

Thomas R. Cook  
St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota  
8:00 and 10:00 a.m. Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist  
The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost; July 8, 2018

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## “Deeds of Power in the Quiet and the Ordinary”

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Scripture: Mark 6:1-13; 7 Pentecost B (Proper 9B) RCL  
Note: At the baptism of Ilakshi Leena Simon.

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Well... here we are again. I was with many of you just last Sunday, here in this same place. I remember I wore the same clothes, the same white robe and this very green stole. I stood in this same pulpit talking with you... like I am doing now. The candles were the same. The windows were... the same. The music was, well, kind of like it is today. We had ushers out front and acolytes and ministers in the pew. Coffee was brewing downstairs. Yep. This is it. This is, sort of, um... what we do. Next week we will do it again. And it will look a lot like this.

What? Were you looking for something more? Were you looking for amazement and miracles? Were you looking to be moved to faith as you've never been moved before? Looking to be convinced of God's reality despite your doubts and unwillingness? Were you looking for deeds of great power? Is that it? Well, you may have come to the wrong place. This is just... home. It's just... us.

But I wonder... if we could be still and quiet enough together, would we hear our collective breath in this gathering?... that quiet, persistent hum of the energy of our life together, as a testimony to faith in the presence of a living God in our midst right now? Could we take time to see the beauty of the many and varied faces of a people, collected and together, the wrinkles of wisdom in the aged, the fresh glow of possibility in the young, the enthusiasm ---maybe the exhaustion--- of parents and their energetic youth? Wouldn't that beauty be... miraculous? And in a world that is so "out loud" right now, so intense, so frightened, so belligerent, selfish, and mean... watching ourselves stream to the front of this nave peacefully, in a sort of beautiful procession or dance, to receive bread become Christ and wine become Christ as a holy gift and a sign of hope that God is at work in and through us... well, isn't that a conspicuous deed of power right before our very eyes?

See, I wonder what Jesus' family and friends were really expecting of him when he made a visit home. Oh, they were astounded by him apparently, wowed by his teaching and his reputation out in the wider world. But I don't know that they were impressed. In fact, I gather they were disappointed when they didn't get any deeds of power, no irrefutable evidence of his godliness, no overwhelming sign that he was anything more than the precocious kid who grew up in Joseph's workshop. In fact, the scripture says they were offended. Never mind that he apparently laid hands upon a few people and cured their illness. I guess actually healing some people wasn't

enough fireworks for an “authentic” Son of God. I mean, where is the BIG? Where is the LOUD? Where is the proof? Where is the show?

You know, I remember that change somewhere along the line when returning home for me became a *magnificently* ordinary experience. When seeing the people I had long known, being greeted by my aging parents, visiting the workshops and play places and bedrooms of my youth, standing in my mother’s kitchen and taking in the sights and smells, walking the neighborhoods... when all that became anything but ordinary. It was grounding, rooted and miraculous. Not always pleasant... not all things “home” were always happy things. Life was not always grand. Challenges were many. But there was power in the living of it all... quiet power, God power, life-shaping power. Pastor Brian Zahnd reminded me recently that while the world likes to find power in the big and the loud and the garish and the forceful, that “...the ways of God are [often] about as loud as a seed falling on the ground or bread rising in the oven.”<sup>1</sup> Nearly silent and entirely amazing. And not to be missed.

Jesus could do no deed of power at his homecoming. Hmm... Perhaps that is because his community wasn’t looking for the simple or listening for the quiet or appreciating the ordinary. I mean, he did raise Lazarus from the dead, he multiplied food to feed thousands, he calmed storms and walked on water, but apparently that

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<sup>1</sup> Synthesis for July 8, 2018.

wasn't enough, since he hadn't done it for them. Apparently it hasn't been enough for so many in our time who are looking for God to do something for them.

I say... God is always acting with deeds of power. But that power may seem so very ordinary. But the extraordinary is born from the ordinary. We rise to the extraordinary occasions of this ordinary life... occasions to heal the sick, to comfort the sorrowful, to welcome the stranger. Occasions to feed the hungry, to support those that society rejects, to offer kindness to one another. Please don't miss these deeds of power happening all around us here in our spiritual home and out in the places you live and work. There is power in our gathering, power in welcome and hospitality, power in the embrace or the handshake, power in speaking the truth, power in seeing one another as sisters and brothers in Christ, power in praying for the living and remembering the dead, power in gathering the generations week by week as church to pray and hope, [there's power in the breath of a little baby awaiting her baptism].

In fact, I find this entire enterprise of faith, this gathering of church, the quiet and ordinary persistence of a people generation after generation through good times and through bad times, to be a deed of great power attributable to the love and fidelity of Jesus. Watch for what God is doing with you in this present moment. It is powerful. Finally, I would say... *you are a deed of great power.* Live like it.