

“Thanksgiving Saints”

Theme: Ordinary Saints – Encountering God in Everyday Life

Scripture: *Colossians 3:12-17*

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon:

Meditation Moments for Monday, November 24 – Read Ephesians 2:11-22 – So many things divide us from one another. But Ephesians says Jesus tore down “the dividing wall of hostility.” In Paul’s day, an actual wall cut off The Court of the Gentiles from the inner courts of the Jerusalem Temple. Just a false charge that Paul had brought a Gentile inside that wall set off a vicious riot (Acts 21:27-31).

- According to verse 18, what (or rather who) is the reason God’s children can live beyond hostility and conflict? How have you seen that work among Christians? When have you seen people rise above tensions due to personal history, traits or beliefs because of their connection with God?
- Verses 21 and 22 address both your personal spiritual life and the type of shared life Christ calls us to. In what ways does it stretch and shape you to think of yourself as a Temple for God to live in? Why does it matter that this is not just a personal matter—that together we form a Temple for God’s dwelling?

Tuesday, November 25 – Read John 15:9-17 – John’s gospel says that uppermost in Jesus’ mind, the night before he went to the cross, was that his followers love one another. He extended that concern to 21st-century believers (including you) in John 17:20-23. It’s a far-reaching prayer. Jesus wants, not just a few, but all of his “ordinary saints” to be people who love.

- In verse 15, Jesus distinguishes between “servants,” who blindly follow their master’s orders, and “friends,” who serve one another out of love and caring. Many of us begin our spiritual journey as servants. What helped (or would help) you to grow from being just a dutiful servant into a friend of Jesus?
- The people planning to crucify Jesus thought they were eager to keep God’s commands. (So do many today who scoff at, censure, or even commit violent acts against other believers.) How did Jesus prioritize his commands? Which of Jesus’ commands do you believe could ever be more central than “love each other”?

Wednesday, November 26 – Read 1 John 4:7-21 – Loving is not just being “nice,” or a good way to avoid social discord. Loving one another aligns us, as nothing else does, with the heart of the God of the universe. God loves us—that is the reason that we love. And God’s love, John wrote, drives out fear. What a contrast with the tragic, fear-filled perception of God so many of us struggle with!

- Most of us know the words: “God is love.” What’s the difference between knowing the words, and being able to “know and rely on the love God has for us?” Do you perceive and experience God as loving? What life experiences and inner messages make it hard for you to rely on God’s love? What helps you trust it more?

- An unknown humorist wrote, “To live above with saints we love—ah, that will be glory! To live below with saints we know—well, that’s another story.” Which people do you find it hardest to love? Read (or pray) through this passage, naming those you find hardest to love. Ask God to help you live out God’s love toward them.

Thursday, November 27 – Read **Romans 14:13–15:7** – We often think of “church” as a big building. Paul’s letter went to a group of smaller “house churches” in Rome (more like our various kinds of small groups). They didn’t always get along or agree on how best to live their faith. Though we differ on the details, the central command is to love.

- “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you.” In what ways does that set a high, serious standard for us? Could it be seen as setting a “low” norm for acceptance, one even a woman taken in adultery or a thief on a cross could pass? Do you find the “height” or the “lowness” of Paul’s standard more challenging?
- “Let us stop passing judgment on one another.” What difference do you see (if any) between having tastes or opinions and passing judgment on someone who does things differently than you would? How does Paul call on us, as members of the family of faith, to act toward each other?

Friday, November 28 – Read **Colossians 3:8-17 – Who’s got your back? When you’re a part of the body of Christ, it’s all the “ordinary saints” you worship with, rub elbows with, see at the market or pass as you walk the dog. That also means God is counting on you to protect, support and bless all of them. As in Romans, this letter calls us to treat one another the same way God has treated us.**

- **This is pretty radical language: take off the “old self,” put on a “new self.” Can you see elements of your “old self” that you and God are in the process of “taking off”? Which of the beautiful “new self” qualities named in these verses do you see flourishing? Which ones do you want to ask God to grow in your life in the next six months?**
- **“Autoimmune” diseases cause a great deal of suffering. They happen when our body “turns against” itself. Colossians says we need to live in peace because we are members of one body, the body of Christ. What steps can you take to make sure you aren’t the source of any “autoimmune” problems in Christ’s body?**

Saturday, November 29

Personal Application: This sermon series aimed to show us how to be “ordinary saints,”

Week 1 – Finding God in the details of everyday life.

Week 2 – Hearing God’s voice in many ways, especially through Scripture.

Week 3 – Making prayer as natural and continual as breathing.

Week 4 – Learning how God wants us to love and bless one another.

Which message spoke to you most strongly?

What spiritual changes can you sense taking root in your life as this series ends?

Family Activity: Read Colossians 3:12. Write each quality listed on an individual index card. Do this for each person in your family, so each person has his or her own set of cards. Gather several fun, colorful items of clothing for each person. Attach a card to each piece of clothing, assigning that quality to the item. Have fun “putting on” each item of clothing and the linked Christ-like quality. Consider writing the complete verse on an index card for each person. (For non-readers, glue pictures of people on the card representing these qualities.) Place the index cards in places where family members get dressed each day as a reminder to also put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Prayer: *God, you’ve surrounded me with your children, people I can bless and who can bless me. Help me to be aware of those opportunities that present themselves where I can share your grace and love with others. Help*

me in humility to be aware of the times when I need help or encouragement from you. Give me a willingness to receive your blessings through other 'ordinary saints' whom you place in my life. Amen.

Theme: Ordinary Saints
“Thanksgiving Saints”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

November 22-23, 2014 at First United Methodist Church, Durango

Colossians 3:12-17

12 Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. 13 Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

16 Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. 17 And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.

VIDEO Thanksgiving Saints – Sermon Starter

SLIDE Thanksgiving Saints

Today we bring to a conclusion our series of sermons on becoming ordinary Saints. We started this four weeks ago and the idea is that God intends for all of us to be Saints, not just those who serve the poor in developing nations or who did miracles hundreds of years ago. We get put off a bit by the idea of being a saint because we don't live in the monastery but we misunderstand the word saint when we look at it in this light. 61 times in the New Testament ordinary Christians are called Saints because the word "Saint" is about wholly belonging to God. A saint is holy by virtue of its owner, not because of its own innate character. We are Saints because we belong to God and we offer our lives to Christ.

We become Saints by virtue of belonging to God but then the lifelong journey of a Christian is about the process of growing into the person God intends for us to be. We are meant to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world, which

is the purpose statement for this church, and that process was described by John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, as sanctification. Again that comes from the Latin word, “sanctus,” which is to be made holy. There is a process of becoming holy that takes a lifetime as we are all on our way to perfection. We are formed into the likeness of Christ over the course of our lives and while God does that in us, we make ourselves available to God to form us and shape us into his ordinary Saints.

So we’ve been asking several questions. What does it look like to be holy and given over to God? What is it like to experience God fully in our lives and to live as God’s people every moment of every day? How do we put God’s will first? How do we hear God speak to us through things like the Scriptures? What role does prayer play in the lives of ordinary Saints? We have been looking at very simple things that we can do together so we can become more readily the presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

The first week of this series I asked you to consider getting up each day and inviting God to shape you and mold you. I reminded you of the Scripture which invites us to say each day, “God, you are the Potter and I’m the Clay. Mold me and make me into what you want me to be.” We also encouraged you to remember your baptism and be thankful. Finally, we urged you to carry your pocket New Testament with you or load the You Version Bible App on your phone so you have your Bible with you wherever you go. Remember that you are people of the book. In Deuteronomy 6:4 God spoke through Moses and told the people to bind the scriptures on their foreheads and place them on the doorposts of their homes so they would always remember that Lord alone is God.

In week two we thought about how we listen for God’s voice throughout the day and particularly through the Scriptures. We talked about how we read the Scriptures with other people and hear God’s voice and how we can read them out loud and hear God’s voice and how we can read them in the quiet and in those moments listen for God to speak to us. We talked about reading Scripture and listening for God as we gave the second graders in our church their Bibles.

Last week we talked about having a conversation with God throughout the day by including God as our babbling partner. The apostle Paul encourages us to pray always and so I tried to teach you some simple ways that we can do that like breath prayers, short little prayers that you pray in one breath. We look at ways

that we can pray the Scriptures and we took some Bible verses this past week and formed prayers out of them. We gave you a little piece of leather like this and had you tie 3 knots in it so that you would be reminded to stop and pray at least three times a day, like Daniel in the Old Testament. He prayed at morning, noon and night and each of those 3 knots were designed to remind you to pray in those times each day. We taught you to pray the ACTS prayer and that the smooth spaces in between the knots represented adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication.

Today we want to remember that the reality of being an ordinary saint is that it doesn't happen in isolation and we need other people. Everything we have taught up until this point you can do on your own, but there are certain dimensions of the Christian life which require help. We are going to look at three of those things that are needed as we seek to become ordinary Saints which include other people. The first idea is that we need other people to grow in fellowship for our faith to become full and rich.

SLIDE We need others to grow and feel loved

The New Testament does not mention any solitary Christians. Sometimes we get caught up in saying, "I can be a Christian all by myself. I don't need anybody else. I don't need to go to worship. I don't need a small group. All I need is me and Jesus and maybe the outdoors and I'm set."

The problem is that Jesus didn't know about faith like that. He didn't preach about it and he didn't live it. He called 12 disciples and had a number of others who he called upon his friends. He organized them and they were his community and his support. When he gave his commandments he assumed that those who followed him would live out faith together.

In the writings of the apostle Paul he calls the church the family of God or the body of Christ. He tells us that no one of us is complete without the other. In that body metaphor the idea is that some of you are a thumb. Some of you are a big toe. Some of you are an eye and some are the lips. The body can't survive just being a thumb or a toe or lips or eyes. All of us are needed together. Some have different gifts but we use those gifts to build others up and to bless them and they use their gifts to bless us and the entire body.

There is something essential to the Christian life about doing life together. You need other people to become an ordinary saint. Other people need you to

become an ordinary saint as well. This is how the Christian life is meant to work and without it we are just a shell.

Bill Withers captured this in a song back in the early 70s which was remade in the 90s into a hip-hop and rap version by Club Nouveau.

SLIDE “We all need somebody to lean on!”

I used that song as the theme for several youth mission trips when I was a youth pastor because it captures so well the idea of Christian community that all of us need. Over 50 times in the New Testament we find what are called, “one another,” commandments. They help us see how important it is to do life together as being a follower of Jesus. We read things like this. We are called to serve one another. We are commanded to bear one another’s burdens. We are told to teach and admonish one another. We are to encourage one another. We confess our broken places to one another. We offer hospitality to each other. We are supposed to pray for one another. We are to greet one another with a holy kiss. We are to spur one another onto good deeds. We are to submit to one another in Christ as we listen to others offer us perspective and advice. We are to be compassionate to one another. We are to bear with one another. We are to forgive one another. There is a “one another” command that summarizes it all.

SLIDE We are to, “love one another.”

We can’t be followers of Jesus without following these commandments which means we need other people, and they need you.

This last summer I realized that there are certain things you just can’t do by yourself. We had a hailstorm which damaged our roof last year and so the insurance company was going to replace our roof this last summer. We have a stucco house which was painted gray and it had several places where it was cracking and peeling and needed some repair. We figured it was a good time to paint the house before they put a new roof on and so I ordered the paint they make especially for stucco which actually fills in the cracks as you go along. I bought a new brush and a new roller and I started in on the house, not realizing how long it takes. It took me most of one day just to finish one section of the front of the house and I didn’t even do any detail work like painting around the Windows!

My back was killing me and I had probably compromised myself on a ladder

one too many times. I thought it would be a great project to do by myself this summer but I realized that I needed some help and so I called up several of you who showed up at our house one day and began painting with us. Thanks especially to Al Studer who had a paint sprayer, a group of about 10 of you helped me finish the house in two days. Not only that, but we got to enjoy lunch together each of those days and had some great community and fellowship. I offered to preach to them while they painted but they didn't take me up on that offer!

The things that are almost impossible to do by yourself suddenly become energizing when you invite other people along on the journey. They can become fun and you get the job done without killing yourself. This is the idea behind Christian Fellowship.

SLIDE Koinonia = Community

The Greek word is koinonia which means, "sharing with, communing with and fellowshiping." We read about this in the early church in Acts 2:42.

SLIDE *42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.*

43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

The idea is that we can do more together than we can by ourselves which is why we need each other. When we join together we can give away a Christmas offering which builds wells for children in Africa who have no parents and no clean drinking water. We can share our resources with those in need and make a huge difference when we see ourselves as the body of Christ, recognizing that we need each other and in doing that we change the world and we become the presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

Let me say this as clearly as possible.

SLIDE *You cannot be the Christian that God wants you to be, you cannot be an ordinary saint, if you are trying to do it by yourself.*

Of course you need worship, but worship is not Christian community. You might get a taste of community here, but how much time do really spend getting to know each other in worship? We maybe spend a few minutes during that meet and greet time, but sometimes we don't even shake hands because we are worried about getting the flu and so we just bump elbows. We are not building the kind of relationships that God is hoping for as we connect with God and connect with each other if all we are doing is coming to worship. Let me tell you what Christian community is meant to look like.

Two weeks ago one of our members and ended up with massive blood clots in his lungs. He was rushed to the hospital and then flown to the front range for emergency surgery. While he was in the emergency room here in Durango several members of a small group came to be with his wife. Their small group listed them up in prayer the entire time and some of them made their way to the front range to be with them. They put together a prayer quilt and made sure it was delivered while he was in recovery last week and as they returned home this past week there were offers of meals and rides and you name it.

I've seen it time and again as people's small groups show up to pray and bring meals and simply be with members of their group who are in need. I have seen them show up in hospital rooms and at funerals in order to bless members of the body to whom they feel connected. That's what Christian community looks like.

When we talk about Christian Fellowship it is not just about you connecting with some people for a few minutes in worship. It's about having other people to walk the journey with and as you're walking with them you are helping each other grow. You are encouraging each other and sometimes you are challenging each other. You are bearing one another's burdens. You are forgiving each other when you do things that hurt.

One of the things I've talked about you before is stretcher bearers. It comes from the story in the Gospels where there was a man who was lame who had four friends. His friends put him on a stretcher and carried him to see Jesus. They wanted to get him before Jesus so Jesus could touch him and make him well. When they arrived at the house where Jesus was teaching, they find thousands of

people surrounding the house and there is no way to get in the front door to see the healer. Instead of stopping and being discouraged by the crowd, they went around to the side of the house and they hoisted him up on the roof. Then they started ripping off the roof while the poor owner of the house sat inside and watched them put an unplanned sunlight in his roof. As they took the roof off of where Jesus is teaching there is dust falling on Jesus' head. Jesus looks up and the friends begin to lower the paralyzed man down using ropes right in front of Jesus. Jesus looks at them and he smiles and says, ***"Because of the faith of your friends, you will be healed."***

It was not the faith of the paralyzed man who healed him, but the faith of his four friends. This is why I ask you this question on a regular basis.

SLIDE Who are your stretcher bearers?

Who are the people who will encourage you and pray for you and bless you? Who are those people that you will carry to Jesus when you can't get there on your own?

And, for whom are you a stretcher bearer? Who will you do this for because you are part of Christian community together?

If you don't have those people in your life right now, today the invitation is going to be to ask yourself, "How can I develop those kind of relationships?" In order to have those kind of relationships you have to invest in those kind of relationships. Here at First United Methodist Church you do that by joining a Sunday school or a small group. We have different learning opportunities that happen throughout the year and in January we are going to invite the entire congregation and anyone who wants to join us to do something called the Daniel Plan.

SLIDE Daniel Plan (Graphic)

The Daniel Plan is a way for us to begin the New Year by looking at how we get healthy through food, fitness, focus, friends and faith. Many of us try different diets or fitness routines as we begin the New Year when we make resolutions, but the reason most of those fail is that we try to do them on our own. So in January we are going to encourage you to do them together in groups and will have opportunities for you to sign up and meet people's homes as well as here at the church. You meet together for six weeks with that group and at the end of that

we will form small groups that will go through the season of Lent until we get to Easter.

You might even come up with a list of 6 to 10 friends that you want to invite them to do the Daniel Plan with you. If you don't want to do the Daniel Plan then we can help you find other curriculum and our director of Adult Small Groups, Cherie Cobb, can help you do that. As you have meaningful conversations and pray for one another and share life together, you will find that you develop those kinds of significant relationships.

The second part of the Christian life that we want to talk about today which you can't do on your own is part of what it means to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world. In Acts 1, Jesus is preparing to ascend into heaven. He is going to give his final words to his disciples and his mother because they will not see him anymore. Here's what he says in verse 8.

SLIDE ***8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."***

Jesus is making it clear that he's not going to be here anymore and if anyone is going to hear about the gospel, the good news of the kingdom of God which brings hope and salvation to all of creation, they are going to need to hear it from his followers. They are going to need to hear from you and me.

If the world is going to know about Jesus and his character and what Jesus taught, about his crucifixion, death and resurrection, they're going to have to hear from you and me. There is no other way, except by us bearing witness to what we have known and seen. A witness tells what they have personally seen and experienced, not what somebody else said, but what they experienced in their own lives. The apostle Paul puts it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:20.

SLIDE ***20 So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"***

We are meant to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world. This idea of being the ambassadors for Christ and being witnesses for the gospel is very difficult for many of us. We're not exactly sure what to do when it comes to the

idea of, “evangelism.” We have seen it done so poorly by other Christians that it sometimes turns us off. We have said, “Well, I don’t want to be like that. My faith is private. It’s something I keep to myself. It’s not something I go share with others because that’s rude.”

The problem is that if everybody felt that way, none of us would be here today. Whether it was your mother or father, or a grandparent, or a Sunday school teacher or a friend, somebody said, “I think I’m supposed to share this faith and give it away, and not keep it to myself.”

We believe that the gospel is God’s answer to the human condition, to our need for redemption, forgiveness and unconditional love. We have a need to feel purpose in life and hope in the midst of the darkest circumstances. The gospel is all of that and more. We have this answer and we are meant to share it. Some might share this in a way that is very off-putting or insensitive. When surveys are done of young adults who are not Christians and they are asked to describe the church, the use words to describe Christians like, “insincere, insensitive and pushy.”

The truth is that Christians are like that sometimes and some of us may have been those kinds of Christians in the past. But what we need to remember is that this doesn’t draw people to Christ, it repels them. Because there are Christians who have been like this, there is a need for Christians like you, who are sensitive, compassionate, caring and invitational. We generally care for people, whether they become a Christian or not, because our job is to plant seeds. You have heard me say this before, but I can’t save a single soul. That’s God’s job. I’m in the people business, not the soul saving business. We are meant to live our lives simply and beautifully so that other people say, “I can see now from you what the Christian faith looks like and I’m interested. Can you tell me more? I want to know where you find that hope.”

The way we live our lives is meant to be compelling and we must be willing to listen to other people stories and then maybe we can share our own story about how faith has changed us and shaped us. I’m going to ask you to take out of your bulletin your Meditation Moments and your Message Notes. There is a space for you to write something down there below the Scripture text that we have heard from today and in one of those spaces I would like you to write a name.

SLIDE Name the person most responsible for you being a Christian today.

If you are a Christian, write the name down of that person who is most responsible for you being a Christian today. If you are here today and you are not really sure if you are Christian, that's okay. The church was actually created by Christ for persons like you. You might simply write down the person who is most responsible for you being here at church today. But if you are Christian, would you write down the person or two or three people that are most responsible for you being a follower of Jesus?

**VIDEO Name the person most responsible for you being a Christian today
(60 second timed with music)**

One of the persons on my list is my great-grandmother Grace Berry. She came to be my nanny when I was six years old and brought a package of napkins with Psalm 118:24 imprinted on each one, "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." She told me Bible stories and she prayed with me and she lived to be 104 years old. When I made the decision to go to seminary I received a scholarship from a scholarship fund with her name on it from the United Methodist church in Castle Rock where she attended for much of her life. She gave her estate to create a scholarship fund for students to become United Methodist pastors, not knowing that one day her great-grandson would receive that scholarship. I had no clue she had created that scholarship fund either, but I am a Christian and a pastor in many ways because of her.

My mother is also on that list along with my childhood pastor, Rev. Gilbert Vieira. Mom took me to church quite often as a child and it was the church that became my refuge during my teenage years when life was difficult at home. I actually have this collection of Rev. Gil's sermons that I often refer to even today and he encouraged me not only to be a pastor but to stay connected to the church and to my faith when things were falling apart all around me. When I became a United Methodist pastor he wrote me a note of encouragement but also asked that I not become one of those pastors who didn't wear robe but instead just wore loafers and khakis and a sports coat. I received a note from them recently that he saw one of my sermons on the web and while he really liked the sermon he wasn't very excited about my tennis shoes and jeans and shirt which was untucked! But he also said that if that brings people to Jesus then I guess its okay.

When it comes to sharing our faith we get this idea that it has to do with

asking icky questions or making big statements or setting out a tract with four steps to leading people to Jesus. People do come to faith in Christ that way, but most often sharing your faith is just telling your story. It's one person telling their story to another person because there is one thing on which you are an expert, and that is your story. So on your Message Notes I'm going to ask you to write the answer to this question.

SLIDE How has Christ made a difference in your life?

I'm going to give you 60 seconds to do this, but let me give you a few hints and tips before you start writing. Here are a few things that I would write down as I answer this question. Because of the presence of Christ in my life, I have a sense that God is with me and always near. When I think of God, I think of Jesus because he is the face of God for me. Because of Christ, I know that God forgives me and that even the cruddiest and creepiest things I have ever done are forgiven because of God's mercy and grace. Christ has showed me God's love for me and how much that means. Christ showed me the full extent of God's love for me when he lay down his life on the cross and I realized that God loves me so much he was willing to suffer for me and for you. Christ has given me a purpose in my life. The teachings of Christ give me a way to live and hope as I try to live into what Christ lived out in his life. My life is much less self-centered and self-focused because I am a follower of Jesus Christ. I don't live up to this each day, but I strive each day to figure out how I can bless others. How can I live for others instead of myself?

In the face of the darkest circumstances in my life, I always feel that there is hope. No matter how dark things may be, I believe there is always hope because of Jesus Christ and his resurrection from the grave.

So take 60 seconds and write down some of the things that are different in your life because you are a follower of Jesus. If you are not a Christian, you might simply write down why your life is different because of someone who is a Christian in your life or because of the church. You might also write down why you came today.

Please be sure to write these down because in a minute I'm going to have you turn to someone that you didn't come to church with and share with them what you wrote. Please don't freak out and get up and leave!

**VIDEO How has Christ made a difference in your life?
(60 timed with music)**

When you look at your piece of paper, you should have two things written down. The first thing you have written down are the people who have made a difference in your life in terms of becoming a Christian or a follower of Christ or why you are in church today. The second thing you have written talks about why your life is different because of Christ. I have to admit that I was a bit scared about making you all do this today in worship. It's a bit of a gamble. Are we going to make you feel bad if you have to turn and talk to somebody you don't know about your faith? But I also know that we are asked to go out to the world and talk to people who are not Christians about our faith. So maybe you can simply think of this as a really safe place to practice. Remember that everybody sitting around you right now is in church so it's okay to talk about our faith with one another.

I also want you to please look around and make sure that nobody is sitting by themselves in this next part of the service. If you need to sit in a group of three then that is fine, but please feel free to get up and move around and go find someone that you didn't come with today so that you can talk. I'm going to ask you to turn to somebody that did not come to church with you today and simply share with them what you have written down your paper. These are the people who made a difference in my life and why and this is what Christ means to me. I'm going to give you three minutes, so 90 seconds each. When a minute and a half is up, please switch roles and let the other person talk. We are going to start the timer in about 30 seconds so please stand and find someone and let share our faith with one another.

VIDEO Lean on Me (3:30 timed with music)

It's fun to stand here and watch you telling each other stories. You can see people's faces light up as we get to share our stories together. Once we get started, it's not that hard, but something else happens when we talk about our faith. Maybe you've experienced this. When I tell my wife that I love her, I feel love for her. The very act of saying it makes me feel it. When I talk about my love for my children, it makes me love them more. When I talk about my faith in God, I find that my faith is strengthened by the very act of talking about it.

John Wesley used to say this to his Methodist preachers when they

struggled with their faith.

SLIDE ***“Preach faith until you have it.”***

The very act of talking about our faith builds it up in our lives. We say in this church that we want to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world and one of the ways that we do that is by sharing this gift that has been given to us. The church was actually formed for the people who are not in it and part of what it means to be the church, the body of Christ, is to share with others this faith which has changed our lives.

We try to make it easy here for you to invite your friends by doing sermon series which are interesting to people who are not regularly in church. We have many in our community who are, “spiritually unresolved,” and who need to hear the gospel in the way that this church shares it and we try to make it easy for you to bring people so they can hear that message. We try to make a big deal of Christmas and Easter, hoping that you will invite your friends so that by the time we’re finished, when we raise the candlelight and we sing “Silent Night,” they will say, “I felt something for the first time in 30 years. I think I want to go back. I need that light in my life.”

You are the key. You have to be willing to say, “Yes Lord, use me to bless and encourage others in the faith.” We practice our faith first so people can see Christ in us and then we get bold enough to say, “Will you come with me to church? I know you’re going through a tough time and when I went through a tough time this is how God helped me. I love you so much and you are my good friend. I just want to tell you what’s most important in my life and why.”

The truth is there are people in your life that no one else can reach but you. I can’t reach them and I’ll probably never meet them. “You,” as St. Francis of Assisi once said, “Are the only gospel that some will ever read.”

We wrap up with this third way that we need each other to be ordinary Saints. The Christian life is not complete when we have given our lives to Christ or grown closer to him and have a personal relationship with Jesus. It’s not completed when we learn how to pray or listen and read the Scriptures. All of that is a means to an end. Yes, we are to love God with our heart, soul, mind and strength but we are also, Jesus said, to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

I love that cartoon version of the “How the Grinch stole Christmas.” The

problem with the Grinch is that his heart was two sizes too small. Something happened to him and his heart grew and he changed. In the Christian life we talk about that is, “New Birth.” We come to faith in Christ and God begins working in us and our hearts, which may be two sizes too small, it begins to grow as we grow in faith. The process of becoming an ordinary saint is meant to turn us inside out.

By nature, we are born primarily concerned about ourselves. It’s all about me and my and I. I want to be safe and I want to do things that’ll make me feel good. The gospel calls us to move outside of ourselves and be concerned about others. The gospel calls us to see the world and others differently. We look at the world and we are meant to remember that, “The Kingdom of God is at hand.” We are meant to help the world look more like what God wants the world to be.

When God looks at our world, he sees a mess. He sees 30,000 children who die every day of starvation and malnutrition related diseases. God sees that and he hears the cries. God sees the wars that are happening in our world. God sees the poverty in which people suffer. God sees the fact that there people, even here in Durango, who are hungry over the weekend. God sees children in Honduras who need to hear the gospel and have a safe place to play. God sees all of that and he says, “Whom shall I send?”

God asks, “Who will go out for us?” What God doesn’t do is send out angels from heaven to do it, but rather people. God sends ordinary people like you and me to be the answer to people’s prayers. That is why Jesus says these words in Matthew 5: 16.

SLIDE ***16 In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.***

Sometimes we get caught up in this dichotomy where we think that we have our personal relationship with Jesus and that’s our gift and it’s up to others to go and serve the poor. James reminds us that it doesn’t work that way in chapter 2, verse 18-20.

SLIDE **18 Now someone may argue, “Some people have faith; others have good deeds.” But I say, “How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.”**
19 You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in

terror. 20 How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless?

What kind of good deeds is James talking about? He tells us in chapter 1, verse 27.

SLIDE 27 Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.

God is continually asking us to be the hands and the voice of Christ, which is why our purpose statement is what it is here at this church. We find over and over again in the Bible two words which capture this idea of what we are supposed to be doing as people of faith and what God is looking for from us when we say we are following him.

SLIDE *Mishpat* = Justice in Hebrew

Mishpat appears 421 times in the Old Testament and it is translated as justice, which is about giving access to those without wealth and power. It is about standing up for those who can't stand up for themselves. Who is going to stand for the weakest among us? Jesus gives us a picture of this when he talks about the last judgment in the last days. He asks, "Did you walk past people who were hungry and do nothing? Did you walk past people who were naked and give them clothing? Did you see those who were thirsty and offer them something to drink? Did you see those who were sick or in prison and visit them and bring them hope? Inasmuch as if you have done this for the least of these, you have done it unto me."

These are the good deeds which should come out of our faith. Let me be clear that we don't do these good deeds to get faith, but we respond to what Christ has done for us in the faith that we have received by living it out with these good deeds.

SLIDE *Hesid* = loving kindness

Hesid is mercy which are deeds done for someone else even though they might not deserve it. They have done nothing to merit you doing this loving kindness, but you do it because you choose to show mercy and grace. The New Testament talks about this in the Greek as *agape*. It is love that is given sacrificially even though it might not be deserved.

It's in this way that our faith calls us to move outside of our comfort zones and go do things that make us squirm just a bit. Our faith calls us to do things that are not always comfortable or convenient. When we first talked to this church about our purpose statement being Jesus Christ to the world, several of you came to me and said it made you very uncomfortable and I was really glad for that. It should make us a bit uncomfortable because it is something for which we have to strive and in doing so we find meaning and purpose.

Going to work at Manna Soup Kitchen on a Saturday morning is inconvenient. You could sleep in or do some other activity around your house that needs to be done or even just watch television or college football, or you could, go and serve people food who you've never met before. Why would you come and do that? We do that because God calls us and they are his people too at Manna.

Why would you give up vacation time and spend your savings on going to Honduras or Guatemala or Kenya? You might worry that you might get sick or that you will get bit by mosquitoes. You will take malaria pills and get a series of shots just so you can go on the trip. Who in their right mind does that? People whose lives have been turned inside out do this kind of thing. We do it because we are called and it's our way of living out the gospel and being those ordinary Saints. I went to Africa several years ago with a group from our church and in order to get to the village where the orphanage we sponsor is you have to take vans through the crazy streets of Nairobi, sometimes being pulled over by the police. It's hot and it's dusty and you get there and you find dozens of orphans waiting for you with signs and dressed in costumes and singing and dancing, because you as a church have built them a place with water and crops and dormitories and a library and eating facilities and chicken coops.

When you get out of the van, one of the beautiful little girls who is 3 or 4 years old comes up and wraps her arms around your leg. You pick her up and she whispers in your ear in her broken English, "I don't have a mommy or a daddy."

Here's what we need to recognize about doing mission work either in Africa or in Durango. It's not what you are going to do for them, but the fact that you will be changed by them. You will be formed into an ordinary saint by virtue of being with people who are in need. You are the one who is blessed. The truth is we can take your \$3000 that you will spend to go to one of these places and

probably do more than you will do in that one week that you are there, except that your \$3000 sends you down there so you can be changed and then come back and tell the story and physically be the presence of Jesus Christ in that place. You become God flesh all over you and that's what makes an ordinary saint. Your heart is broken and then it grows, sometimes two or three times.

It's in those times and places that you become molded and shaped and the Potter can do his work as you are placed on the potter's wheel. It only happens by nature of being involved with our hands and our hearts. The last time I went down to Manna Soup Kitchen, which unfortunately was over a month ago, we sat down and ate with those who were there that day to have a meal. One of the men I sat next to had a PhD and is homeless. I met a mother and father with two small children who had lost everything because of medical expenses. In those moments you become the hands and feet of Christ and you realize, "There, but by the grace of God, go I."

Are we living out our faith with our hands? To be the presence of Jesus Christ is not only to come here but to go out there. We give you lots of opportunities to do that. One of the things I love most about you as a congregation and one of thing that makes me so proud to be a pastor is that most of you actually do this. I have been here as your pastor for 12 years and God willing I'll be here for many more, but by the time I leave, if this community in around Durango hasn't been changed by all of you rolling up your sleeves and digging in with your hands and becoming ordinary Saints, then I will have failed you and God and we will have failed ourselves and God.

This year, our Christmas Eve offering, which we give away every year outside the walls of this church, will go to three different places. I thought it would be cool for us, as we end this sermon, to see where your offerings will go because all of them are places where you've been involved.

VIDEO Christmas Eve Offering

Do you know that looks like to me? What that looks like is being Jesus Christ to the world. I want to invite you to end with this prayer that you find up on the video screen. It was written by St. Francis of Assisi hundreds of years ago. It's still a very good prayer so let's pray together.

SLIDE *Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace;*

***Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is discord, harmony;
Where there is error, truth;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.***

SLIDE *Prayer*

Would you bow your heads as we close in prayer? I'm going to invite you to say this simple little prayer.

Lord, make me an ordinary saint.

You are the potter and I am the clay.

Here I am Lord, send me.

Gracious God, I love these people in this congregation and I know you love them far more than I do. Many of them are bold and courageous in sharing their story of what you've done in their lives. Help all of us to have that kind of courage. Help us to bear witness to your love by our actions and by our words.

God, there are so many in this room who give of themselves to serve the least of these. I pray thee would help all of us to make that our ambition in life, to serve as your hands and voice for others, and in particular those who feel invisible and forgotten.

God, help us to have a deep yearning to get connected in Sunday school classes and small groups. Help each of us to find someone with whom we are walking this journey. We thank you and praise you as you make us your ordinary Saints. In Jesus' name, Amen.