Invitation to the Table

Jesus invites us who follow him to “do this in remembrance of me.”

As we take the bread, we remember: one loaf is made from many grains of wheat.

As we drink the cup, we remember: one cup is made from many grapes.

Together, we remember: Jesus is one Lord in the lives of many followers, all called to lives of service, healing, and love.

At this table we put the many pieces of our faith into action:

many gifts, one spirit,
many songs, one voice,
many reasons, one promise.
Many followers, one church.

Come and rejoice as we find our place in the one body of Christ.

Our Communion Hymn is #399, *“O God, Unseen, but Ever Near.”*

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious God, we are filled with joy
for the ways you make yourself known to us
as we worship, sing, and live as followers of your Son, Jesus.

Creating God, you've created the cosmos, called each of us into life,
and made us partners with you in
stewardship of this earth,
supporting the good gifts of Life,
sharing from our resources to lift others into lives of justice and peace.

Loving Christ, you live again and again in the gospel stories of your life,
in the least of us—the vulnerable and the hurting,
in the witness of countless lives of faithful followers.

Empowering Spirit, grant us energy to walk with you.
Show us dreams of a better day as we seek justice, love with mercy,
and celebrate your gift of abundant life!

We pray as believers and followers of Jesus the Christ. AMEN

A Spiritual Quest for Quick Fixes

I PETER 4:12-14, 5:6-11 (NRSVUE) *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.* 13*But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.* 14*If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. . . .* 5:6*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time.* 7*Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.* 8*Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.* 9*Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.* 10*And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.* 11*To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.*

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The Word of God for the people of God!

"Cast all your anxiety on him…" It's a quote from Psalm 55; except the writer of I Peter adds a comment: "*Discipline yourselves; keep alert.*"

I have a T-Shirt… it's 27 or 28 years old, sweat-stained, faded, almost illegible, but it's precious to me. Jo Lynn made it—well, she didn't make the T-shirt, but she did a photo transfer to it: Kyle and are in my boat; he's about two or three. He's on my lap, and we're fishing. And that verse from Psalm 55 is… adapted. The shirt says, "Cast your care upon the Lord; then go fishing with Grandpa."

While there's truth and comfort in those words, they've become so hackneyed—used and misused—they almost lose their impact. Casting our cares, our burdens, our anxieties on the Lord is not a quick fix, it's a life-long discipline; which is why it's sometimes ineffective. If you do it only when you're in trouble, if you wait until you're desperate, maybe it's not too late, but you may not recognize the strength and comfort God already has given you.

Last year I started working out with a trainer; fighting the aging process… And I learned a some things. The first thing I learned was that I could do more than I thought I could. Actually, I RE-learned it. I first learned that in the Marine Corps, and it almost always catches me by surprise.

I learned to "lift to fail." That means you keep lifting until your body screams, "Are you kidding me?" And I learned that the next day I could lift more—failure isn't final. It's painful; but it isn't final.

And the next thing I learned was that if I quit, I lose everything I gained. It's a lifetime commitment; just like casting your burdens on the Lord.

Three weeks ago was Trinity Sunday, and a lot of pastors in a lot of places, preparing sermons that week, were stuck. Not for lack of ideas. Stuck because the text in front of them was about the nature of God, while outside their window the news was running footage of ICE agents detaining people at a World Cup soccer

game. The economy is contracting. There are active wars in multiple theaters. And in six days from Trinity Sunday the church calendar would flip to Ordinary Time.

Ordinary. Right.

The liturgical season of Ordinary Time runs from Pentecost to Advent, twenty-six Sundays of green banners and green paraments [Pentecost Sunday is the only day of the year the liturgical color is, officially, red; but at some point in our congregation's past it was decided to extend red through June. I love that, because Pentecost is worth more than a one-day observance.]

But, "ordinary time." The name comes from the Latin *"ordinalis,"* meaning numbered, not ordinary. But the distinction has mostly been lost, and in most settings, it's a season of placeholder Sundays, marking time between the dramatic seasons while the real work of Christian life is put on hold, waiting for Advent.

Here's what actually happens in the Lectionary during Ordinary Time. Jesus feeds a crowd of five thousand and immediately retreats to pray alone. He walks on water, terrifying the disciples. He confronts religious authorities about their treatment of the poor and vulnerable. He tells parables about money that make comfortable people uncomfortable. He asks his disciples who they think he is, and most of them get it wrong. The Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, the Greatest Commandment… In the liturgies of the church, virtually all that falls in Ordinary Time.

The lectionary has never been about keeping things calm. Last year, during ordinary time, a text about a rich young man walking away sad came up the same week a billionaire testified before Congress. The feeding of the thousand was scheduled during a week when food banks reported historically high demand. Matthew's "do not worry" passage came as markets dropped seven hundred points in a single day.[1]

It's not coincidence. It's by design. Not by specific events, but in recognition of human political, economic, and ethical cultures; because the Bible has more to say about how we treat each other than about life after death.

So if you feel the gap between the liturgical calendar and the morning headlines, you're not alone. Christians everywhere feel that gap and the discomfort between the Scripture and the headline is the point of casting our cares on the Lord.

The pulpit doesn't become a news desk. A sermon shaped by headlines is not the same as a sermon addressing the humanity—good or bad—exposed by the headlines. The first is reactive. The second is what biblical preachers have always done.

For several weeks, one of the online commentaries I read has been focusing on the preaching of Harry Emerson Fosdick. He founded Riverside Church in New York City, after he was forced to resign from First Presbyterian Church because of

[1] The previous two paragraphs are adaptations from The lectionary doesn't flinch

his anti-fundamentalist, anti-war preaching early during WWII. William Sloan Coffin was pastor there; and James Forbes, Jr. Martin Luther King, Jr. preached there a number of times.

Fosdick's practice was simple. Before he opened a commentary or wrote a sentence, he asked one question: "What's the real question my people are asking this Sunday? Not the question they would say out loud to their pastor. The one beneath it. The one that keeps them up at night. Then he opened the text.

That sequence—congregation first, then scripture—is not a departure from faithful preaching. The old Scotch preacher said every sermon should begin in Aberdene and end in Jerusalem or begin in Jerusalem and end in Aberdene—or Conway. It's how the tradition has always worked at its best. The text does not change. The questions we bring to it do. And right now, we are carrying real questions. About safety. About the future. About whether any of this holds.

Fosdick didn't abandon the liturgical tradition when the world got hard. He trusted it to say something true enough to hold up under the pressure of really hard questions. That trust is still available to us, standing at the edge of another Ordinary Time that is anything but ordinary. That trust is the core of casting our care on the Lord.

The lectionary doesn't flinch. Neither do we have to. But first we have to understand that casting our burdens on the Lord is not a quick fix. It's a life-long commitment in which we learn that we can do more than we think we can do; a commitment that teaches us that failure isn't final, and a commitment that teaches us that if we quit, we lose everything we've gained.

Pray with me.