



Not Especially Memorable

TEXT
Acts 2:1–4, 41–47

September 1, 2019 — Sermon by Rev. Sally Wright

Have you ever tried to paint a canvas? One day during high school art class, the teacher laid out acrylic paint and canvases for us. She showed us the example painting of the one we would be painting together. Then she started with step by step instructions — which paint brush to pick up, which color to dip it in, the exact angle and pressure with which to brush the canvas. After what seemed like a million brush strokes, the class had replicas of the example painting. Let's be honest, each copy of the high school art class's replicas had its own special "flare."

I have been thinking about how many brush strokes it takes to create one canvas. Even though my painting may not have been a classical masterpiece, it took thousands of moments to consider what mixture of colors to put on the brush, how hard or soft to place the brush on the canvas — all to culminate in a beginner's copy of a painting. Each moment of creating that high school beginner's painting was not an especially memorable moment. Yet, added together they created something unique.

If I asked you to sign up for and attend not so memorable moments, you might chuckle out of the awkwardness of the question and really be thinking, "Well, no." But can I tell you a secret? Any community, any family, any community of faith is built upon thousands upon thousands of not especially memorable moments.

Thousands of not especially memorable moments is the way that God paints the canvas we call the Christian community. Faith is not solely about the mountain-top experiences, although they are important; the tongues of fire at Pentecost is a hugely transformative moment for the whole of the Christian religion. Yet, in the Pentecost passage, we see what really is at the heart of the day to day early Christian community: study, worship, eating meals together, and being with one another.

In the five brief months I have served as one of your Interim Associate Pastors for Pastoral Care, I can tell you that there seems to be a deep thirst for something similar to this early Christian community. After having three conversations just this week with people who in essence were asking me, "How do we go deeper, more

real, more authentic?" People are wanting to connect — not through a screen, but face to face, in real life, in genuine, authentic ways.

It is not a coincidence to me that there have been recent studies and articles articulating that loneliness is rampant in American society. It is literally killing us. Twenty-five to 50 percent of Americans express feeling lonely at any given time. Scientific research has demonstrated that the more often someone feels lonely, the more likely that person is to suffer higher death rates, higher illness rates and even cognitive decline and memory loss. Researchers are calling this a public health problem — so much so that there is even a UCLA Loneliness Scale and Meaning of Life Questionnaire so that we can quantify just how lonely we are. It is also so widespread an issue in Great Britain that Prime Minister Theresa May announced a strategy to address loneliness.

In the *Harvard Business Review* in 2017 on "Work and Loneliness," physician and former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy noted, "During my years caring for patients, the most common pathology I saw was not heart disease or diabe-

tes; it was loneliness. Loneliness and weak social connections are associated with a reduction in lifespan similar to that caused by smoking 15 cigarettes a day and even greater than that associated with obesity.”

In her book *The Joyous Recovery* about emotional healing, Lundy Bancroft underscores how basic a need community is to our emotional and mental health. She says, “Throughout almost the entirety of human history, we have been born into tribes and clans where our membership was secure from the moment we emerged into this world. We are a species of animal that watches over each other, that shares food, that sleeps piled together, that cares for the sick, that gathers for weddings and funerals. It is only in the last three percent of our history that we have not lived in this manner, and this means that the need and desire to live in community is programmed into us at the deepest levels.”

I even read of a medical system out in California that has created an intensive intervention on loneliness that includes weekly phone calls, home visits, encouragement and connection to community-based programs. I simply want to remind us that this is what we do. This is what we do as Christians. We check in on people, we bring them food, we call them up, we study the Bible with them.

We, who are hearing this sermon, are a People of the Trinity — meaning we believe that our God is a God of community. God in God’s own self

is relational through the dance of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is through relationships that we can sense and discern the Holy Spirit’s movement. We believe that our God can create and transform the world, and God does so through groups of Christians together in worship, study, eating and sharing.

I am inviting you to participate in and show up for study, for prayer, for food, for people — because someone else needs you, and they don’t know it yet. Show up because when two or three or when two or three thousand are gathered together, Christ can show up. Because our God is the one who sends the tongues of fire to transform; and it is the same God who is the still small voice revealed to us in study, in prayer, in eating and in sharing.

The way to build community, the way to build our faith is to participate in thousands upon thousands of not especially memorable moments. We eat dinner with each other. We study the Bible, read books and discuss them. We worship. These are basics. They are such a basic part of Christian faith development that it is almost assumed.

Contemporary theologian Cindy Rigby, in the last chapter of her book *Holding Faith*, when discussing what we are called to do as Christians, says, “Here is where I default to the standard Christian advice we pastoral types dole out to anyone interested in being a faithful disciple: We need to pray. Read our Bibles. Go to

church. I know we know these already. But we need to reclaim them in a new way. What if we thought of prayer, Bible reading, and going to church as ways of creating spaces to imagine God’s kingdom.” Cindy Rigby suggests that in order to imagine and create the kingdom of God, we need to regularly take part in the basics of prayer, study and eating together. Through each moment of Bible study, prayer, drinking coffee at church, these are the ways that God and us are painting a canvas together.

Together, each of us — through thousands, millions of not especially memorable moments — act as the paint and the paintbrush God uses to create God’s kingdom here and now.

As we are at the start of this program year at Village Presbyterian Church, join me in committing to participating in thousands of not especially memorable moments. Because these are some of the places and ways that God reveals Godself.

You might be wondering what Village Church offers. We are gratefully part of a church that offers so much that I cannot name them all here. I will point out a few, but be sure to go to our website and see all that we offer.

Volunteer at the Food Pantry on 99th and Mission, or deliver flowers after church to our sick members. Attend organic intergenerational events like Wednesday Family Dinner Nights, Ice Cream Socials and Food Truck Festivals. Join a Bible study like a Presbyterian

Women Circle, a Village Connect Group and Village U class.

So to end, *you*. You are important. Your presence is important. To make a bumper sticker slogan out of this: “Church” doesn’t happen without “U.” You eating dinner at Wednesday Family Dinner Nights, learning through a Village U class and worshipping on Sundays has divine and cosmic ramifications. Your participation matters to God — and it matters to us.

I invite you to join me and find one additional way to participate in Christian community together. I have committed me and my family to go to every Wednesday Family Dinner Night. Perhaps you want to join the Sewing Ministry or the Art Ministry. Maybe register for a Village U class. Maybe commit to coming to the Village Cup for a cup of coffee every Tuesday at 9 a.m. to pray for everyone who walks by. Whatever it is, know that God is using you to paint the eschatological masterpiece that is Christian community here at Village Church.

We are now going to watch a 45-second time-lapse video of an artist painting. This is from the 2015 Winter Park Paint Out in Winter Park, Florida. This time-lapse video compresses three hours of a painting being created by renowned Impressionist artist Morgan Samuel Price. The time-lapse is produced from 3,000 individual images. As we watch this in silence, imagine God as the painter, and us as the paint. Each of these moments is not especially memorable, but when

joined together, they create a masterpiece. You — yes, you — are helping to create God’s masterpiece.

The video: <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/features/os-story-fla360-timelapse-3hours-impressionism-20150424-story.html>

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This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church’s website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.