

**Celebrating the Daughters of the King during ‘Ordinary Time’** Reading: Mark 2:23-3:6 Prop. 4/B  
By the Rev. Karen Faye Siegfriedt; St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, Atascadero CA 6/2/24

Today we are celebrating two events: The beginning of the liturgical season known as ‘ordinary time’ and the acceptance of Judy Lewis into the ‘Daughters of the King.’ I will address both events in today’s sermon.

Ordinary Time, which is also referred to as the ‘Green Season’ is anything but ordinary in the liturgical calendar. Sure, the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter and Pentecost, all celebrate the special events in the life of Jesus and his early disciples. But during the Green Season, we learn how to mature in the faith by following in Jesus’ footsteps. The readings that are presented to us during this particular season, offer us insight on how to do just that. In summary, we are cultivating the soil of our spiritual lives so that we may become the good news of compassion, generosity, peace, and justice.

Each year, over a three-year cycle, we read a different synoptic gospel during ordinary time. This year, we will read the gospel of Mark which is considered the oldest and most reliable of the gospels. That is because it was written closer to the time of the events and focuses more on Jesus’ actions rather than interpretations of his actions (as is found in the gospels of Matthew & John). Mark was not one of the original apostles but was a companion of Peter. Mark wrote this gospel for a gentile audience in order to deepen the faith of the members of his community. The Gospel of Mark has several unique characteristics. It reports nothing concerning Jesus’ birth, his childhood, or his activities prior to the time when he was baptized by John the Baptist. For Mark, the real significance of Jesus’ career began at the time of Jesus’ baptism and his decision to devote his life to the work of God’s kingdom. His gospel begins as follows:

*“The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”* {Mark 1-3}

“Throughout the gospel, Mark emphasizes Jesus’ humanity. For example, when Jesus becomes weary from his many activities, some people question whether he is behaving in a normal manner. At one point during the early ministry in Galilee, his friends are greatly disturbed because of the way he attracts attention, and even the members of his own family suspect that he is ill. However, Jesus never claims any greatness for himself over that of other people. When an ardent admirer calls him “Good teacher,” Jesus promptly rebukes him, saying that no one should call him good since that quality belongs only to God.

In Mark’s gospel, “Jesus never claimed to have any special power that was not available to others. The miracles that he performed were not meant to display any power of his own but rather to show how the power of God could be used in and through human lives. He even told them they would perform greater works than he had done. Mark gives a rather full account of Jesus’ teachings and activities during the days preceding Jesus’ trial and crucifixion. In the end, he tells about the women’s visit to the tomb and their surprise at finding Jesus risen from the dead.” {Info from commentaries} The earliest manuscript of Mark’s gospel concludes with the following: *“So [the women] went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”* {Mark 16}

The topic of today’s reading from the gospel of Mark is about Sabbath keeping. When this commandment was first given to the Israelites as they were crossing the desert, it was a gift, a joy, a time of rest and relaxation. After all, when the Israelites were slaves, they never had enough time to recuperate from their heavy labors. So to have permission to take a day off was a cause for celebration, offering rest to the weary. Over time, this commandment morphed into rigid rules and regulations to the point that it became devoid of compassion and joy. This is where today’s gospel story picks up.

As Jesus and his disciples were traveling, they became hungry and began to pluck some grain from the field. The Pharisees criticized him for not keeping the Sabbath Holy, as harvesting grain was forbidden on the Sabbath day. Well I don’t know about you, but for me, remaining hungry has little to do with keeping sabbath. In response to their criticism, Jesus said: “The sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the sabbath.” {Mark 2} To prove his point, Jesus then healed a man on that sabbath day which technically was unlawful according to Jewish Law. By doing so, Jesus challenged the powers of the day that tried to corrupt and destroy the creatures of God. Sometimes, these powers were those of the religious establishment, trying to control the people. In response to his actions, the Pharisees then went out and conspired with the Herodians on how to destroy Jesus.

I remember having to keep the Sabbath when I was a child. After going to Church on Sunday, we would then sit around reading the newspaper, maybe watch a ball game on TV, and having dinner together. It was quite boring for me as we were not allowed to go out and play with our friends. But on the other hand, it was a relaxing day for my father, who worked all week and did household chores on Saturday. It was also the one day of the week when my family stayed together. Since all stores, athletics, and businesses were closed on Sundays, most other families could also be together, taking time to relax and enjoy one another. This is not so today...in our culture of seeking “bigger, better, faster, and more” which often deprives families of a designated day when they can gather together. A lack of sabbath taking creates stress and exhaustion for so many people today. 😞

The 10 Commandments were a powerful landmark in the journey of the Hebrew people toward God, but they were not the whole story. This 4th Commandment specifies that the Sabbath applies to the entire household and even to the animals. It also applies in principle to the land and its use. From this insight, we practice crop rotation as well as allowing the land to lay fallow for a period of time, thus creating more robust crops.

The meaning of the Sabbath centers on God’s wish that all Creation remain in peace and in harmony. Setting apart a time for intentional reflection on our covenant with God helps to maintain this level of spiritual comprehension. Acknowledging the sacredness of the rhythm of all Creation turns our thoughts from self-worship and shortsighted materialism toward a deeper view of life. Over and above the visible times and places, we, as God’s people, are capable of creating moments of glory and holiness in the very midst of the chaotic culture in which we live, even in business and in travel. The pause...the rest...the silence...the hallowing...keep it holy!

THERE IS A SABBATH ATTITUDE TOWARD LIFE that not only gives us peace personally but also is contagious in the eyes of others. So I want to thank you for keeping the Sabbath holy. Thank you for putting aside time from your busy lives to be together in community, to listen to the Word of God, and to share in a church barbeque that will happen today, one that is opened to the entire community of Atascadero. Thank you for coming together to celebrate the acceptance of Judy Lewis into the Order of the Daughters of the King!

The Daughters of the King are Christian women, both lay and ordained, who are strengthened through the discipline of a Rule of Life and through the companionship of their sisters. These daughters are all at different stages of their Christian journey – some have just begun while others have been on this path for a long time. Their vision is to know Jesus Christ, to make Him known to others, and to become reflections of God’s love throughout the world.

On a practical level, they have two rules: The rule of Prayer and the Rule of Service. As part of this rule, they offer their support to the clergy for the good of the parish and the extension of Christ’s Kingdom. They will wear the cross of the Order as an outward sign of their commitment to a life-long program of Prayer, Service, and Evangelism.

Finally, I want to say a few words about the importance of a life of prayer to which they are committed. Praying for others is known as intercessory prayer. Intercessors are people who are not satisfied with the way things are now in our chaotic world. Instead, they visualize an alternative future into being through prayer and action, thus helping create a different reality than what is. Through prayer, they create a larger opening, an invitation where the Holy Spirit of God can enter in, doing more than any of us can ever hope or imagine. Nothing in this world is fixed. History will belong to the intercessors who believe the future into being!

Even a small number of people, firmly committed to a new future on which they have fixed their imaginations, can decisively affect the shape the future will take. So thank you to all who are committed to a life of prayer and service for the betterment of our families, our church, our country, and all of creation. If the Episcopal Church in general and St. Luke’s Church in particular want to thrive into the future as a visible force that is relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, then it is imperative that we nurture the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our congregations through prayer, service, and outrageous acts of love.

The Motto of The Order of the Daughters of the King is this: “For His Sake, I am but one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. What I can do, I ought to do. What I ought to do, by the grace of God, I will do. Lord, what will you have me do?”

Judy Lewis and presenters, will you please come forward so we can present the cross of The Order as a mark of membership. It is a modified Greek Fleury cross, inscribed in Latin, “*Magnanimiter Crucem Sustine,*” meaning “With heart, mind and spirit uphold and bear the cross.” (*literally translated as: Carry the cross generously*)