

# Ordinary 2

## Coats

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Salem United Methodist Church

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*Take up your cross and follow me.*

*This is your cross to bear.*

*Well... you just gotta carry your cross and follow Christ.*

Is this a new phrase to you? Or one you've carried with you through your life?

Have you heard it said with love? With superiority? In a way that felt out of touch?

Was it comforting? Did it encourage you?

This doesn't feel ordinary to me. It feels like something extra. Extra effort, extra challenge.

Crosses are physically heavy. We're not talking about taking up a little cross necklace that many of us own. Not even this nice one on our wall.

A real cross? Most of us wouldn't be physically capable of lifting one, let alone carrying it. Doing the emotional equivalent? That's not ordinary.

During Lent, we're talking about **everything** ordinary. Last week was ordinary bread. The week before? Ordinary dust.

This? Take up your cross? Hm.

I've heard this said in a bunch of ways that feel... icky. I've heard it said to brush off trauma, abuse, toxic situations. I've heard it said as a cheap way to describe following Jesus: as if suffering is what *earns* salvation.

Sometimes, when we hear things like that, we might feel a bit stuck. After all, it is in the Bible. Jesus does say to take up your cross and follow...

We know the cross was a torture device that was used by the state to literally kill our savior. [*indecisive*] That... sounds pretty **awful**. If Jesus did it, if I'm **supposed** to take up my cross, too... if I'm supposed to join Christ in lifting and carrying the impossible... perhaps suffering *IS* required for salvation. How can we *argue* with scripture?

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Is anyone uncomfortable yet?

Actually, the cross is Jesus promising to fight violence with love. Jesus is all powerful. He could have snapped his fingers and gotten all power, worship, sustenance, everything! Satan promised that to him in the temptations-remember? All Jesus had to do was worship Satan and he'd have everything he wanted. Easy. **Extra-ordinary** perfection!

Instead, he allows himself to be arrested, questioned, and killed. Why?

Why would he do that? He could have changed everything instantly. He could have fixed all problems forever. World peace? Poverty? Famine? [snap] Over.

What's so bad about that?

Well, Christ had a bigger problem to deal with. He was *and is* dealing with the intricacies of the human heart. Sure, He could solve all our external problems in an instant... and we'd be crucifying someone else in the next.

Solving the presenting symptoms does *nothing* for the disease.

**The only thing that can cure us is learning to love God more than *anything*.  
Learning to put God before anything.**

Jesus is God, but he's also a young man who wants to care for his people. The story of the temptations isn't a story of laughable things the devil presents to Jesus. It's a story of Jesus *feeling tempted* deep in his soul. He wanted to have what the devil offered.

Then later, before his death, he begs God to find another way. He promises to take on suffering and death if he must, but he begs for another way out.

He makes a **fully informed choice** to take up his *impossible* cross, suffer, and die.

And this death? It's a once for all death. It's the death to end all death. Nobody else needs to die for anyone else to live. Christ took it all. As he died he said, "it is finished."

Finished.

Done.

Not a semi-colon waiting for someone else to finish the idea. A period. Full stop.

Okay.... So what did he mean about us taking up our crosses?? If the suffering and death is done... it seems like this is a contradiction. What's going on?

*This is a great "wait, what?" If you've been in a study with me, you know I love "wait, what?" questions. That's when you're happily reading along and suddenly you read something where you think, "wait! What?" Trying to think about the cross is a great "wait, what" moment.*

If Christ calls us to take up our cross, but also fought death by dying and being raised on a cross, what does that mean for us?

Mini headache, right?

I can't solve it for you, but I can offer some ideas.

My first question-what leads Jesus to the cross? What made the authorities so upset that they decided to kill him?

If Jesus had been easygoing or smooth talking, he probably could have gotten out of it. He wasn't disrupting the civic order, just the religious order. The religious leaders needed to expend extraordinary effort to get him crucified. They needed to get the government on their side first. If Jesus had made friends with any of the leaders of the government or the religious leaders, they probably would have protected him from death. We've all seen leaders protect their friends. All he'd need to do to stay safe is soften some of his language in some crowds. If he'd left his Son of God status a little more ambiguous, perhaps they would have looked past him and he would have lived.

But Jesus couldn't do that.

He couldn't tell a half-truth about God.

His insistence on telling the full truth of God's love, redemption, and expectation is what gets him to the cross.

Telling the truth... it's not really ordinary in our lives. We work really hard to be polite and not make waves. We try to say things the right way-at least when we're face to face!

Now, not always. We all know we've living in a world that is more and more divided.

We're seeing a shift into angry truth-telling based in feelings rather than facts. We're seeing attacks rather than conversations. We're claiming to be prophetic like Christ as we shout at each other on social media.

EEK! Friends, that's not the kind of truth telling I'm talking about.

Christ's truth telling was about making life more accessible. Making sure the temple didn't have a tax. Making sure people with illnesses or disabilities were accepted into society. Making sure women and foreigners had a voice. Making sure people didn't twist his Father's words of love into rules of hate.

If your truth-telling is angry and isn't about inclusion, that's not taking up your cross.

Christ's truth-telling is saying that he is more important than anything in your life. More important than your job, family, security.

If you want to take up your cross-start telling people that Christ is more important than anything else. Start living like following Christ's way of inclusion is more important than anything else.

Some people will be hurt.

Some people won't understand.

Some people may think you're crazy!

Many people will find it inspiring.

Many people will see the way your truth-telling brings life, rather than death.

Many people will wonder what makes you different. What makes your truth-telling *compelling*.

**If you ask honest, hard questions? If you tell the truth about what you find? If you take up your cross, others will know life.**

*It's ordinary*-this truth telling. It's what you can do in your daily life. We aren't all called to be preachers! You're here because you're called to be a Christian *everyday* in your daily life. I'm here to help sustain you in the journey. We can carry our cross, we can share the truth, together.

Friends, I have to do this. I have to bring in a Pokémon Go story. Many of you know I just discovered this cell phone game called "Pokémon Go." If you've never heard of it, bear with me!

In the game, you're trying to collect different Pokémon. They all have different levels of power. If they have a lot of power, they're harder to catch. Something with a power of 15 is a cake walk. Something with 2,000 might be a problem. I might be able to catch something with 2,000 power, but it'll be close.

Now, beyond **ordinary** Pokémon, there are special Pokémon. There are some that are extra powerful. Way beyond all the ordinary limits. Their health will be in the 5 to 6 digit range.

That catch? That's impossible. That's beyond me. I literally cannot do it on my own. These are called "raids." Raids are done in groups.

So, here's the best part. As you fight this Pokémon with the group, it's power lowers steadily. Finally, at the end, when you defeat it, it starts to shrink. It goes from 50,000 power down to 40, then 30, then 15, then 7,000, then down down down to something I can manage on my own.

This defeat makes it manageable in the future.

Perhaps that's what Christ did on the cross. He took on the enemy in its biggest most powerful form and reduced it to something we can manage. Something... ordinary.

## TRANSITION TO LOVE FEAST

We cannot do this on our own power. We need God to sustain us. That's why we do communion. In communion we are in God's presence. We are forgiven, reconciled, and commissioned in the world.

Today, we are doing something slightly different. Today we are doing a Love Feast. This is to sustain you on your journey.

This is about feeding our spiritual hunger. God knows that we are a practical people. We need symbols and examples. We need to try things, fail, try again. We can't just get information and understand, we have to experience it ourselves. That's what we do in a love feast. We get to practice eating abundantly to learn what it means to experience grace abundantly. The only thing that can satisfy our deep soul hunger is God.



As we shift into our Love Feast, open your souls to be filled by Christ. Bring your emptiness, your fear, your loneliness. Bring your deep joy, your desire for God, your celebration. Bring everything you have and as you eat, drink, and pray, let God come into all of it. Communion is about God's full presence with us. Love Feasts are about God's abundance within us. You can do this anytime, with anyone. You don't need to be at church or with church people. John Wesley came up with this for communities that didn't have pastors so that they would never be without remembering God's abundance.

## PREP INSTRUCTIONS

For people watching on Zoom, I invite you to turn your cameras on so you can look at each other. If you're on Facebook, our Live Site, or YouTube and you'd like to join with a community for this mini-feast, go ahead and click the Zoom link in the description of the video. They'll be happy to welcome you! If you're watching this later, welcome. I invite you to think deeply about your community as you participate with us.

If you don't already, I suggest getting ready by having a glass of something to drink and something to eat. Here we have water, crackers, and peppermint melts. Water because Christ is the living water, crackers because they are relatively shelf stable and delicious, and peppermint melts because I believe in bringing chocolate into everything I can. If this were communion we would still have bread or crackers and we'd have grape juice.