

THE EXTRAORDINARY ORDINARY

Long ago, there was a small village in a valley ... of ordinary people, doing the ordinary, day after day.

They worked hard. Everyone had food and shelter, and most were quite comfortable.

Each day was much the same as the day before. They laboured and provided for themselves and their children, even shared their leftovers.

BUT,..... they were bored. They were not content with life.

So,.....they looked for ways to be entertained, and even arranged for exotic animals to be shipped in .... for their viewing pleasure.

All those things brought smiles,..... and something else.

Not long after the exotic animals arrived, some of the villagers became ill, and then others,... and then more and more became deathly sick.

Men, women and children were dying..... from the plague – the Black Death.

Apparently, there were stowaway fleas in the animal crates.

Soon, everyone was afraid to go outside. All life seemed to stop, and the once quiet, ordinary evenings were broken with the cries from the “death carts” – “Bring out your dead.” And, it was very personal.

In desperation, the survivors, not knowing what else to do, sent a messenger to the monastery on the hill, nearby. They had always ignored the monks, but now they sought out the pious men, asking them for a miracle in order to stop the misery.

The next day, a lone monk walked down to the village carrying a wooden box.

All who could crowded around with great expectation as the monk opened the box. He told them, “I have two things for you. Two things you desperately need.”

“The first”, he said, “are seeds.”, as he reached in the box and filled his hand with seeds.

The monk went on and explained to them, “If you plant this dormant seed in the ground and add water... it will,” he proudly declared, “grow 1,000 times bigger than it is, and it will live for centuries.” Adding, “Isn’t That impressive?”

The people wanted a return to their comfortable past—the way things used to be.

They were expecting a grand miracle that would end all their suffering – something spectacular was envisioned. Yet, in the gloom of the Black Death, the monk merely presented simple, small seeds – something that grows.

*In our dark times, do we not also seek the spectacular – the instant cure – the sudden salvation – something that will destroy the problem .... and the pain?*

We live in world of instant results, of Gigabytes crunched in nano seconds, of special affects... and the illusion that problems can be made to disappear..... immediately.

We can insert ear pods and listen to any song we want, instantly–no need to find a CD, place a stylus on a record or tune an instrument.

Instead of caring on with life as we wait a week or so for a letter to arrive, we get irritated as we impatiently wait a few minutes for an email reply... or for the cell phone to ring.

No longer can we adjust to the schedule of others, we now expect to watch our movies and TV shows whenever we wish to. We live on deficit time– which is too precious to waste on waiting or spontaneous visiting.

It isn't good enough that medical care can heal most of the deadly diseases that once terrified humanity, we want it now because we can't wait. And, when advised by a doctor that time and arduous physical therapy may be the cure, we usually demand surgery–expecting the spectacular miracle, Now.

Moreover, it sure doesn't seem like God is keeping pace, either. It feels like God has not joined in the 21<sup>st</sup> century,... because divine solutions / resolutions are not keeping up with our short-lived memory.

We expect God to deliver on command – to give us the “EXTRAORDINARY” now. The ordinary is not good enough. We must have the spectacular / the extraordinary at extraordinary speed.

Maybe things haven't changed that much over time, except that we think we should do more and more in less time. The villagers wanted some instant Razzle Dazzle – a flash miracle, but instead they were presented with .... seeds that grow tomorrow, and they were greatly disappointed.

*Perhaps, if they would have stopped hiding in their rat invested, cramped little town and went out in the country side to plant seeds and patiently nurture those seeds to life, then more people would have avoided getting the plague?*

The monk presented the second item. From the box, he pulled out his Bible, and read the story of Lazarus.

The incident with Lazarus, today's text, is about a miraculous, physical restoration. And, it is also a story with a simple message.

Lazarus was a dear friend of Jesus', and the brother of Mary and Martha.

Word came to Jesus, who was hiding out on the other side of th Jordan River, that Lazarus was gravely ill.

With “Divine” insight, Jesus sees that this episode with Lazarus will serve to glorify God..... and be a teaching event.

Even though the message is “marked” urgent, Jesus lingers two more days before leaving. Was Jesus insensitive? ????

Actually, two days didn't matter. Verse 17 states that when Jesus did arrive, Lazarus had been dead and in the tomb for four days.

His delay was likely divine insight.... and a deeper understanding – because Jesus' timing reveals a pace / a life rhythm that is NOT in haste as if there is a time deficit. Jesus didn't panic; he was in beat with a natural cadence, such as exits with a healing wound, the aging process... or a plant growing.

The disciples were hesitant to return to Judea. The Jews there were plotting to stone Jesus, and .... stonings have a tendency of hitting multiple targets. Yet, give them credit; they did follow Jesus back to Judea, to Bethany, where Lazarus was. It likely felt like a "special mission", and they didn't want to miss out.

Jesus had told them that he was going to go "awaken" Lazarus.

They didn't fully understand, so Jesus dropped the euphemism, and plainly said, "Lazarus is Dead." Therefore, he was going to bring him back to life!

Now, this was going to be a big event – too big to miss.

To be sure, this undertaking does prompt a question that still grabs us today.

If God can .....Restore Life..... then why just Lazarus?

That seems a little unfair.

And,...there are many more similar questions in that vein of inspection, such as "Why am I suffering when others are not?" or "Why don't I get the breaks and good luck that others do?" ... or "Why do others succeed and have it better... while I have to work so hard?"

And, "Why can't the leafs ever make the playoffs?"

Life just doesn't seem fair!

Well..... Life is NOT Fair, and that concept becomes a huge issue when we compare ourselves to others or some glorified ideal.

??We must First fact the reality of our ordinary... before we can experience the extraordinary.  
Confused? ????

Well, maybe the rest of the story will help.

Jesus arrived in Bethany, and is met by Martha who confronts him with this very issue.... of not being quick enough. She states, "If you had been here, my brother would NOT have died!"

That's a strong accusation. It is an accusation that Mary also repeated.

BUT,..... Jesus was human. HE Could NOT fly instantly to the scene.

It would have been impossible for him to arrive in time, unless the he could perform the spectacular miracle of rapid mobility.

The human Jesus reveals the Divine... by telling Martha, “Your brother will get up once more.” And, he wasn’t referring to an end of time / life after death experience. Jesus explains by saying, “I am the fulfilment!” “I AM LIFE.” Jesus is the model for life. Then he focusses on her, and asks, “Do you believe this?”

Her response, affirming that Jesus IS the Messiah, feels a bit too crisp—like an answer on a test. Maybe she’s merely a bit overwhelmed? Anyways, she immediately takes off, goes to Mary, as if to get away, and claims to Mary, “Hey, The TEACHER is calling you.” [ ? ]

Mary also accuses Jesus of neglect,...with, “If you’d only had been here in time.” .... according to my time table.

Jesus saw her heart / her pain. And, she was outwardly weeping.

*There is great sadness when life is gone, and misunderstanding, too.  
Loss of life often brings confusion.*

All the people there were crying. It was a dark, sad moment full of loss and confusion. So much so, that even the “light of the world” cried.

The human Jesus had to ask where Lazarus had been placed.

Jesus approached the tomb which was blocked with a big stone, and asked that the stone be removed. Again, the reality of a heavy rock is dealt with in an ordinary manner.

It was past proper time to visit a dead body; Jesus was warned of the natural effects from a decaying body. But, Now it was time to see the glory of God.

The stone door is removed. The crowd backs away. Jesus looked to the sky and thanks God... and for this opportunity for all present to witness the divine in Jesus... and in life.

And then, Jesus loudly yelled out, “Lazarus come out!”

I imagine there were a few tense, unnerving moments of silence, as the crowd focussed on the opening of the tomb.  
*My joints are stiff in the morning. I bet Lazarus’ were really stiff.*

To be sure, Lazarus came out...still tightly wrapped up in burial cloth.

An aside: This was NOT a resurrection. The Lazarus episode was a restoration. His human body was restored to life.

Jesus spoke out for all to heal, with powerful words, “Unbind him and let him go”  
Unbind him and set him free!

This was a massive, spectacular miracle..... for a reason.  
It was a teaching event to give a double message for all.  
The obvious part is for everyone to understand the glory of God... experienced through Christ.  
And, the other part was to teach us something about life itself – about living.

The narrative about Lazarus ends here, but he lived on.  
He likely had to go home and put sheets on his bed, then fetch his clothes back from the thrift store,  
reactivate his bank account... and figure what he was going to say in order to get his job back.

In other words, Lazarus returned to normal, “ordinary” life,... and later died, as we all do.

Nevertheless, this was an unbelievable, marvellous event.....  
...Lazarus was given something you and I already have – LIFE.  
That’s Pretty ordinary... just ordinary life.  
Lazarus was given what we already have.

So, the message is simple: God give Life through Jesus.

Life happens, .... unless we forget how precious living is, then... the world becomes rather dark....  
The beauty of creation fades away, as does the joy of relationships... and we turn to distractions and  
entertainment to consume the time.... in the dark tomb of lifeless existence.

All feels dark and dreary until, .... we respond to Jesus’ call to come OUT / to be unbound and set free.

God speaks through the words and life of Jesus so that we can understand how to live / how to escape  
the darkness and be unbound.

God presents the surprise of truly living, that feels like the delight of a child in a Spring garden.

Through Christ, by the grace and love of God, we can discover the wonders of just living the  
extraordinary ordinary.... in God’s time / at God pace with God’s love—when we allow our death  
wrappings /what binds us to be removed.

Yes, death happens and it’s terribly sad, and there is darkness in the world full of pain and injustices,  
and there is the mundane,... yet into the darkness,... we can hear, with the voice of Christ,.... “COME  
out into the light,... just for today and Live. Live with Christ—God’s love.

It’s a beautiful day today. Spring is here, and we are alive!

Life is extraordinary when we slow down and think about it, and walk away from the bondage and  
darkness.