

The Extraordinary in the Ordinary

AN EXTRAORDINARY DAY

What an extraordinary day! It was a day that changed everything. He said it would happen but it was almost too hard to believe. Looking back, his whole life had led to it, and from the moment he was born he did things differently. In fact, even the manner of his birth was different: a king born to no fanfare; a king born in no palace; a king born without royalty having any idea of where he would be born at all. In fact the birth of this king was so ordinary that it was almost missed. Shepherds on a hillside were the first to be told about the birth, shepherds who as far as we can tell, weren't even looking for him. The first people he wanted to know were the lowest of the low, shepherds, whose testimony wasn't even recognised in a court of law. But he always did things differently. Right from the beginning he chose to work the extraordinary in the ordinary, and right from the beginning of his life, through the extraordinary in the ordinary, he made transformation possible. The different manner of his birth would show us how he would live, how he would take ordinary things, transform them, and through them bring about the extraordinary.

One day he went to the synagogue – an ordinary thing for him to do, this was his custom. And he read from the scriptures - an ordinary thing for a rabbi to do. On this particular day he read a very familiar passage from Isaiah. Jesus read:

“The spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.” Then he sat down – he had something important to add. He transformed the reading of a familiar passage of scripture: “today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” This was different – no-one had said anything quite like it before. This was an extraordinary thing for an ordinary carpenter's son to say. Jesus was saying – I am the one who brings transformation. The people asked: “how can this be? He's an ordinary carpenter's son!” But Jesus was different. He is the one who brings good news, and freedom, release and hope.

Mathew records some of the greatest words ever spoken by a human being. We call it the ‘Sermon on the Mount.’ Jesus sat on a hillside and began to teach. But that day he did something very different – he spoke extraordinary words of transformation to a group of ordinary people. That day he said – my kingdom is different from the kingdom of the world, and here's how it works – God is near to people just like you, and you are welcome in my kingdom. That's the very reason I came, to welcome you. And he looked in their eyes and he said you are welcome.

He looked at the outcast, the shabbily dressed, the mute, the deaf, the lame, the widows, the thief, the murderer, the physically repulsive, those who smell bad, the twisted, the misshapen, the deformed, the too big, the too little, the too loud, the bald, the fat, the old, the drop outs and the burn outs, the broken and the broke, the drug addict and the HIV positive, the herpes ridden, the barren, the pregnant

too many times or at the wrong time, the incurably ill, the unemployed, the underemployed, the unemployable, the shoved aside, the lonely, the incompetent, the stupid, the emotionally starved and the emotionally dead, the brutal and the bigoted, the drug lords and the pornographers, the terrorist, the sadist, the perverted, the filthy and the filthy rich.¹ And he said 'My kingdom is different.' he extraordinary has come to the ordinary and transformation is possible – and it's open to you!

Jesus transformed the lives of many ordinary people by doing ordinary things and transforming them. He walked to fishermen in the storm and transformed them. He gave sight to a blind man by mixing his spit with mud and rubbing it on his eyes. He fed 5000 men with an ordinary packed lunch of 5 loaves and 2 fish. He washed his disciple's feet transforming an ordinary custom and giving it a new meaning. The God of the Universe – has come to serve – and has come to serve you! In all these things he showed that his kingdom was completely different from the kingdom of the world.

When Jesus celebrated the last supper with his disciples it was something they had done before, but when he took the ordinary bread and the ordinary wine that day, he transformed them. He transformed them into the means by which he explained his whole reason for being on earth – his life, his coming death and his resurrection, and he transformed it into the means by which we remember his sacrifice today. When Jesus died on the cross on that first Good Friday – he transformed the ordinary. There was nothing extraordinary about the means of Jesus' death - literally thousands of people were crucified on Roman crosses. In that way he was treated like an ordinary criminal. But he was different. And what was extraordinary was that the God of the universe would let the people he created nail him to a cross and put him to death. And in many ways his death almost went unnoticed. Just another crank; another person with delusions of grandeur; another small threat against the vast force of Rome; another poor soul who really thought he could change the world. His disciples almost missed it – they ran away - they were too scared to show their faces.

But then it happened, an extraordinary day, the day when Jesus showed once and for all that he really was different, and that his kingdom really was not of this earth. He transformed death and he rose again and on that extraordinary day he transformed the cross into the means by which we might be saved. On that extraordinary day he rolled back the stone and death was defeated. On that extraordinary day when he rolled away the stone, things changed forever. On that extraordinary day when he rolled away the stone, he made it possible for the lives of ordinary people to be transformed. His whole life was different, so that our lives could be different. He rolled an ordinary stone away from the mouth of the grave, so that he could do the same in our lives.

Friends, on that extraordinary day, he opened the door to life, and the possibility that your life and mine can be transformed because of his birth, life, death and extraordinary resurrection. And he is still, today, right now, in the business of opening doors. He continues to open doors in our lives that we might live.

Friends, some of us live as if we are entombed. We maybe entombed in many things:

- guilt
- un-forgiveness
- bitterness, rage, anger, malice
- we have been badly hurt
- we have been deeply scarred
- the pain of rejection
- the pain of loneliness
- the desire for more
- we are never good enough
- relationships that are destructive
- debt
- deep regret
- living a lie

Friends, there are many things which stop us living the life that Jesus came to bring, but you are welcome in his kingdom – YOU ARE WELCOME!

Friends, there are doors here today and with these doors, as with the tomb on that extraordinary day, the stone has been rolled away and the same power that moved that stone from the entrance of the tomb, is present here today. The extraordinary thing is that he invites you to walk through the door to life, and if you do, he will take your ordinary life and he will transform it. He will give you life. So, friends if you are entombed, walk through a door and, as you do, pray that God would meet you powerfully, and begin the journey to life as he intended. For the God who takes the ordinary and transforms it can bring about the extraordinary in your life and mine, and just as that first Easter Day was an extraordinary day – so can today!

Preached in Crawley Baptist Church on 23rd March 2008 by Rev. I. Phillips

1. Quoted from: "The Divine Conspiracy" by Dallas Willard: Harper SanFrancisco 1998 pages 123-124