

# Crossing Place

20 February 2022

## Ordinariness

### WELCOME

The four Sundays of February lie between Candlemas (the end of Epiphany) and Ash Wednesday (the beginning of Lent). The church calls this period Ordinary Time. So what makes Ordinary ordinary?

It is tempting to believe that this is because there is nothing 'special' happening in terms of Church liturgy, feasts or periods of time. We use ordinary as the opposite of special or extraordinary, but we should at least be aware that the ordinary in ordinary time is derived from ordinal. An ordinal number shows its order in a sequence – third, seventh, twentieth and so on.

So ordinary Sundays are simply the whateveritis Sunday in the year. For some reason the church cannot cope with just describing a Sunday as 20<sup>th</sup> February, but still has to assign it a name – this Sunday is either seventh after Epiphany, the second before Lent or Sexagesima, the eighth before Easter or Proper 7.

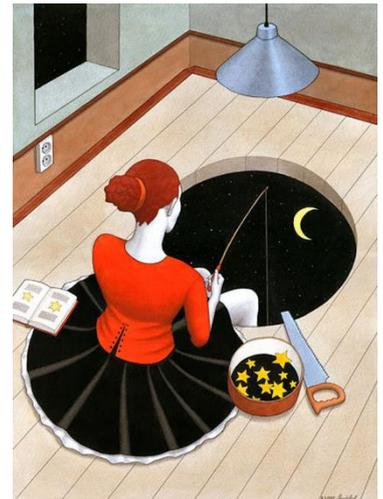
Nevertheless it is very hard to shift our mindset from assuming the word ordinary just means normal, usual, the expected thing. And I am going to follow that pattern. But I want to argue that we need to associate God with the ordinary rather than the extra-ordinary and that we limit God whenever we look for the extraordinary.

### We gather for worship

Eternal and everlasting God,  
you came to our world in Christ.  
You shared in our humanity, you walked with us.  
You still come to us through the presence of Your spirit,  
sharing in our experiences each and every day,  
sharing in our worship whatever our number,  
for where two or three are gathered, you are there.

**Be with us now as we come to you to share in worship,  
for we know nothing can separate us from your love,  
and we are all part of the body of Christ.**

**So, as we come before you in worship, to read your word and listen for your voice,  
open our eyes to your presence in the ordinariness of our lives**



*Cosmos as ordinariness*  
*Andrej Mashkovtsev 2009*

**and open our lives to your grace and power.**

**Amen**

### **Confession**

Loving God, present and near in this our ordinary world,  
yet also beyond our ordinary words and our understanding,  
help us to remember that you are at once  
infinite, boundless, timeless and eternal  
but, at the same time intimately entwined with our lives.  
You are with us no matter where we find ourselves.

When we have forgotten you

**Lord, have mercy.**

When we have failed to speak words of love

**Lord, have mercy.**

When we have neglected the need of another

**Lord, have mercy.**

**Loving God, present and near**

**help us to recognise your presence and nearness with us  
as we worship together.**

**Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

**Hymn 609** Teach me my God and King

**Readings: The ordinary and the 'permanent'.**

**The patience of ordinary things** *by Pat Schneider 2003*

It is a kind of love, is it not?  
How the cup holds the tea,  
How the chair stands sturdy and foursquare,  
How the floor receives the bottoms of shoes  
Or toes. How soles of feet know  
Where they're supposed to be.  
I've been thinking about the patience  
Of ordinary things, how clothes  
Wait respectfully in closets  
And soap dries quietly in the dish,

And towels drink the wet  
From the skin of the back.  
And the lovely repetition of stairs.  
And what is more generous than a window?

### **Comment**

Every-day things getting on with what they have to do and if there are any hidden messages – and the poet suggests that there are, then by and large we fail to notice them – indeed we rarely notice the objects themselves.

Our second poem also considers ordinary things, but ones that we might be a little more aware of:

### **Pied Beauty** *by Gerald Manley Hopkins*

Glory be to God for dappled things –  
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;  
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;  
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;  
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;  
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;  
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)  
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;  
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:  
Praise him.

### **Comment**

The first poem is about ordinary things doing what they do. This poem is also about ordinary things, being what they are. Hopkins sees them specifically as being created by God, although some also have the hand of humankind. There appears no desire on either authors' part to want to change these things. The lists they have created hold power.

### **Time for reflection**

Spend a few moments to talk with each other about the ordinary things in your life that are powerful

### **Prayer**

Lord, you are not heard in the whirlwind, the earthquake or the fire but as a still small voice of calm. Help us to see you and hear you in the ordinary things of life.

Let's bring in another dimension.

### Reading Genesis 9: 8-17 The ordinary and the fleeting/permanent

<sup>8</sup>Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: <sup>9</sup>“I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you <sup>10</sup>and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. <sup>11</sup>I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

<sup>12</sup>And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: <sup>13</sup>I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup>Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, <sup>15</sup>I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. <sup>16</sup>Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.”

<sup>17</sup>So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.”

### Comment

The passage really labours the point about what the rainbow means. The rainbow has fascinated humans over the millennia, Mainly because it was beautiful and until relatively recently no-one could explain it. (Hopkins – who knows how? ) It is an ordinary and natural event and will occur automatically whenever the right conditions are there. Nevertheless it finds a place in many religions, linking as it appears to do, heaven and earth, and certainly gets an extraordinary even supernatural gloss.

At this point I want to introduce you to an American Artist: Michael Jones McKean  
McKean is known for spending many years to complete projects. Notably, he worked for 10 years developing *The Rainbow: Certain Principles of Light and Shapes between Forms* a project that created a fully self-sufficient urban rainwater harvesting system used to create real prismatic rainbows. In 2012 the project was realized at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts. in Omaha, Nebraska

Here it is



Yet the rainbow this installation creates is no different from any other, for the reality is that there is only one rainbow – throughout the whole of time. If Noah really existed any rainbow he saw would have been no different from those we see today or future generations will see in millennia to come. It is an entirely consistent image. You could see it as a way of communing with our ancestors and with the future. But unlike the patient objects in the poem, the rainbow is fleeting, fragile, impatient, totally the product of the here and now, and reminds us of our condition, living as we only can in the present. And yet at the same time it is used in the bible to symbolise something that was regarded as permanent – the covenant mentioned. This too is a linking of past through the present into the future. Of the fleeting with something far deeper and longer lasting.

### **Prayer**

Lord God when we receive bread and wine at communion, we do not keep it, but consume it. The act is a brief fleeting moment like a rainbow, yet we see in it a much deeper significance and sharing in your love.

So let us focus for a few minutes on ordinary yet transient things through two more poems.

### **The ordinary and the fleeting**

#### **Postscript** *by Seamus Heaney*

And some time make the time to drive out west  
Into County Clare, along the Flaggy Shore,  
In September or October, when the wind  
And the light are working off each other  
So that the ocean on one side is wild  
With foam and glitter, and inland among stones  
The surface of a slate-grey lake is lit  
By the earthed lightning of a flock of swans,  
Their feathers roughed and ruffling, white on white,  
Their fully grown headstrong-looking heads  
Tucked or cresting or busy underwater.  
Useless to think you'll park and capture it  
More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there,  
A hurry through which known and strange things pass  
As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways  
And catch the heart off guard and blow it open

### **Comment**

Well, says Heaney, sometimes experiences just come out of the blue and hit you. But like rainbows they are fleeting moments – you cannot make them last longer than they do – you cannot possess them, though they have in some ways possessed you and left you open to new things.

Here's another poem that offers a different perspective.

## **The Bright Field** *by R S Thomas*

I have seen the sun break through  
to illuminate a small field  
for a while, and gone my way  
and forgotten it. But that was the  
pearl of great price, the one field that had  
treasure in it. I realise now  
that I must give all that I have  
to possess it. Life is not hurrying  
on to a receding future, nor hankering after  
an imagined past. It is the turning  
aside like Moses to the miracle  
of the lit bush, to a brightness  
that seemed as transitory as your youth  
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.

### **Comment**

R S Thomas links the fleeting moment with eternity. Like the rainbow it has two ends. Thomas also seems to indicate the treasure in the field can be possessed. In the biblical narratives all Jesus's examples of the kingdom of Heaven show that it can be obtained. If we link this to the rainbow, the principle of the rainbow is always there, we only see it in certain circumstances. Perhaps the same can be said of the Kingdom of Heaven.

### **Time for reflection and discussion**

Discuss the fleeting moments we have had that have captured something powerful.

### **Prayer**

Lord God, help us to respond to the unexpected experience that catches our heart off guard in whatever way and at whatever time that seems right.

### **Affirmation**

We believe in a sacred power within and around us.  
A divine spirit that we call by many names  
and experience in many ways,  
in the ordinary things of life,  
that empowers and heals,  
and engages with us.

We believe in our creativity.  
Making and transforming beauty

out of ordinary words and notes,  
images and colours,  
lines and pictures  
... and silence.

We believe in love.  
That can appear transitory  
in laughs and cries,  
yet challenges and comforts,  
heals and lasts.

We believe in our diversity.  
We affirm our many shapes and sizes,  
colours and traditions,  
emotions and thoughts,  
differences and similarities.

We believe in potential.  
We know who we are,  
and sometimes gain insights  
into what we might be  
and learn to grow in ordinariness.  
Amen

### **Intercessions**

Loving God,  
you have called us to be a living community,  
a people bound together as the body of Christ,  
and a family united in love.  
Yet Lord, in our broken world so many are suffering, so many are hurting.

### **Hear our prayers Lord**

For those whose lives are ruled by hate and vengeance, rather than love and justice.  
For those whose homes are not places of love or safety, but places of fear and violence.  
For those who have no home to speak of and have become invisible on our streets.  
For those who are stigmatised because of status, ill-health, ethnicity, religion.  
Lord, you asked us to love our neighbours, all of them, not just the ones we choose.  
Enable us and equip us to carry out your command  
and to make a positive difference in the lives of those who are our neighbours and are  
struggling.

### **Hear our prayers Lord**

For all those in our congregations and communities who are ill at home or in hospital – bring  
your healing hands and soothing balm upon them.  
For all who are anxiously awaiting treatment, results, or appointments,

for anxious relatives and carers who are exhausted with little or no rest, and no end in sight, while the much-needed care packages are few and far between.

Lord equip us, your servants and disciples, to assist them in their time of need.

Enable us to be beacons of light in what are still dark days.

### **Hear our prayers Lord**

For all our medical, public health, nursing and ancillary staff  
and the difficulties they face and over-stretched work environments.

May we also play our part, Lord, in protecting others.

Lord, you call us all to make a positive difference and to heal your broken world of its hurt  
and its divisions. Enable us to do this in Jesus' name and for his sake.

**Amen**

### **Final summary**

I hope we have seen how ordinary things can point to far deeper issues. Apart from at the beginning I have avoided using the word extraordinary. But I suspect that it is those fleeting experiences that are unexpected are the ones which tend to have some greater impact on us than normal, and so we might call them extraordinary. Perhaps if we had them more often, they would become ordinary. Would that be a bad thing?

**Hymn** 447 Morning has broken.

### **Blessing**

Go now and share God's love with all you meet.

Go now and share the joy of Jesus.

Go now and share the inspiring breeze of the Spirit.

Go in peace assured of God's love.

**In the Name of Christ**

Amen

Postscript

Apparently Michael McKean is currently the owner of the ill-fated Teignmouth Electron, the ship used by Donald Crowhurst to singlehandedly circumnavigate the globe and possibly commit suicide in the process in 1969.