

“God is in the Details”

Theme: Ordinary Saints – Encountering God in Everyday Life

Scripture: John 15:4-5. 8-13

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon:

Meditation Moments for Monday, November 3 – Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14-24 – 1

Thessalonians is one of the first letters Paul wrote to early Christian converts. He wanted them to let their new loyalty to Christ shape their whole life, not just at church but every single day! Paul clearly believed this new life in Christ was for everyone, not just for a select “spiritual” few.

- Go through this passage and note all of the sweeping, inclusive words like “everyone,” “nobody,” “always,” “continually,” “in all circumstances,” and the like. Do you believe the promise in verse 24? Where do you see you and God making progress in your spiritual growth?
Where are you patiently awaiting growth?
- Verses 14-15 deal with how you treat others. Verses 16-18 focus more on your personal spiritual practices, on how your character grows. What links do you see between the two sets of verses? Can you consistently treat others well if you are not committed to walking with God in your inner growth process?

Tuesday, November 4 – Read 1 John 1:5-2:6 – John describes a central tension that keeps many of us from carrying our faith into everyday life. We don’t like to fail, and we know we sometimes will. So we may be tempted to not even try to live deeper spiritual lives. John says we always live in God’s forgiveness. He also tells us that, as a goal, nothing less than living like Jesus will do.

- John writes about truth and lies, notably in the realm of self-deception. How easy or hard do you find it to be honest with yourself (about yourself)? What distinction do you see between hurtful self-hatred and being able to face up clearly and openly to where you need to grow? How does God help you do the second rather than the first?
- John also talks about “light” and “darkness.” List the things you believe are part of “walking in the light.” Then list the things you believe are part of “walking in darkness.” Which things in the second list used to be true of you, but no longer are? How much of God’s light are you open to in your daily life?

Wednesday, November 5 – Read 1 Kings 16:29-33, 18:16-21, 36-39 – In human terms, King Ahab was a success. He reigned for forty years, built a great palace and many other buildings. But Elijah the prophet was blunt: spiritually, Ahab and Queen Jezebel were off the mark. Many Israelites were undecided. Serving God was fine, they thought. But what harm could it do to also worship Baal along with the royal couple?

- Elijah called, and the text says fire dropped from heaven. (Middle Eastern art from that time often showed the gods throwing thunderbolts.) Have you ever wished that you could see a sign of God’s presence that was that dramatic? What evidence (quieter though it might be) have you seen of God’s presence with you every day?
- Did you ever wonder why Israel would have been drawn to worship Baal? One writer said, “To a Canaanite farmer, worshipping Baal made as much sense as fertilizing the fields does to a modern farmer.” You’d never worship Baal—but what things does “everybody” do today that may pull you away from serving God?

Thursday, November 6 – Read Ezekiel 1:1-2:2 – Ezekiel spoke to people in deep spiritual crisis. They were exiles in Babylon. Psalm 137:1-5 shows them asking, “How can we worship God when we aren’t in Jerusalem, when our Temple is wrecked?” Ezekiel’s awesome vision showed God “on wheels.” It said, “God isn’t stuck in one place, even Jerusalem. God can go with you wherever you go in life!”

- This vision of an awesomely “mobile” God can be deeply comforting. What are the places, physical or emotional, that most tend to trigger your feelings of fear? Carry Ezekiel’s “appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD” with you into those settings. See if it doesn’t give you more courage in the face of your fear.
- On the other hand, there may be times in your life when you’d like to draw the curtain, to not have God present with you. Honestly (remember Tuesday’s reading from 1 John), are there things you do or places you go that you’d rather leave God out of? If so, talk those over with our gracious, life-changing God today.

Friday, November 7 – Read 2 Corinthians 4: 7-18 – Paul gives us a profound sense of God’s presence with us in all of life. He was very clear that we don’t live godly lives on our own—we are “clay jars” holding God’s treasure. But when God is with us, we’re never destroyed, never abandoned, never crushed. Every day lived with Jesus (even the bad ones) is a transforming day, leading to eternal glory!

- Paul calls this life’s troubles “light and momentary.” He’s not in denial. He knows life’s trials well. He’s not trying to convince anyone that it’s great to be struck down, hard-pressed or persecuted. But he’s clear that some of the results, the pay-offs, of serving Christ come in eternity, not now. And he’s just fine with that. Are you?
- At the same time, note the ways Paul expresses his buoyant resilience. He sums them up in verse 16: “we do not lose heart.” In what ways are suffering and perseverance building character and hope in you (see Romans 5:1-3)? How can you draw on Paul’s eternal outlook to develop greater inner strength and resilience every day?

Saturday, November 8

Personal Application: You can deepen your personal experience with God, and live your life in contact with eternity. But it takes more than listening to sermons to do that. Use the tool you received at church last weekend. Make a conscious choice to practice the presence of Jesus. Pause, often, each day to say, "Jesus, thank you that you're with me, here and now. Shape what I do, how I think, and the choices I make."

Family Activity: As a family, list all the places you have been in the last year. Include everything from states and countries to different rooms in your house. Read Psalm 139:1-18. Discuss how the Bible tells us God is with us everywhere we go. Obtain a large piece of butcher paper or newsprint. Gather old magazines, scissors and glue. Use these materials to create a picture collage of "spaces and places." Cut your family's list apart and glue it in strips on the collage as well. Somewhere on your collage, write the words, "God is always with us." You might also want to write some verses or phrases from Psalm 139 on your collage. Thank God for always being with you, no matter where you are.

Prayer: Lord God, help us to see the many opportunities we have each day to engage you in conversation and invite you into our lives. Thank you for being the God who reaches out to us, always, in love. Amen.

***THEME: Ordinary Saints – Encountering God in Everyday Life
"God is in the Details"***

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

November 1-2, 2014 at First United Methodist Church - Durango

Scripture Reading – John 15:4-5 and 8-12

5 "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. 6 Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned.

8 When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father. 9 "I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. 10 When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. 11 I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! 12 This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.

VIDEO Ordinary Saints Week 1 Sermon Starter

SLIDE “God is in the Details”

None of us think of ourselves as Saints. When we think of Saints we tend to think of people like Mother Teresa who went to Calcutta and devoted her life to working with the poor. Now that’s a saint! We might think of somebody who lives in the monastery somewhere because they have given themselves wholly to God. We tend to think about these folks and then we think to ourselves, “But I’m just an ordinary person. I’m not a saint.”

Most of us would feel more like Robert Mulholland, who in his book *The Deeper Journey* described his own spiritual life as a, **“Mud pie covered with a thin veneer of Christian icing.”**

We see our shortcomings and our failings and we think that to be a saint is something that is way outside of our league. Yet the Bible calls all of us to be Saints and in fact calls us Saints already. The Scripture says that we are set apart by God for God’s purposes. We are God’s workmanship. We are God’s people and we are called to be holy, to become the presence of Jesus Christ the world. We are called to be Saints.

In this sermon series that we begin today called ordinary Saints we are looking to see how ordinary people like me and like you live out our life more fully and completely as followers of Jesus Christ. How can we experience more of God in our everyday lives? How can we walk with God each day and invite God to walk with us? How is it that we can experience the life to which God calls us?

Each week of this sermon series I will offer you several concrete suggestions as to how we can go deeper in our faith and more authentically live out our faith in Jesus Christ. I want to invite you to take out of your bulletin your Meditation Moments and your Message Notes. Those of you who are watching online, you can download this resource right off our website. Today I’m going to give you four ideas that are very simple and I would like to encourage you to try them each day this week and see what happens. See if these things don’t help you to take the next step in becoming an ordinary saint, the presence of Jesus Christ in the world. You can write those things down in the blank lines, below the Scripture text, that will be reading from today.

Then there are Scripture readings and questions for reflection for each day. I would invite you to take this home with you and each morning when you wake up or each night before you go to bed spend some time reading scripture and reflecting on these questions. It takes just a few minutes each day and I think it will help you grow in your faith.

Let's begin by looking at the goal of Christian spirituality. What is it supposed to look like as you seek to become like Christ? I want you to recognize that spirituality is kind of an amorphous term. I know atheists who talk about spirituality and every faith in the world talks about spirituality in some form. When we use the word spirituality we are really talking about the interior life, the deepest center of who we are, out of which comes our decision making, our values and how we act towards others. All of that starts with something that is in our heart, mind and soul, which is probably why Jesus said we should love God with those things and that is the greatest commandment. There is this understanding in scripture, both Old and New Testament that everything starts with our love of God and our sense that we are loved by God which takes root in our heart, soul and mind.

There are things that shape your heart and soul so when we talk about growing spiritually as Christians the aim is to allow God to shape our heart and soul so that we become more like Christ and what God wants us to be. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, was asked in the 18th century as the movement was starting, "So what exactly is a Methodist?"

He wrote a little tract in 1742 called, "The Character of a Methodist," in which he said these words.

Methodists are those who love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength and love their neighbor as they love themselves. They try to rid themselves of all conscious sin. The Methodist is one whose one desire and one design of his life is namely not to do his own well, but the will of Him who sent him. His one intension at all times and in all things is not to please himself but Him whom his soul loveth.

For Wesley, this is the ideal for which we are striving. In every situation we should be looking for doing the will of God instead of our own will. It doesn't mean we have done that but it is what we are working towards, to love God wholly and completely and to make that the deepest desire of our lives. We might

acknowledge that this is a good thing and we even pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We may want that but we struggle to figure out how to get there in my ordinary life. How do I come to a place where my deepest desire is not about my will but about God’s will?

Recently I was visiting with someone who was sharing with me their frustration because they have been trying to change for years. She said to me, “I have realized that I just can’t change myself. And that is so frustrating!”

She was right because in many ways we can’t change ourselves. As followers of Jesus Christ and those who believe in God what we acknowledge is that we believe that God is the one who does the changing. When you are part of Celebrate Recovery or any good 12 step program there is a recognition that we are powerless to change ourselves and we need a higher power that will help us. When it comes to changing our soul, we can’t do that on our own, but we can create a space where it can happen. We can make it possible for God to work in us as we make ourselves available to him and his Holy Spirit.

But here is a truth about God. God will never force himself upon you. God will never make you change. God waits for your invitation and it’s up to you to say, “God, please change me. Mold me and make me into something you want me to be.” This is where Isaiah 64:8 is helpful.

SLIDE *8 And yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, and you are the potter. We all are formed by your hand.*

(Use the Potter Long Play video behind the Isaiah text and leave up the video without the text until it finishes.)

I like this picture of God as the potter, molding and shaping our hearts. God can change us when we can’t change ourselves. I don’t know if you have ever watched a potter work the potter’s wheel with a lump of clay but we had that in worship about four years ago when Pastor Buff Hearn made this chalice and plate that we use for communion. You can see that here on the video screen and you can imagine God doing this with our souls.

We invite God to be the potter and we recognize we start off as a mud pie, that clay, that God begins to mold and shape. Every day as we pray and lay ourselves on God’s potter’s wheel, God uses the circumstances in our lives, both the painful things and the blessings, to make us into something beautiful. God

uses our spiritual disciplines and the things we do to practice our faith like coming to worship or singing songs of praise and God shapes us into the person that he longs for us to be. Paul says this in one of his letters when he says that we are God's handiwork, God's poetry, God's work of art and God creates and shapes us if we are willing to place ourselves in God's hands.

Our first task in the spiritual journey as we are seeking to become the presence of Jesus Christ in the world and experience more of God in our lives is simply to ask for God to do that in us. We say, "Lord, you be the Potter and I'll be the clay. Make me into the person that you want me to be." When you say that you are both giving invitation for God to do what only God can do and you are fixing your heart on that desire. When we say this every day that we want this to happen in our lives, that in itself begins to shape us.

Many of us talk about being followers of Jesus Christ but do we really want that change to happen in us? Every week when I preach my aim is not to give you information but to move you towards transformation. Preaching in the act of worship is not just meant to inform you, it's meant to transform you, but that only happens if we want it to happen. Do we want to be formed into the image of Christ?

Harry Emerson Fosdick, one of the great preachers of the early 20th century talked about this when he talked about prayer. He said, "Prayer is not telling God stuff that God doesn't already know. Prayer is fixing your own heart's desire on that thing and saying that this is what I really care about." We ask God to change our lives and our hearts then we open ourselves up to that through prayer. So here's the first suggestion I would give you for becoming an ordinary saint.

SLIDE Begin every morning with prayer asking God to shape you.

Each morning I begin by getting up and kneeling next to my bed or doing a stretching video in which I pray Psalm 118, "This is the day the Lord has made and I will rejoice and be glad in it." I'm a kinetic person so it works best if I moving when I pray and so I do that while I stretch or walk. I pray for my wife and my kids and I pray for all of you. I ask God to shape me and help me be the person that God wants me to be that day. After the sermon this week I probably will say something like, "God you are the Potter and I am the Clay. Mold me and make me into what you want me to be."

That is a simple prayer and when you can use every day this week in the morning as you begin your day. “God, you are the Potter and I am the Clay. Make me and mold me and shape me into what you want me to be.” You may not say a prayer this way but there are a variety of ways that we can pray in this way and yield our will to God’s will. You might say the Lord’s Prayer every morning so you are praying, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth and in my life as it is in heaven.”

You might pray the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Not my will but thy will be done all Lord.” That simple breath prayer is a powerful one that invites God to shape you and mold you. You might pray the prayer that we have taught you here in that John Wesley taught his pastors in the early Methodist movement. “I am no longer my own but thine, put me to what you will.”

When we begin each day surrendering ourselves to God and inviting God to shape us we take a great first step into becoming more like Christ and being on that spiritual journey of every day Saints. We allow God to work in and through us and I invite you to keep that image in mind about God being the Potter and we are the Clay. I invite you to make a daily invitation, yielding yourself into the hands of God.

That’s how we begin our day but we have a problem as Christians and human beings. I heard one pastor call it, “spiritual dementia.” Spiritual dementia works like this. I pray that prayer early in the morning. Then I take a shower and get dressed and hopefully have some breakfast and I get in the car and go to work or to some other task I have the day. Somebody pulls in front of me before letting me have my turn at the new three-way stop on Florida Road and County Road 250. All of a sudden I forget that I prayed that prayer just an hour before. Now I am just irritated with this person who has pulled out in front of me.

This doesn’t happen in my office, because all of the people who work here are pretty perfect, but you might get to your office and you find imperfect people. And there is that person who was backbiting or gossiping about you. Maybe they did the wrong thing or they took advantage of you or they took credit for some work that you did. Then you have to deal with them and you totally forget that you prayed two or three hours earlier, “Lord, mold me and make me into the

person that you want me to be.” Instead you are focused on how irritated you are by that person.

Maybe go to school and your friends are having these conversations with you and you get caught up in the gossip about other people. You have totally forgotten about allowing God to mold you and shape you and you end up talking about other people just like everybody else does. You blame people and put them down in order to help yourself look better because you have forgotten.

We have forgotten what we prayed in the morning and we have spiritual dementia. The story of the Old Testament is actually very simple because it is the story of people who suffered from spiritual dementia. Let me give you the twitter or text version of the Old Testament. Are you ready?

God saved his people. They were thankful and they promised to follow God as their King. God blessed them and they forgot where the blessings came from. They wandered away from God. They stopped experiencing God’s blessings. They got in trouble. They cried out to God and God save them. Then, in their gratitude, they promised to follow God as their King. God blessed them and they forgot where the blessings came from. They wandered away from God. They got in trouble. They cried out for help and God save them. Then they promise to follow God as their King and God bless them. They forgot what a blessing came from and...

Are you following the plot? This is the story of the Old Testament and it’s repeated over and over and over again, because they suffered from spiritual dementia. Knowing this about ourselves means that it’s not enough to say our prayer at 6 o’clock in the morning and then that is all the attention we give to our spiritual life the entire day. Instead, we seek to abide in Christ and stay connected to Christ. Jesus gave this powerful image in John 15, beginning with verse four.

SLIDE 5 “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. 6 Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. 8 When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

Jesus is giving this talk and sharing this parable at the Last Supper in John's gospel. In just a few hours Jesus will be arrested. A few hours later he will be nailed to the cross and a few hours later he will be dead and shortly after buried in the tomb. He will rise from the dead and then some time later he will ascend into heaven and his disciples will not see him anymore. He says to them, "I'm going to leave you and you won't see me, but I will still be with you. I need you to remember that I am with you and I need you to stay connected to me as a vine stays connected to its branches, because if you don't stay connected to me then you will wither away and you won't bear the fruit for which I'm looking. Abide in me and I will remain in you and things will be okay."

I was thinking about how I might capture this idea of abiding in Christ and not just saying our prayers early in the morning and thinking that's good enough. I went out late this week and I got these beautiful flowers. I got both sets of flowers at the same time. These flowers I put in water and these I simply set in the vase without any water. This is just 24 hours without being connected to a source of nourishment and this is what happens. Jesus says, "If you abide in me and I abide in you, if you stay connected to the vine like the branches of a plant, then you will bear much fruit. But if you disconnect yourself this is what you will look like."

Hopefully we come to church and worship on the weekend and we get spiritually renewed. We plan worship here and ask how it is that we can help feed your soul and help you connect to the vine, to the living water of God's Holy Spirit. How can we help you hear God's word for your life so you can go forth and live it? Every week we plan to give you something nourishing when you gather here for worship. We leave church and maybe we say our morning prayers for a day or two but we might even skip doing that. Two or three days of that leaves our souls looking a bit like these flowers without any water. Sometimes we miss a week of worship and then we missed two weeks and then after a month or two we don't even remember what it feels like to feel God's presence in our lives. We find ourselves withered and dried and not bearing any fruit at all, wondering if God even exists.

As we gather for worship today I would ask you this question. Which one of these sets of flowers better represents the state of your soul today? Are you blooming for Christ and bearing fruit or beautiful flowers? Or are you withered

and dry because you haven't been drawing upon the living water of Jesus Christ. He says, "If you abide in me and I in you then you will bear much fruit."

So how do we go about abiding in him? I want that but I'm not sure how to do that. All of these sermons are designed to encourage you to abide in Christ and to give you some tools for doing that so you can grow deeper throughout your day. Paul Jones is a retired United Methodist pastor and former professor at the United Methodist seminary. After retirement he can became a Trappist monk and he built a Hermitage from which he could write about the spiritual life. Trappist monks are forbidden to speak unless the speech is, "spiritually enriching." That's probably a pretty good rule for any kind of talking that we do! While they are forbidden to speak, they can write and they do blog.

On one of his blogs Paul wrote about, "sacramental," in our spiritual lives. In the United Methodist Church we have two sacraments, baptism and Holy Communion that we will celebrate today. These are ways in which we experience the grace of God in a very concrete and tangible way through a physical act. You are being baptized in water or you are receiving the bread and the cup. God's grace is communicated to us in a powerful way to the sacraments. In the Roman Catholic tradition there are seven sacraments but Paul reminds us that there are many things in life which are not official sacraments but are very sacramental.

SLIDE "Sacramentals are acts or things that remind us of our faith and who we are and God's mission for our lives."

They remind us of the grace of God. Let me give you a couple of examples because I think they are important to abiding in the vine and abiding in Christ. Jewish people are really good with Sacramentals and here is one example that was given to me on my last trip to the Holy Land.

SLIDE Mezuzah Case (Graphic)

This is a Mezuzah case. Our children have made these at Vacation Bible School in the past. Inside this metal box is a scroll. On that scroll you will find Scriptures. The scroll is often handwritten by ascribing it has to scripture passages on it which come from the book of Deuteronomy. The Mezuzah case is hung at the doorpost at an angle like the one you see in the video screen.

SLIDE Mezuzah on doorpost (Graphic)

It's put at an angle at the top one third of every doorway of a home of a practicing or observant Jew. They typically are on the front door and then every other doorway in the house except for those leading to the bathrooms. And observant Jew will also place this at their office doorway. When they walk in, they will stop and kiss or touch the Mezuzah case to remember the words that are inside. It's a way of saying that these words to find my life. They are my marching orders each and every day. What are the words that are on the Mezuzah? The first passage is from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. It's called the Shema Israel and Jesus said it's the most important commandment of all.

SLIDE ***4 "Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. 5 And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength."***

I want you to recognize that for an observant Jew who walks into their home, the moment they walk into the home they stop and remember that the Lord is God alone and I am to love him with all of my heart, soul and strength. Every time they walk into any room or in their office, they remember this passage. When they leave their house in the morning they stop and they touch the Mezuzah case. It's a way of saying, "As I go out to the world, I remember that I'm supposed to love God with all of my heart, soul and strength. God is God alone and nothing else should come first."

As I walked into my office I should remember the Lord is God alone. I am not God, not even in this workplace and especially not because I'm the pastor of the church. Money is not God. My job is not God. God is God and I am not, and I am to love God with all of my heart and all of my soul and all of my strength. That is the sacramental. It's something that reminds you throughout the day of who you are as a child of God. The rest of Deuteronomy 6 describes this in more detail and how we remember this truth, beginning with verse six.

SLIDE ***6 And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. 7 Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. 8 Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. 9 Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.***

Some Jews take very literally and they will take the Scriptures and put them in the boxes that they have on their four heads, called phylacteries. Perhaps you have seen photographs like this one on the video screen. We saw many observant Jews like this at the Western Wall when we visited Jerusalem in February.

SLIDE Man with phylactery at western wall (Graphic)

You can see in this picture the man has a little box that he is placing on his head in front of the Western Wall and you will notice the wrap around his arm which also has another box at the end of it, taking literally this idea of wrapping God's word around their heads and around their arms. The idea behind this is that the word of God would be in your mind all the time. The commandment is meant to be lived out with your heart and with all of your strength and with your hands.

I'm not encouraging you to make little boxes and put them on your head and wear them to work. You might get a mezuzah for your home but even more powerful would be to carry this pocket New Testament with you. We give these to you for free and we also have these little cards that you can carry in your wallet or your purse with the John Wesley Covenant Prayer. If you don't have either one of these, we have them as you leave on little tables and we also have them in the Welcome Center. If you are watching at home or online then you can email us and we can send you one for free.

SLIDE You Version App (Graphic)

If you are someone like me who carries your phone with you everywhere that you go I encouraged you a couple of weeks ago with the Youth Version Bible app on your phone that will push to you a Bible verse every single day and actually will do it several times a day if you tell it to. It's free and you can use any version of the Bible that you like.

A good plan is to always carry either the pocket New Testament or be sure you have a Bible app on your phone that reminds you every day to read from God's word. Wherever you are, knowing that God's word is close to your hip or your heart remind you of who you are. Reading the Scriptures reminds me that I belong to Jesus Christ and I was made by God to be loved by God. I am seeking to live by this book and it is my defining story. The Scriptures contain everything necessary for salvation and they remind us that we were meant to spend eternity with God and the worst thing in our life will never be the last thing in our life.

At least once every day we need to open up this book and listen for God. I'm going to say, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening," and I'm going to listen for God's voice in these words. That's one of my Sacramentals. If I am in a tragic accident I want this word close to me. When I'm 100 years old and in a care facility, I want this on my bedside like my great-grandmother Grace Berry. Of course, I want one with large print or an audio version if I can't read anymore. If I can't hear anymore, that you could just rub it up against me and hopefully through osmosis I will absorb the truth that God is with me. This book defines my life.

SLIDE Carry God's Word with you.

Here is your second tip for becoming an ordinary saint and that is to carry God's Word with you. Would you be willing to make a commitment to carrying this pocket New Testament in your purse or your pocket or put that app on your phone so you can be reminded about God's word every day? Every time you look at it you can remember that you are a person of the book, and hopefully will take the time to open it and read it. Next week we will talk about how we hear God's voice and we will give out Bibles to our second graders and will talk about how we read the Bible and listen for God's voice as we do. If you don't have a pocket New Testament then stop by and pick one up today because that's the second practical idea for how to grow in your faith and become more like Jesus Christ.

SLIDE Remember your baptism.

A third tip I would give you is to remember your baptism and a good way to do that is whenever you get in the shower or the bathtub each day. Whether you were in infants and you don't recall it, or whether you were a young adult or an adult, in your baptism God claims you. It was a defining act of your life. In your baptism God said, "You belong to me and I will not let you go."

God promised to wash away your sins and your broken places every time you ask for his mercy and grace. God promised to give you living water so you might never thirst again and he offers you the gift of salvation.

Your baptism is actually a covenant between God and you and is part of the ritual you say, "I want to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior. I want to be defined by my relationship with God." This is why we reaffirm baptism for those of you were baptized as infants, so you can say those words for yourself and claim that truth.

We did a reaffirmation of baptism for people in the Jordan River in February when we went to the holy land and it was a powerful time for people to remember, in that same River where Jesus was baptized, that they were claimed by God. We spent some time with the teachers from our Christian school Friday and we put the sign of the cross on their fore heads with water from the Jordan River and invited them to remember their baptism and be thankful.

When I get in the shower each morning I try to remember that I am baptized and that God has claimed to me. As I feel the water flowing down my face and on my head I remember my baptism and I give thanks. I ask God to wash me by God's grace, filling me with his Holy Spirit and renewing my soul. I pray to live as God's child that day so I can honor God and all that I do.

Those moments are when we remember who we are and who God calls us to be. We stand in the water and we rededicate our lives to Christ. I encourage you every morning to say a prayer as you enter those waters. Those waters not only clean us but they refresh us and they remind us that without water you wouldn't have life and without God we would experience the same kind of drought that would lead to death.

Let's continue to look at this passage from John's Gospel in verse nine.

SLIDE 9 "I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. 10 When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love.

How do we abide in his love? How do we remain in his love? We do this by keeping his commandments. Sometimes we get this idea that the Christian spiritual life is about me and Jesus and how close we can feel to him. That's part of the Christian life, our inner spiritual journey.

Some people think that the Christian spiritual life is about how much you know and about studying the Bible all the time, knowing the Greek and Hebrew and having all of your theology just right. That's a part of the Christian spiritual life but it certainly not all of it.

Jesus says that if we were really want to remain in his love then we are to obey his commandments. By doing the things that Jesus asks us to do we remain in his love. He then goes on to say these words in verse 11.

SLIDE 11 I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!

Which of us doesn't want joy? We find joy as we abide in Christ and live out his commandments. Then he sums it up in verse 12.

SLIDE 12 This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.

Jesus summarizes everything he has taught us in one commandment. How did Jesus love us? He lay down his life for us and showed us that love is about sacrifice. He thought more of us than himself. Jesus sought to bring us to God by showing us the mercy and kindness of God. Jesus was thinking first of us and he was willing to lay down his life for us. "I want you to love one another as I have loved you and in doing this you are practicing my commandments, you are finding joy and you are abiding in the vine and in my love."

The Christian life is never just about our hearts and our mind and our soul but it is lived out with our strength in our hands. This is why we now have in our new Welcome Center these words that remind us about what it means to love God with our heart, soul, mind and strength.

SLIDE Connect (Graphic of these)

Grow

Serve

Share

Connect to God and each other as we experience God in worship and form meaningful relationships. This is about loving God with our heart and soul.

Grow into the likeness of Christ through Bible Study, prayer and authentic conversation about life and faith. This is about loving God with our mind.

Serve God and others with genuine humility. This is about loving God with our strength.

Share God and our faith with radical hospitality. This is about loving our neighbor.

As we do these things we begin to feel God's love growing inside of us. God begins to shape us and mold us and we become the people that he wants us to be. Sometimes people say that the devil is in the details. It's not the devil that is in the details. It's God that is in the details.

SLIDE God is in the details.

The Christian life is not just something you do on Sunday mornings. It is not something you do just at 6:15 in the morning each day as you read Scripture or say a prayer before the day begins. The Christian life is lived out, tested and proved in our everyday, ordinary lives. It is lived out in every interaction that we have and every decision that we make. We have a chance in every moment to either abide in the love of Christ or step away from it. We have a chance to practice love or turn away from it. Now we never will get it perfect every single time and that's okay. Jesus came and lived and died because we are not perfect, but we are called, in the words of the founder of Methodism John Wesley, to be moving on towards perfection.

The New Testament writer James called this idea of loving our neighbor as we love ourselves, "the royal law of love." The apostle Paul said that he could speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but if we don't have love we are a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. How is this love supposed to guide us?

SLIDE What is the loving thing to do?

I have taught you on numerous occasions that one of the main things we can do in every relationship is to ask this simple question. What is the most loving thing I can do right here, right now? How can I think more of the other person than I think of myself? How can I put them before me? How can I bless them and encourage them and lift them up? When we asked that question we almost always find the right answer.

It's football season right now and I know many of you are football fans and I saw perfect illustration of this in the story of Matt Ziesel. Matt was born with downs syndrome and his deepest desire in high school was to play football. But when his mom asked the doctor, "Can Matt play football?" the doctor said that because of Matt's condition if he gets hit really hard it could be life-threatening. The doctor asked her to not let them play football. But Matt was dying to play

football and he begged and begged to be able to play. The doctor insisted that Matt could be hurt too seriously if he was tackled wrong or even hit by anybody.

Matt's mom talk to the coach and asked if he could simply suit up and be on the team but not be in a place where he could ever get hurt or hit. The coach agreed to put them in the scrimmage games and make sure that he was never hits or tackled in a way that could hurt them. He could suit up for the games but he would never really get to play in a real football game.

As they got towards the end of Matt's senior year his team was losing 46-0 to their high school rival. All game long Matt was doing what he did every game which was to bake the coach to put them in the game, "Put me in coach! Put me in coach! I'm ready to play!"

There was one minute left in the game and the coach called timeout. He ran across the field to the opposing team's bench and he spoke to the coach and said, "I know that this is a rivalry game and this is a chance for you to have a shut-out and I would look good on your record, but I was wondering if you might consider something else. There's clearly no chance run to come back with just a minute left and I've got this kid on my team who so desperately wants to play football. This may be his only game he ever gets to play. I'm wondering if you would let us put them in and then maybe your guys not tackle him. I want your guys to try but make sure that he doesn't get hurt in any way and let's just see what happens. Would you be willing to do that?"

The opposing coach said, "Absolutely! Let's do it." He called his players together and gave them instructions. Matt's coach went back to his bench and says, "Ziesel! But your helmet on and let's get in there." This is what happened next.

VIDEO Matt Ziesel Touchdown

I don't know if any of those guys are Christians who are out there on the field. I don't know if the coaches were Christians are not. But what I do know is that's what love looks like for ordinary Saints.

Here's the invitation today. Every day, would you be willing to simply begin by saying, "Lord, you are the Potter and I'm the Clay. Make me what you want me to be."

Remember your baptism every time you get in the shower or the tub or even the swimming pool and feel those waters pouring over you. In those moments remember who you are and that you were made by God to be loved by God.

Carry the Scriptures with you in your pocket, on your phone and in your heart. Open them at least once during each day and read them and let them soak in and become a part of your soul.

In every interaction, and in every decision that you make, ask yourself what is the most loving thing that I can do.

If you do those things then you will be on track for becoming an ordinary Saints.

SLIDE Communion

SLIDE Prayer

While your heads are bowed and your eyes are closed I'm going to invite you to say this prayer with me. I'm going to invite you to repeat it out loud after me.

Lord, you are the Potter... And I am the Clay... Make me the person... You want me to be... Use me Lord... That I might be... One of your ordinary Saints... In Jesus' name... Amen.