

Jerusalem

Gillian Cooper *reflects on* 2 Samuel 5:1-5. 9-10

David the shepherd boy has become king of Israel. He has survived giants and armies, hatred and betrayal. He has been clever and resourceful. He is good-looking, talented, popular with women, as well as one of the lads. And he has God on his side.

The first seven and a half years of David's reign seem uneventful – they pass by in a single sentence. All we know is that he was based at Hebron. Hebron was already a significant place in ancient Israel. The book of Genesis tells us it was where Abraham bought a plot of land as a burial place for his wife Sarah. It was the first bit of the land of Israel owned by Israel's ancestor. It is the obvious place for the king to hold court.

But Hebron represents the past, and David's reign is about the future. Ever the effective strategist, David captures the city of Jerusalem from its Canaanite residents, and there he establishes the "City of David". Jerusalem has no historical or religious associations. The people's new capital city is David's place. There his palace will be, and there also God's temple, for ever associated with David and his successors.

So David gives us Jerusalem. Beautiful and doomed. Conquered and rebuilt. Essential to three world religions and many warring peoples. A place of hatred, tragedy and death. And a place where, through David's descendant, hatred has been defeated, death has been conquered, and God's love has triumphed. ☺

Making Ordinary Time anything but

by Caroline Hodgson

We're deep into Ordinary Time – that part of the Christian liturgical year that falls outside Advent, Christmastide, Lent and Eastertide.

The origin of "ordinary" in this context comes from the word "ordinal", referring to the system by which the weeks are counted. So strictly speaking it's not ordinary in the sense of being mundane

or routine. Even so, it raises an interesting point, because we tend to discount things as ordinary, to be got through or passed over – whether that's ordinary time (a rainy weekend), or places (where the bins are kept), objects or even people. But the reality is that every nanosecond of existence, every millimetre of God's Earth, every atom of existence and each and every person is worthy of being treasured and celebrated. Now I'm not suggested we start praising God over an egg whisk, but that we practise becoming more engaged with the wonder of creation all around us. So over the next three weeks I'd like to share a practical exercise for keeping Ordinary Time anything but ordinary. ☺

We pray, Lord for the peace of Jerusalem, for reconciliation between all those who live there, and all who from a distance call it home. May it be once more a beacon of hope and a sign of your kingdom on earth. Amen.

Walking with Poppy *World made new*

by Gillian Cooper

There has been a thunderstorm after the hot and dry weather, and the air is fresh. Poppy sniffs the air from the door and takes a tentative step out. She does not want to get her paws wet, but the scent is enticing. The walk along the path to the playing

field takes us even longer than usual – the rain has brought out the smells and every inch has to be sniffed. Meanwhile I notice the raindrops on the bushes and the new green shoots on the allotment plants. Between Poppy's nose and my eyes, we are experiencing a world made new.

How much more, we hope, will we rejoice when we experience God's new world, at the end of our lives or at our world's end, when we breathe the fresh air of God's love and marvel at the sparkling glory of the new heaven and new earth. ☺

“David was the last one we would have chosen to fight the giant, but he was chosen of God.”

Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899), American evangelist and publisher

How to be a super-hero

Julian Smith *reflects on* Amos 7:7-15

Our thirst for super-hero movies seems unquenchable, but in reality there is no one to sweep in and sweep away our problems. Last year showed that our heroes come from a very different mould. They included healthcare staff, workers at our local care homes and supermarkets, corner-shop owners, volunteers at community shops and food banks, postal workers and delivery drivers. Many were immigrants, on the minimum wage and, until then, largely taken for granted. Unlikely heroes all.

This is nothing new for God. The Bible shows us how God calls and empowers ordinary people – Amos is a good example. He is not a smooth-talking professional; he is a plain man, a herdsman and dresser of trees, who has been called by God to prophesy to “my people Israel”. Amos is sent to set Israel straight. Amos is abrasive and uncompromising, he is from a class of people beneath contempt, and he is an immigrant.

But Amos has some things going for him – he is open to God, willing and able to listen, and he has the courage to say “yes” when God calls.

Super-heroes may be fictional, but God’s calling of unlikely heroes continues. If you are open to God, willing and able to listen and are brave enough to say “yes”, the next unlikely hero could be you. 🙏



Dear God, we thank you for calling unlikely people to be heroes in your earthly kingdom and for those who have touched our lives. Give us grace to be open to you and courage to say “yes” to your call. Amen.

Making Ordinary Time anything but

by Caroline Hodgson

One of our greatest challenges is to stop thinking of “ordinary” time as wasted or “dead” time. So here is an exercise in thinking and praying about what’s “ordinary” in our lives. First, set aside at least half an hour – and stick to it. Then take a piece of paper

– the bigger the better – and a bold pen, and start compiling a list of activities you find “ordinary”. You can work as a group, but each person should create their individual list. You might include washing up, commuting to work, visiting a relative. Be honest (but sensitive) and resist the temptation to get into big discussions at this stage. Every time you find yourself faltering, take a minute to pray – this is a wonderful exercise in achieving clarity through prayer. Keep the list visible during the week, and every time you find yourself doing something “ordinary”, add it to the list. 🙏

Characters from the lectionary

by Julian Smith

St Swithun, bishop, is commemorated on Thursday. Julian Smith looks at his life and legacy.

Immortality is assured when a rose is named after you. St Swithun has a “large, strongly-scented, soft-pink bloom of more than a hundred petals” to his name.

But his fame does not depend upon a rose. Nor does it depend upon knowledge of his holy and humble life, his ten years as Bishop of Winchester in the mid-tenth century or his time as an

adviser to King Egbert. Swithun is remembered for the legends that attend the moving of his body.

According to his wishes Swithun was buried in a simple grave outside his cathedral. When a new cathedral was being built it was planned to move his remains to a shrine within the building. Despite dire warnings of storms and tempests, Swithun’s remains were moved on 15 July 971 and forty days of storms ensued.

Never mind the rose, Swithun is remembered for his link to the weather and his day is anticipated with trepidation. 🙏



God is faithful even when his children are not.”

Max Lucado (born 1955), American author and pastor

A family tree

Julian Smith *reflects on* 2 Samuel 7:1-14a

The television series *Who Do You Think You Are?* reflects a growing interest in genealogy. Viewers seem fascinated by the family trees of celebrities, hoping to find links to notorious ancestors or some noble lineage.

The Bible, too, is interested in family trees, as the seemingly endless lists of "begats" testify. It is important that these genealogies place Jesus in the direct family line of King David and our reading explains why.

Israel is enjoying a period of peace and prosperity. David is king and has built a palace in Jerusalem, but God's dwelling place, the Ark of the Covenant, rests in a tent, as it did during Israel's long years of wandering. David wants to build a permanent resting place for it and confides his wishes to the prophet Nathan. But God appears to Nathan and tells him that David will not build a "house" for God, rather God will raise up a "house" for David. David will not build a temple for God, but God will raise up a dynasty of David's descendants and his son will build the Temple. "He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."

In this solemn covenant between God and David rests the promise and hope of the Messiah fulfilled by Jesus, which is why his family tree contains carpenters and kings. 🌿

Lord Jesus, David's son and Messiah – you came to bring God's love to a dark and troubled world. Shine that love on us today and help us to be lights for you in the places where we live and work. Amen.



Making Ordinary Time anything but

by Caroline Hodgson

Last week we started to compile a list of "ordinary" activities. So now let's start to think and pray about how to make a real change in our life. The objective is that from now on, daily life is going to be anything but mediocre and mundane. If making a necessary

change means having a difficult conversation with someone, don't shirk from it, but do pray that God shows you a way to communicate with tact, integrity and, above all, love. This is about getting our relationships out of a rut, as well as our lives. And if you've decided that it's appropriate that you do a certain activity, think about how to revitalise it. Because a chore done prayerfully can – truly – be transformed into a pleasure. It will almost certainly take practice and faith to really discover that, so stick with it and keep finding fresh approaches to everyday activities. 🌿

Finding God on the smallholding

by Jeni Parsons

Have we had summer yet or is it still to come? Last year winter was wet, spring was hot and summer was mixed. "The seasons aren't what they were," says my farming neighbour. So the anxiety around getting the hay cut, dried, baled and stored is often very high. Our

hay meadow is the glory of our tiny farm at this time of year – a bit of grass, lots of wild flowers and "weeds". The weeds are really tasty for sheep and cattle when dried and fed in the dark winter mornings. Our field made ten big bales last year. We kept one and the neighbour, who did the work, took the other nine as a gift.

Turning weeds into delicious fodder is a miracle of the ordinary kind you can see each day, but it speaks of God's transformation of the ordinary into glory of you and me into workers in the kingdom. 🌿

“Make sure you are doing what God wants you to do – then do it with all your strength.”

George Washington (1732-1799), first president of the United States

At a crossroads

Julian Smith *reflects on* Matthew 20:20-28

Today we are at the crossroads where two ways meet.

The first way is that of Jesus, outlined in today's Gospel. The mother of James and John asks Jesus if they can have first dibs at seats in glory. The other disciples are angry, so Jesus spells out the facts of life in living his way. Conventional certainties are stood on their head and greatness comes through serving others. "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve," and the same is true for all who follow his way.

The second is the Way of St James, the Camino de Santiago. On this weekend each year tens of thousands of people gather in Santiago de Compostela, the burial place of St James, to celebrate Spain's patron saint. Many of them walk the Camino to get there, following one of the "ways" that spider-web across the map of Europe. In doing so they experience a different way of living, a fellowship of mutual support and encouragement. On the Camino de Santiago walkers begin to experience the way of Jesus.

Always we are called to live at another crossroads, the crossroads where the way of Jesus meets the way of the world. The world can be hostile and unforgiving, yet we are called to a way of life that brings the light of Christ into the darkness of hearts and lives – the way of service. ☺



Jesus, you call us not to be served but to serve; walk with us on our journey of faith. Give us grace to support and encourage our fellow pilgrims as we follow your way in a harsh and unforgiving world. Amen.

Making Ordinary Time anything but

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To round off this exercise in thinking about the "ordinary" side of life, think of Ordinary Time as a drink of water, and a feast day as a glass of wine. Jesus said: "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me," and he also turned water

into wine. a glass of wine might be a real pleasure – but we all know the dangers of over-indulging, and it's no substitute for a long, life-giving drink of water.

We can't live in a permanent state of festivity, or it becomes deeply unhealthy. Ordinary Time makes up most of our lives, so let's find cause to celebrate and thank God for it. Let's also resolve that nothing we do will ever be dull or flat, and keep searching for ways to make every single second as extra-ordinary and remarkable as Christmas, Easter and birthday rolled into one, enlivened by the intoxicating fizz of the Holy Spirit. ☺

International Tiger Day

by Lisa Tulfer

Thursday is International Tiger Day. The day was instituted in 2010 at the St Petersburg Tiger Summit where, with tiger numbers below four thousand globally, governments of tiger-populated countries committed to doubling that figure by 2020. This didn't happen.

There are two main threats to tiger populations. One is

poaching for the illegal trade in body parts. Used in traditional medicine and luxury home décor, this is a multi-billion dollar international trade which involves organised crime. The other is habitat loss – tigers are now restricted to just seven per cent of their historic range across Asia, and populations are down over ninety-five per cent since the start of the twentieth century. There are now more tigers in captivity in the USA than living in the wild worldwide.

The largest of the big cats, and with stripes as individually unique as fingerprints, the tiger is an icon of our responsibilities as stewards of God's creation. ☺

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”
Philippians 2:5