

## The Most Ordinary Summer Pageant Ever

Welcome to the Most Ordinary Summer Pageant Ever. But there ain't nothin' ordinary about it. We'll explain that soon enough.

Last time we saw y'all, Jesus was just an iddy-biddy, tiny, little thing, and he sure was cute. We all sang *Silent Night* and *Joy to the World*, and for good reason, because that little baby grew up to be an extraordinary person. Joseph took the family to Egypt and back again, finally free of Herod's grip. And when the family settled back in Nazareth, Jesus turned into quite the prodigy. At twelve, Jesus put a scare into his mama, Mary, because he got so engrossed talking with the Temple elders, he forgot to meet everyone at the food court, and begin the two-day hike home. But his precociousness soon revealed itself in a gifted sense of kindness, and a wisdom beyond his years, and a devotion to channel every ounce of his energy in the service of his Creator.

And let me tell you something: when you love like Jesus did; when you see your neighbor, I mean *really* see your neighbor like Jesus did; when you have a curiosity for laws that unlock possibilities rather than preventing them; when you can tell stories that invite people to see themselves in their characters; when you've been called to be God's boy...you can change the world. Jesus changed the world, and he's still changing it.

For nearly 30 weeks a year, we participate in something called Ordinary Time. It's the space in between *Pentecost*, the day we all met the Holy Spirit, and the birthday of the Church, and *Advent*, the four Sundays right before Christmas, a season of preparing and waiting for the birth of Jesus, and all the hope, peace, joy, and love that surround his arrival. But there's nothing ordinary or normal about Ordinary Time. We focus

on the life and ministry of Jesus. And just like our own lives, even when it's not a feast-week such as Christmas, or Thanksgiving, or Easter, or family birthdays, lots of important and special things happen. The business of living; the business of being in community; the caring for one another; summering, to name a few.

We want to tell you the story of the ordinary Jesus doing extraordinary things. But we need your help.

A pageant is the acting out of a story or stories we know, and many of the stories you'll hear today, you might have first learned in Sunday School or Vacation Bible School, or from reading your own Bibles.

However, when we tell the story today, we'll be acting it out and there may be a few things added which aren't in the Bible. There is no script, so it's kind of what you call an improv...in other words, we'll be making it up as we go along!

During the telling of the story, there will also be some directions for the actors and the audience. You'll have to pay attention to make sure you catch all the instructions and cues. There will be a chance for the actors to make up what the real characters might have said and ad lib the story how they see fit.

Here are the first instructions for the audience:

Every time you hear the word **Kingdom** – you must shout out  
“Kingdom, glorious Kingdom!”

Every time you hear the name John – you have to say, “Oh, what a fine young man!”

Every time you hear the word **Jesus**, you have to say “Amen” in your best “going to church” voice.

There may be some other instructions, but they’ll come along as we go. Now remember,

Kingdom – “Kingdom, glorious kingdom!”

John – “Oh, what a fine young man!”

Jesus – “Amen!”

There once was a man named **John**. He was a good man. A prophet. He lived way out in the country. And **John** would travel all over, walking back and forth and back and forth. And he’d get excited when he was around other people, so much so that he’d wave his arms above his head, and jump up and down, and even do jumping jacks. And when **John** had gotten the attention of everyone in the audience, he’d say as loud as he could, “Repent!”

**John** preached a message of hope, mixed with a little fire. The fire and gravel in his voice got everyone’s attention. The hope stirred everyone’s heart. When **John** said, “Repent,” what he meant was turn around. Because God was getting ready to do something special with the world, make something new, and everyone could be part of it. This was a call for everyone to live into their best selves, to be the goodness God created us to be.

To symbolize a commitment to living into our best selves, **John** invited people to be baptized in the Jordan River. They flocked by the thousands, and **John** welcomed them all, pointing his fingers in every

direction, and saying, “You get a baptism, and you get a baptism, and you get a baptism!!!”

One day, **Jesus** ventured to the wilderness to see what the fuss was all about. He saw **John**, and he said, “Hey **John**, would you baptize me?” And **John** said, “Yes, **Jesus**, I’ll baptize you!!!” And **Jesus** ran into the water, and the two of them splashed, and splashed, and splashed. The water was so cold, and so clear, and so refreshing. And **John** dunked **Jesus** under the water, ever-so-gently, and he brought **Jesus** out of the water, and he said, “**Jesus**, you are a child of God!”

And at the exact moment that **Jesus** came out of the water, three doves, just as happy as they could be, flapping their wings, I mean really flapping their wings, and saying, “chirp, chirp, chirp, chirp, chuurp,” came flying down from heaven.

And God’s voice followed the doves. And God said, “Hey world. This is **Jesus**. My child. My boy. My son. And you need to know him, because I love him. And I am so proud of him.”

And **John** shook **Jesus**’ hand, and he said, “It’s your turn now.”

And **Jesus** said, “What am I supposed to do?”

And **John** said, “Teach people to love God and to love one another. You’ll be good at it.”

And **Jesus** said, “I think I can do that.”

And **John** said, “You’ll need some helpers.”

So **Jesus** sat down and thought for a bit. And he thought some more. And a little more. And then he got up, he went to look for some helpers. He walked along one end of the lake. And then the other. And then he walked back again.

And in the lake, he saw a fisherman named Simon, who was sitting in the boat with his brother Andrew. But they looked discouraged. They were hanging their heads, and shaking them back and forth, and sighing really loudly. They hadn't caught any fish.

**Jesus**, said, "Hey friends! I know this might sound crazy, but try casting your nets in the deep water."

So Simon and Andrew cast their nets into the lake. And when they tried to pull the nets back in, the nets were full of hundreds of fish. Fish, fish, fish, everywhere. They tugged. And tugged. And tugged. And finally, they got the net into the boat. But there were more fish than the net could hold, and the fish started jumping in the boat, and they started clapping their hands together trying to catch them so they wouldn't get away. And then, before they knew it, the boat was full, and it started sinking. The water was up to their knees. So they jumped out. And they swam. And swam. And swam. And when they'd made it to shore, **Jesus** said, "Wouldn't you rather fish for people?"

And Simon looked at Andrew. And Andrew looked at Simon. And Simon nodded yes. And Andrew nodded yes. And then Simon, said, "Yes, on one condition. Call me Peter."

**Jesus** looked at Simon Peter, considered the request, and said, "Okay, Peter. Follow me. You, too, Andrew."

And off they went. The three of them walked on this side of the lake, and then the other side of the lake, and then this one again. It seemed like they walked around the lake a million times. In the process of all this walking, **Jesus** told Peter and Andrew, “We need some more helpers.” Eventually, ten more helpers joined the regular traveling party, but lots of other helpers emerged along the way. It being the summer, we don’t have a full budget for cast and writers, so you, the audience, will just have to imagine the other disciples.

Finally, **Jesus** had found all the helpers he needed to get started on his mission. And they all sat down to rest.

As they rested, **Jesus** explained to the helpers, whom he called his disciples, that God had called him to tell the world about something named the **kingdom** or kin-dom of God. All creation had the ability to live into its purpose – to be God’s goodness right here on Earth. And each time people expressed love for God and love for neighbor, this **kingdom** came a little closer to their lives, to everyone’s lives.

**Jesus** told the disciples that they were going to travel together, go to all sorts of new places, and meet all sorts of new people, and take part in every human experience. And day by day, something new would be revealed about God.

**Jesus** asked the disciples: “Are you ready for something extraordinary?”

And the disciples replied, “Yes!”

Let’s start with the miracles. **Jesus** and the disciples got up, and they walked to the next town.

They met a man who'd been blind from birth. **Jesus** placed his hands over this man's eyes, and his sight was restored. But **Jesus** also offered healing, because he saw this man, this person, this neighbor as a child of God. He said, "I see you!" And the man said, "I feel seen!"

**Jesus** met others who could no longer walk. But he didn't walk on by. He greeted them. He listened to them. He prayed with them. And gave them the strength to walk again. And he said, "I see you, too!" And they said, "We feel seen, too!"

One day, the disciples traveled by boat, and a storm came along, and before they knew it, the sea was in a rage. The waves whipped back and forth, kind of like teenagers waving pool noodles and hissing and foaming. And the disciples were afraid. They shook. Their teeth chattered. They crouched down low.

Not **Jesus**. He was asleep. I mean *really* asleep. Snoring soundly. The kind that whistles. And the disciples screamed, "Wake up, **Jesus**. Wake up, wake up, wake up!!!" And they shook him. And finally, **Jesus** sat up. And he rubbed the sleep from his eyes. And he yawned. And he stretched. And as he did, the waves started waving at him, and hissing, and foaming.

And **Jesus** just shook his head. And he said, "Peace. Be Still." And he motioned with hands for the waves to go on and get. And those waves stopped what they were doing. And they quietly, calmly, ever-so-gently, laid the pool noodles down, and walked away. And the sea was calm again. And **Jesus** reminded the disciples that no matter the storm, no matter the crisis, he would always be a calming presence in their lives. "I got you," he said.

When they finally came back on shore, a large crowd had gathered. **Jesus** was a story-teller, and he delivered a great performance. He told stories to help everyone understand the **kingdom** of God. How everyone belongs. How God never stops loving humanity. Why God's love is something to celebrate.

There was a story about a shepherd. He had a hundred sheep. And yet he knew them all by name. And one day, one of those sheep started to wander and she got lost. She kept saying, "bah, bah, bah." And she walked back and forth, and back and forth, and back and forth, just bah-bah-bah-ing and hoping to find home. And that shepherd left the 99, and went looking for the lost sheep. And when the shepherd found the sheep, he was SO happy, because she was his pride, his joy, a member of his family. And she added to his wholeness. And there was nothing he wouldn't do to make her a home. And the shepherd gave his sheep the biggest hug. **Jesus** said that's how God is with each of us. God never stops loving, searching, hosting, protecting, longing to make a home for us, no matter how far we wander.

There was one about an old woman who lost her coin. She was really disappointed. She slapped her forehead. She shook her head, frowned a little, let out a deep sigh. Put her face in her hands. That coin meant a week's worth of groceries. She went back to her chores, and while she was sweeping the floor, she found the coin. And she picked it up. And she admired it. And she jumped up and down. And she yelled, "Woo-hooh!" And she threw a party for all her friends. **Jesus** reminds us that God always delights in our homecomings, always celebrates our worth and value.

The crowd was really amped up, and **Jesus** was just about to tell them about a son who reunites with his father, and about a Samaritan who models the idea of neighbor, when the disciples realized the sun was

going down, and everyone was hungry, and there wasn't a Bojangles within miles.

The disciples asked *Jesus*, "What are we gonna feed these people?"

*Jesus* said, "You feed them."

The disciples responded, "With what? It would take a month's wages to feed all these people."

*Jesus* isn't deterred. "I've got this," he says. He instructs them to go and see if anyone has any food. So the disciples went to ask the crowd for food. Nearly everyone shakes their head, because they didn't bring anything.

But one small child steps forward. "You can have my food; my mom packed plenty."

The child gives *Jesus* two fish and five loaves. *Jesus* blesses the food, and breaks it, and suddenly the food multiplies, creating an abundance of fish and bread, so much abundance that there are twelve baskets left over.

We learn that when we share; when we cooperate; when we look out for one another, there's more than enough to go around.

This is where our pageant ends. We sit here with full stomachs, and full hearts, ready to rest for the evening. We know at some point this season will transition to something else. Something deeper, perhaps more painful and full of longings. There will be goodbyes, and things we won't yet understand, and all the ups and downs of our spiritual adolescence. But we're on a journey. In the presence of *Jesus*.

The Most Ordinary Summer Pageant Ever  
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Bob Stillerman



We work for God's *kingdom*.

We live in God's hope.

Sometimes with the fire of *John*. Always with the love of *Jesus*.

Discovering what it means to be beloved community. An ordinary summer that's anything but ordinary.

Thanks be to God!