

For Us He Seeks

Mark 1

When we think of what Jesus did for us, we often think of the great miracles. We think of the healings. We think of how he drove out demons. We think about how he raised the dead. We think of how he died on the cross. But while the big miracles are an important part of Jesus' ministry, they aren't the only part. Much of what Jesus does in his ministry is ordinary things. He eats with tax collectors and Pharisees. He teaches people in large crowds, or he teaches them one on one. He teaches them how to pray, and he withdraws to find a quiet place to pray himself. As we just sang,

4. For us He prayed; for us He taught;
For us His daily works He wrought,
By words and signs and actions thus
Still seeking not Himself but us.

In other words, everything that Jesus did on earth was not for Himself but for you and me. His teaching, His preaching, His defeat of Satan and His overthrowing of death and the grave, the big miracles and the ordinary actions, all of it was done for us.

Gandalf, in the film *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, speaks about Bilbo Baggins like this:

[Some believe] it is only great power that can hold evil in check. But that is not what I have found. I have found that it is the small things, everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keep the darkness at bay—simple acts of kindness and love.

While Jesus is a great power and overcame the tempter, it is important to note that many of the works God continues to do through us to hold evil at bay are simple acts of mercy. Everyday

deeds of ordinary folk, simple acts of kindness and love.

Here's how Martin Luther described it in a sermon on marriage years before he himself was married. "When a father goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other mean task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool, though that father is acting in the spirit just described and in Christian faith, my dear fellow you tell me, which of the two is most keenly ridiculing the other? God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling, not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith. Those who sneer at him and see only the task but not the faith are ridiculing God with all his creatures, as the biggest fool on earth. Indeed, they are only ridiculing themselves; with all their cleverness they are nothing but devil's fools."

Not just in marriage, but in all of life, we see God at work through ordinary things. Luther elsewhere describes our vocations as "masks of God," the means employed by God to perform his work and to make himself known while remaining hidden. "All our work in the field, in the garden, in the city, in the home, in struggle, in government—to what does it all amount before God except child's play, by means of which God is pleased to give his gifts in the field, at home, and everywhere? These are the masks of our Lord God, behind which he wants to be hidden and to do all things."

We find the work in our vocations elsewhere. When we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," God provides, but not as he did for the Israelites in the wilderness

with manna and quail falling from heaven. No, God provides our daily bread through others fulfilling their vocations. A farmer grows the wheat, takes it to be ground into flour, which is taken to the baker to be baked into bread, and then to the store where we can buy the bread. There's nothing miraculous in that, but that doesn't mean God isn't at work. Instead, it is God at work in ordinary things.

That is why the ordinariness of Jesus' life is so important. He did miracles, yes, and we will continue to talk about them. But perhaps His greatest miracle is that He forgives our sins over and over again. But this was not only Jesus' work when He was here on earth. This is the work of the church, His Body, to this very day. Martin Luther put it this way in the Large Catechism:

Everything, therefore, in the Christian Church is ordered toward this goal: we shall daily receive in the Church nothing but the forgiveness of sin through the Word and signs, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here. (Large Catechism, Part 2, paragraph 55)

Just as God provides for our physical needs through vocation, through ordinary things, so too does God provide for our spiritual needs through ordinary things. We, too, are given strength, purpose, and community. God gives us strength as He nourishes us with His Word and Sacraments. A splash of water, a wafer and a plastic cup may seem insufficient and ordinary, but God comes to us through Baptism and Communion. Still today, the Lord hides in the little, the lowly, the quiet of his Word, his baptism, his meal. We are given purpose as we live out our vocations, doing God's work in our careers, in our families, and in the world. God gives us community, the family of believers

created in Baptism and sustained in Holy Communion. The community that is bound together in Christian love, that cares for us when we are weary and worn, tired and tried, that lifts us up in prayer when we can't form the words ourselves. People doing the work of God in ordinary ways.

The daily work of God for us is to forgive sins in Jesus' name over and over and over again. To the world, it looks ordinary—boring even. “They're just words,” you might say. But this is why God sent His Son out in the first place. He sent His Son so that He might seek us out, find us where we are, and care for us when we need it most.

When we look at Jesus' final words in the Gospel of Matthew, the Great Commission, we may think it's calling us to special, great things that require us to leave everything behind. But it doesn't. It's a call in our ordinary lives. When he tells his disciples to go and make disciples, he isn't giving them a command. It isn't an imperative. It's a participle, a description. As you are going. While you are living. While you are living within the circles of life within which I have placed you, expect God to be at work in and through you to change lives for eternity.

What Jesus does for us is great and awesome. It is hard for us to accept the ordinary work that God does in Jesus Christ. It is hard for us to believe that God works through simple words and ordinary objects to point us to who He is and what He does for us in His Son. Our sinful nature rejects it as too easy, too obvious. Yet everything in the church is ordered so that you receive the forgiveness of sins and new life in His name here and now.

The Messiah seeks you out, by “words and signs and actions thus,” as the series hymn puts it. He seeks you out so that you will repent of your sins and turn to Him. Come, listen even now to His words of promise for you. Amen

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