

Your Ordinary Life Is Not Too Small

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Date: 12 April 2026

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[0 : 00] All right, welcome. Good morning, everybody. My name is Anthony. I am happy to serve as one of the pastors here at the table. And we are starting a new series that will take us through June called A Stewardship of Everything, Everything We Carry.

Everything We Carry. And we carry a lot. We carry both the good and the bad. We carry the heaviness of the world and the society and the families and the households.

And the blocks and the neighborhoods that we're in. The heaviness of our souls, our pasts, and the hopes for our future and delayed dreams.

We also carry the good things. Our gifts and our talents and our happy memories and our friendships and our family. And we carry all of this and this makes us complicated, interesting people.

And something I've been thinking about tons recently is just the constant juxtaposition of the mundane and the extraordinary. Just this week, as I was picking up the poop from our new puppy, I was also very much aware that our president had threatened to destroy and end a civilization.

[1 : 23] I know this feeling all too well because it's one that comes up constantly in our culture and our society right now. I remember five years ago, my wife was doing virtual school with the kids because we were still in the midst of the pandemic.

And I had come upstairs to interrupt whatever the lesson was on how to draw a circle or a square or whatever to turn on the TV so we could watch our capital being invaded by violent tourists.

I have this sense every time of, like, when we sit down for a meal or when we play a card game or a board game. And, like, the joy and the privilege that it is to just be a person in this world, having a good time and enjoying something, while also knowing that there are those going through heartbreak and suffering.

I was, you know, in prep for the sermon, thinking, like, looking at, like, other juxtapositions. And in 1994, during the NBA finals, it was game five, and they broke into this basketball game and put it in a split screen while a white Ford Bronco was racing away from the cops.

And that was the beginning of the O.J. Simpson sort of era and trial. And so you had, like, O.J. Simpson with a gun to his head on one side of the screen and people playing basketball on the other side of the screen.

[2 : 50] And, like, what a moment of capturing the absurdity of life where all these things happen simultaneously. So if you have your Bibles, I invite you to turn to the book of Luke chapter 24, the gospel of Luke chapter 24.

Last week, of course, was Easter. And, of course, the inevitable question after Easter that we ask every single year is, Jesus is raised. Now what? So what difference does it make, if any?

And this is my second favorite post-resurrection story. I'll leave it to your imaginations to figure out my first favorite. This is my second favorite. And it's the disciples on the road to Emmaus who are walking away, and they have an encounter with the risen Jesus.

Now, there's this constant hum of anxiety underneath everything in our lives. If you don't sense it, maybe you're not paying attention.

And if you do sense it, you're exhausted by it. You never know what's next. So how do you live? How do you function when crises are enormous and constant and you have a bill to pay?

[3 : 59] How does your ordinary life matter when it feels like the world is on fire? So, Luke chapter 24, starting in verse 13.

This is the word of the Lord. It says, Now, on that same day, Resurrection Sunday, two of them were going to a village called Emmaus. My autocorrect, when I was typing this out, kept changing it to Emmaus.

And so I just imagined, it's like, oh, they're walking to Emmaus' place. Okay? So they go to Emmaus. It's about a seven-mile walk from Jerusalem. And talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

And while they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And Jesus said to them, What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?

They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?

[5 : 03] To which Jesus says, and I put this in, you know, mixed caps, What things? Jesus is plain dumb, okay? And they reply, The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was this prophet, mighty indeed, And word before God and all the people, And how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.

But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us.

They were at the tomb early this morning, And when they did not find his body there, They came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that Jesus was alive. And some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, But they did not see him.

And then Jesus said to them, Oh, how foolish you are. What a punk Jesus is sometimes, right? He goes up to them, interrupts their conversation, Pretends like he doesn't know anything, And then insults them.

Oh, how foolish you are. And how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared. Was it not necessary that the anointed, the Christ, the Messiah, Should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?

[6 : 14] And then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near to the village to which they were going, He walked along, walked ahead as if he were going on.

But they urged him strongly. Again, Jesus is being like flirtatious and coy, which I love. It's like, ah, you know, where am I going to go? I guess you guys are stopping. I guess I'll just keep walking, right?

And they're like, okay, fine. Stay with us. Because it's almost evening and the day is now nearly over. So Jesus went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them.

And then their eyes were opened and they recognized him and he vanished from their sight. And they said to each other, Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?

And that same hour, they got up and made the seven-mile walk back to Jerusalem and found the eleven and their companions gathered together. And they were saying, The Lord has risen indeed and he has appeared to Simon, to Peter.

[7 : 25] And then they told him what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. The word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

So you've got two disciples. It's the same day as the resurrection, Easter Sunday. But they don't know that yet. They have left Jerusalem. They're walking away. These are disciples who have given up.

The disciples, the twelve minus one, because Judas had committed suicide at this point, so it's the eleven, plus probably the women and some of the children who were with them, had stayed in Jerusalem.

But Cleopas and this other unnamed disciple, they start walking back. They had given up. They had believed that Jesus was going to redeem Israel, but that seemed to be over.

So they walk away. They walk away from where the action is, where the temple is, where the movement was supposed to culminate. They're going home. For them, it's over. This whole Jesus thing did not work.

[8 : 26] Rome won. Their leader was executed. It's the end. Past tense, they said, We had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel.

So Jesus comes near them and goes to them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. So on a road between Jerusalem and Emmaus, a village so unremarkable we don't know where it is, Jesus shows up.

Not at the temple, not at the halls of power, but on a commute, a sad commute. This is where I think a stewardship of the ordinary begins.

Because to begin with, Jesus shows up and doesn't redirect them back to Jerusalem. He doesn't say, Turn around, you're going the wrong way. He walks their direction. He joins them on their retreat back home.

The ordinary path that they're already on becomes the site of divine encounter. And Jesus asks, What are you discussing with each other while you walk along? And they stop, and their faces are sad, downcast, gloomy.

[9 : 34] These are not pilgrims on a spiritual journey. These are people retreating from a catastrophe. It's clear that this fires back. Are you the only person who doesn't know?

And of course, the irony, which the reader knows, is enormous, right? He's talking to the one person who does know. The person with the crucifixion scars in their body.

The one that they're mourning is standing in front of them, but they can't yet see it. The disciples are drowning. They have lost hope.

They've quit. And what I love is that Jesus does not scold them. Yet. He does call them a little foolish, but he doesn't scold their grief.

He doesn't scold the retreat or the walk back. He simply says, This was all written. He doesn't open with an accusation. He simply asks, What happened?

[10 : 31] And lets them tell their side of the story. He walks alongside. In any given week as a pastor, there's a significant number of conversations with folks who are going to be anxious or scared or feel like they need to give up.

And one of the common threads in those conversations is this idea that they're alone. That they feel silly. That they feel like they're the only one who feels like this.

Which, of course, is just not true because I have this conversation more than once. Lots of times each week. There are lots of people who are anxious and scared and who want to give up and don't understand why they are part of this thing called faith anymore.

And it's precisely there, in that moment of giving up, that Jesus shows up. And this is a resurrected Jesus. This is a Jesus who has conquered sin and death and has trampled hell and Satan and the grave.

And one of his first acts is not to go to Caesar and go to Rome and say, I told you so. No. One of his first acts is to walk alongside the scared and the anxious and the depressed and the confused and the retreating on an unremarkable road to an unremarkable village.

[11 : 55] So they arrive at Emmaus and Jesus is the coy little flirt who pretends like he's going to keep going. And what I actually think is happening, what I think is interesting, is that Jesus does not force himself in.

He doesn't say, you need to hear this, you need to let me in. He doesn't bang down their door. He gives these two disciples a choice. They get to their house, they make their way into the entrance and Jesus makes his way out.

He gives them the option to say, we're not interested. He gives them the option to say, you keep on going, we need the night to ourselves. But they say, stay with us.

Stay with us. I hear Ira Glass in this American life. Anybody else know what I'm talking about?

Okay, thank you. They say to Jesus, stay with us.

And this is the hinge of the whole story. This is not an act of strength. They're not hosting out of abundance. They're not hosting out of a sense of, let's throw a party.

[13 : 09] They host from a sense of need. They needed the company. They were sad and confused. And something about this stranger on the road who opened the scriptures to them made them not want to be alone.

This is hospitality as vulnerability. Hospitality out of a sense, not of excess, but out of need. food. Not a put together dinner party.

This is a please don't leave us alone tonight kind. And so then when he was at the table with them, he took bread and he blessed it and he broke it and he gave it to them.

And if that sounds familiar, that's the words that we say every week at the table. It is the communion liturgy and it is a litany throughout the gospels at the feeding of the 5,000 and the 4,000 and the Last Supper and here at Emmaus he takes the bread and he breaks it and he gives it.

And the whole passage builds towards this. And notice, by the way, as a quick little aside, that the moment that their eyes are opened is not at the exposition of the word.

[14 : 18] It's not at Jesus' great preaching and exegeting skills. It's at the breaking of bread. Now I realize the irony here as I am here expositing the word for you.

But there was this turn around the Protestant Reformation where the center of the worship service moved away from the Eucharist, what our Catholic siblings call the Mass, and towards the exposition of Scripture.

And there were some good historical reasons for this. Scripture had become more and more mysterious to the common person because it had only been available in Latin and if you did not speak Latin, you were sort of lost. And so then there was everything that Tyndale and Martin Luther were doing about making Scripture available in the vernacular, in your available language.

And then as the Protestant Reformation went on, then that exposition of Scripture became the center point of the gathering. Now part of it was because there were centuries of not really understanding what Scripture said or did.

but I think something was lost because we moved away from Eucharist and Thanksgiving and the Lord's table and towards a speaker who was an expert on a stage telling you what the Bible meant.

[15 : 25] But in Jesus' economy of theology and of getting people to understand what God was up to, yes, Jesus taught, yes, Jesus used his words, but when he wanted to explain what the cross was about to do, he did not give them an exposition, he gave them a meal.

When the disciples could not see Jesus, could not understand who Jesus was standing right there in front of them, it was not in the exposition of the Scriptures from Moses to the prophets that got them to understand the divine in their midst.

It was the breaking of bread. And I think there's something worth paying attention to here. Anyway, all of this is to say is that the ordinary is the instrument of revelation.

It is in grains and grapes brought together and served at a meal where the divine presence is made known. The ordinary is the instrument of revelation.

It is the mundane things of the world that God uses to make themselves known. And I don't mean this as a replacement for the supernatural. I mean this is the place where the supernatural breaks forth and is revealed.

[16 : 36] As the poet says, earths crammed with heaven and every common bush of fire with God, but only he who takes off his shoes.

The rest sit round and pluck blackberries. Or as the mystic Meister Eckhart said, apprehend God in all things, for God is in all things.

Every single creature is full of God and a book about God. Every creature is a word of God. If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature, even a caterpillar, I would never have to prepare a sermon.

So full of God is every creature. Whereas the psalmist says, the earth is filled with the glory of God. Now the danger of a sort of find God in the ordinary kind of preaching, which I'm very much aware of, is that it can flatten down to a sort of just like a just be nice to your neighbors kind of epic therapeutic deism with a casserole. But that's not what Emmaus is. This is the risen Christ, the one who walked out of a tomb, who is actually mystically present at a table.

[17 : 46] The ordinary, in my view, does not replace the transcendent. The ordinary is where the transcendent lives. We are called the table church.

And that's not merely a brand. It's meant to be a confession. Whenever you gather together, do this in remembrance of me. At every meal, at every table, every time bread is broken and shared, there is the possibility of encounter.

Every creature is full of God and is a book about God. So we're starting this new series that will carry us on into June, Everything We Carry.

And it's that double meaning of both the good and the bad. We carry the heavy things and the grief and the anxiety and the scars and the weight of the world that feels like it's falling apart.

And we carry the capacity for moon joy, for excitement, for the possibility of new things, to help and to feed and to send a text to a struggling friend and to say, Stay with us.

[18 : 53] So yes, it's a series about stewardship. And we'll do some, like, pulling apart and plucking and decolonizing around that word. And yes, we'll talk about money and finances and resources, not only to the 501c3 called the table church, but also, how do we make sure that our friends and our neighbors and maybe even our enemies are resourced?

Stewardship of the ordinary means both. It means tending to our burdens and our weights and tending to the gifts because often they're mingled together. I have no ability to stop a nuclear threat, a threat to end of civilization.

I am not in the room where it happens, where those decisions get made. I don't hold the launch codes and I'm not in the presidency here. But if I look at Jesus, Jesus did not go to Rome after the resurrection.

He could have. He had just conquered death. If there was ever a moment to storm the palace, that was it. But instead, Jesus goes to a road to two sad people and hosts a meal.

And so I think that's our model. Not powerlessness, not a belief that there is nothing that we can do, not powerful displays of authority, but ordinary people.

[20 : 13] The risen Christ puts on, puts the ordinary ahead of the spectacular. As Trevor said it a few weeks ago, one of the best acts of resistance we can do is host a barbecue to get to know our neighbors.

If we want to build a new kind of society, it helps if I know my neighbor's name. So stewardship happens in the most ordinary ways. I may not be able to stop a nuclear holocaust, but I can build a world and a society in which it's worth living in.

I can feed up my friend. I can send a text. I can check in on someone I haven't heard from in a while. And I know it seems so small. It can seem embarrassingly small against the scale of the crises.

But the disciples didn't do anything impressive either. They were sad and they were walking in the wrong direction. They told a stranger how sad they were and yet they still said, stay with us.

And that was enough for the risen Christ to show up. I cannot allow my joy to be hitched to an erratic bully. And I cannot let the whims of politics dictate whether my ordinary life has meaning.

[21 : 27] That's a form of surrender. The resistance is this. I will care for you. I will stay at the table and I will keep breaking bread. And if the world tells me that's too small to matter, I point to Emmaus and say, but that's where Jesus showed up.

In the show Shrinking, the old, wise, cantankerous mentor played perfectly by Harrison Ford is encouraging his younger colleague to start living life again.

But his younger colleague is afraid because of all the pain that he has experienced and that he has caused. He doesn't want any more scars or wounds. To which Harrison Ford says, what a shame to live 42 years and not have a body full of scars.

Scars mean you stayed in the game. It means you stayed at the table. You kept showing up even when the community disappointed you or the friend let you down or the church turned its back.

And the temptation, which I know personally the temptation is to respond to disappointments by either performing your way back to worthiness and proving you deserve love or the opposite, fawning and overfunctioning and doing whatever anyone asks you to so they won't leave.

[22 : 45] Or, you can just abdicate. If I don't engage, I'll never get hurt again. I'll be safe. But each of those are refusals to let the ordinary be enough.

Both say, my plain presence at this table isn't sufficient and I need to earn this. But Emmaus says otherwise. The disciples didn't earn their way to a revelation of God.

They just said, stay with us. In a few minutes, we're going to have a picnic together, outside, with ordinary food and ordinary company.

And if you're the person who usually leaves early, who slips out after the benediction and avoids the crowd, I know your type. I am your type. But the invitation today is to stay.

To talk to somebody or allow yourself to be talked to by someone you don't know. to experience what it is to relate to another person because you just might find Jesus there.

[23 : 51] The disciples on the Emmaus Road invited a stranger to dinner and that stranger turned out to be the risen Lord which makes very literal that Matthew 25 passage. I was hungry and you gave me something to eat.

I was thirsty. You gave me something to drink. I was naked. You clothed me. I was in prison and you visited me. And Jesus does that. He shows up and the disciples don't recognize him and they

invite him in anyway.

And on the flip side of that is when we allow ourselves to be helped and to be fed and to be carried, we give someone else the chance to encounter Christ in us.

We don't have to be invincible. We don't have to have it all figured out. All we need to say not only to Jesus but to one another is stay with us.