

Finding The Extraordinary

Dr Lois Dodds (Part 3 of 7)



2 Corinthians 4:7 talks about us being earthen vessels so that the excellency may be of God. I have written two books using titles from that verse: 'Clay pots' and 'We have this treasure'. The mystery that Jesus spoke of time and time and time again is that ordinary things of life portray God's extraordinariness. Ordinary things of life give us the power to live authentically so that God's life in us becomes visible.

So there you are. You are in some very extraordinary place, very different from where you started out. What was familiar, what was home and maybe your perplexity is that you are there for a very lofty purpose, and that that purpose seems to get frustrated, often because there are all the ordinary things to do. You want to invite people in to share the love of God with them and what happens is a lot of hard work that goes with that: buying the food in the market, putting up with the market place, maybe putting up with the thieves in the market place, bringing it all home and cleaning it and fixing it, and after the people leave, the dishes.

These ordinary things become the conduit really for God's grace. The mystery of Christ in us is that we live ordinary lives and we do ordinary tasks but we can do that with an extraordinary spirit. Jesus' spirit in us can transform the ordinary into something very wonderful and purposeful, both in terms of how God is speaking to us, shaping us, growing us, and in terms of the outcomes in our life.

I am always impressed that Jesus chose very ordinary things when he talked. Most of the stories and the parables are pretty ordinary things. The salt - what could be more ordinary than salt? We use it every day and yet Jesus chose that to represent an important message about his life in us. Pottery – we have mugs and oven-to-table glassware nowadays but pottery was the thing in Jesus' day. It was so ordinary. It could be made into something wonderful and beautiful, or something like a dustpan. But Jesus spoke using metaphors from everyday life. A light on a hill – if you have travelled in countries that are very dark where there are few habitations and you approach a city on a hill it is totally visible. It is unmistakable. There is something 'life-ly' going on in that dark environment because the light shows.

When we live in the light there is also the problem of shadows and darkness. God speaks to me over and over again in the ordinary things of life. I want to encourage you, as you live today and tomorrow, to ask God to show you how to be more attuned to him - to hear him, to see him in the ordinary. I would like to read another poem or two that illustrates some of this for me.

This poem is called 'Curl'. Curls are very ordinary things.

*There is a gentleness in curl,
a reminder of the sweet and fair-of life.
Something perfect, unmatched by other curve or angle.
Fragrant cedar shaving curls from the plane
as natural as bird in free flight falls.
Perfect, flexible,*

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*springing to life at touch of the cutting edge.
Delicate sweet pea tendril twines intimately round the latticework
effortlessly, yet for all its delicacy tends its vine with strength and purpose.
Idle winding smoke embraces cloud and sky
as lover's circled arms curl round his love
and in its leisure beautifies by-product of a common fire.
Infant's gentle hand encircles breast, the mother cup,
enriching by its touch
and by absorbing love expressed in curling arms
gives its own gift of love.*

The scripture is full of analogies and metaphors and experiences that have to do with plants. I have always been impressed that God spoke to Moses out of a burning bush, and I remember God speaking to me out of a begonia. Now that may sound really crazy but it's another ordinary thing in life, another way that God speaks to me. I was pruning my bushes, beautiful begonias, on our balcony in our house out in the jungle, and on the outside they were absolutely gorgeous, just beautiful – glossy shiny green leaves, wonderful flowers. But as I began to prune I discovered that underneath all that new growth was a lot of dead stuff, and in the dead stuff there were nests for wasps and other things, and I thought, this is really incredible; these are so beautiful on the outside but underneath they are quite a mess. And God spoke to me about my life and said, 'Lois, you see I have to keep pruning you and cleaning your life because you keep putting out new growth and that's good and that's normal but the new growth requires that you let go of the old stuff.' So God spoke to Moses through the burning bush and he spoke to me through my begonias.

He speaks to me often through the world of nature. Jesus used the world of nature often for his teaching material. We have a friend named Peter. Peter is a plant geneticist and he and his wife Inge lived in Peru. One day Inge and the gardener transplanted a tree from one part of the garden to the other. Inge was quite astounded when Peter got home: he absolutely rushed from the car into the house, got the pruning shears, ran out and practically stripped this little tree bare. She said, 'Peter, what are you doing? You have ruined it now.' He said, 'No, I have just saved the tree because you didn't prune it when you transplanted it. It was about to die because all the moisture was coming out through the leaves; the roots were not established yet to bring in new moisture and so that tree would have died if I hadn't just cut it back ruthlessly.'

Now I sigh, and add another analogy from my life because when we get transplanted to these extraordinary places it takes a while to put our roots down. If we expect to grow the same beautiful leaves or perhaps even fruit before the roots are down, what happens is we lose our moisture. We become exhausted. We become droopy. So to be transplanted successfully actually God has to cut back many of the things that have made our lives beautiful, and it hurts and we grieve over the loss of those things. But I believe this is another time we can trust God in the ordinary. He knows what he is doing and he is saving our lives in order to make them more productive.

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I will read one poem that talks about this, 'Transpiration':

*These needs
I feel: how real they are;
these longings, Lord:
how deep, penetrating the very heart and core of me
and if they be unmet, I die.
You must provide, reach deep,
flow through and saturate my very roots,
these tender shoots which shrink and shrivel in hard ground.
Your love,
your flowing life
drawn up through each small root
will flow through trunk and living sap
and freshen every leaf
through transpiration's special miracle of circulating life.
Meet my needs.
Fill my longing.*

This was my prayer as I asked God to replenish me and to give me back all that had been pruned from my life when I went off to live in the jungle.

Today, ask God what he will do for you to renew you in spirit, to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary.