

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



ORDINARY TIME

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A NEW PRIEST

The road to (and after) ordination

by Drew Downs

After walking with Joanna on her path to ordination for several years, it was gratifying to be there in the flesh to participate in its culmination.

Reflecting on my own process, which started twenty years ago (has it really been that long?) I can't shake how emotionally challenging it is. We, the church get to see the high points. Information sessions, discernment groups, projects and seminary.

And then, God willing and the people consenting, we see someone who has spent nearly half her life wrestling with God's calling receive the hands of her bishop and a host of other priests on her head as she is blessed and commissioned to serve.

A lot went into that moment. And into the many that follow. We are blessed by sharing the road with Joanna Benskin and may we continue to pray for her.

ORDINARY TIME

Summer 2021

IN-PERSON WORSHIP RESUMES

Pentecost celebration brought people back into the building

On Pentecost, we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit. Often referred to as "the birthday of the church" it is more notably the fulfillment of a promise Jesus made to his disciples. To put it in colloquial terms, Jesus was saying *Yeah, I gotta go. But God's sending you something **better**.*

For St. Stephen's, Pentecost served as a celebration of renewal. It was not going to be the mundane return to routine, but the chance to celebrate something we've prayed for many months: the chance to be together in an "after" time.

To the people who gathered at Pentecost, and in the Sundays since, we've shared the constant reminder of continued patience with each other as we relearn how to do what used to be so familiar. To shed renewed eyes on practices we've taken for granted. That we would stumble and step on each other's figurative (hopefully) toes. That we aren't going back to anything, but forward into something new.

ONLINE WORSHIP CONTINUES

We continue to focus on reaching out and experimenting

Since last March, we have experimented with different ways of being church online. Live-streaming, prerecording, and Zooming have all been tried and each has had its own pros and cons. Many have liked the chance to see each other while others have appreciated some more polish in the presentation. But what we have strived to maintain has been a consistency of presence. We wanted to offer people a chance to have church on Sunday morning at the very time they'd normally be in the building.

This summer we will be live-streaming the service at 10:00. It won't be perfect. The wifi and cell service could be far more reliable. And we'll be working on that. But know that whether Fr. Drew is presiding or not, we are working to provide everyone with a chance to participate.

ORDINARY TIME

Summer 2021

GATHERING CHANGES

Masks continue to be required inside for services

While many of our members are vaccinated, many others are not, either by choice or availability. Masks on everybody, therefore, remain the most significant protection for the unvaccinated. As of mid-June, barely 35% of the Vigo County population is fully vaccinated, and just 38% have had at least one shot.

Groups of vaccinated individuals may unmask

Hosting a gathering of people in which all participants are vaccinated may freely gather without masking inside or outside the building. Unlike public gatherings, attendance in small groups is more controllable and less likely to be mixed.

Increased singing

We will increase our singing throughout the summer, which will include some congregational singing. Our continued wearing of masks makes this much safer.

Sign Ups no longer required

We are tentatively lifting our attendance cap, so for now, there is no longer a need to sign up before attending our Sunday services.

Coffee Hour in the Garden

Our gathering in the garden for coffee hour has afforded a lively and much safer way of gathering each week. We will continue to gather after the 10:00 as weather permits.

Additional services begin August 8

We plan to expand our Sunday morning to services at 8:00 and 10:00 beginning August 8. The earlier service will be a spoken Holy Eucharist. The following Thursday, August 12, we will resume our noon services in the chapel.

ORDINARY TIME 2021

PATIENCE

Redeveloping the skill we thought we had mastered

by Drew Downs

You may be sick of hearing me encourage patience. It has felt the necessary refrain throughout the last fifteen months. And it is always relevant.

When we were thrown into panic and chaos in early 2020, our first thought wasn't: be patient. Far from it. We scrambled. Quickly. Urgently. Intentionally. There was always more to do. More things to try.

We told each other to create routines that would manufacture a kind of normalcy in an abnormal moment. So we set alarms, even when we didn't need to. We took showers and got dressed, even when we weren't leaving the house. We acted to create opportunities for normalcy.

Some of us lost the boundaries between work and home, working late into the night because the office is also the living room or because we spent hours playing teacher's aid for kids as they schooled-at-home. Some of us have spent 450 straight days rushing and pushing ourselves.

And many others, perhaps because of boredom or loneliness, are antsy to finally feel like they are actually doing something.

I return again to the story that has sustained me throughout the pandemic: the grumbling in the desert (Exodus 15-17). A story of human impatience. Remember that the Hebrew people were convinced God was trying to kill them. Even as God maintained a physical presence with them. Being patient with them.

Rushing is rarely God's way. Patience and discernment always is.

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