com/article/idaho-protest-woman-removed-town-hall-b4348df006fe83723f95769a05007098>

means of effective nonviolent resistance to learn, too. ‘Cause sometimes, all you gotta do to seek justice is stand up.

On this Last Sunday of Ordinary Time, we’re faced with the extraordinary. Moses is so changed from encountering God that the rest of us can’t even look at him, and Jesus glows alongside him and Elijah to boot. Now, both those parts of the stories are about them, not us. Moses and Jesus are extraordinary. And that’s okay. The story doesn’t have to be all about us to be inspiring. But it is kind of amazing how our story intertwines with the extraordinary, especially when the extraordinary is Jesus. The part where we come in is a little later after the flashy miracle’s faded. When Jesus comes down the mountain, he finds the Disciples worried that they’re unable to cure a boy of epilepsy. They’re trying to do the impossible, and failing, but they try anyway. Jesus comes along and completes the miracle, but it started with the Disciples standing up and trying. See, I think that’s us. We’re facing down the impossible, and many of us are completely at a loss of what to do next but still desperate to help. To heal the world, sometimes you gotta stand up.

That Psalm serves as a great reminder, too. We can try and try and try, but ultimately we go back to that old line, “Pray as though everything depends on God, work as though everything depends on you.” Even the impossible we work to change, and we pray that God’s got our back. One of the great treasures of religions across the globe lies in the reminder that something bigger than us is out there. No matter how puffed up we are, there’s always a bigger fish, and sometimes that bigger fish is God. I know, most of us don’t love to hear about God making the people tremble, but I’m not so sure that’s a bad thing. Some people need the reminder that they’re not the biggest thing out there. I wonder if that Psalm is kinda like the stories about Moses and Jesus in that it might not be a lesson for us to learn. Most of us know we’re not God. We don’t enthrone ourselves as kings and queens, but some relish plopping the crown onto their own heads. I wonder if they’re the intended audience. Some need to hear that, experience that for once. Some need to be shown that no matter what they accomplish or destroy in this world, they’ll never make it to the very top. That’s God’s spot, and declare all they want, they’ll never be God. And God in that position’s terrifying to people like that. That Psalm says God is the mighty King, a king who loves justice, a king who establishes equity, a king who punishes for evil deeds. Sometimes, all we gotta do is stand up for that King instead of kneeling for another.

In that epistle, Paul reminds us of an old strength stored deep in our souls. He says, “since it is by God’s mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.” Because we serve the King, we’re empowered, and come what may, we must keep trying. We must stand up. Y’all, I know what we’re facing feels insurmountable. Protests and economic boycotts and calls to our senators scratch an itch, but the tidal wave of destruction just keeps crashing. Do not lose heart. The Disciples at the base of Jesus’ miracle mountain tried the impossible, too, and while they failed with the epileptic, they learned, they remained faithful, and they started to get it. And once they did, the love of Christ spread all over the world. All they had to do was keep standing up.

As it turns out, Ordinary isn’t so ordinary after all. It’s wild to me that standing up can be extraordinary, but it is. Your faith is extraordinary. Your commitment to mercy, justice, and humility is extraordinary. You and I, we may just be regular people, but together we form the extraordinary Body of Christ. And to change this world, sometimes all that body’s gotta do is stand up.