

# Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church

## Pastor's Blog: December 29, 2011

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### Ordinary Days

By the Rev. Louisa Watkins Umphres



Some thoughts before these extraordinary days of the holiday season end and the first of 365 ordinary days begin again –

On Christmas Day, *The New York Times* Sunday Book Review published an article by renowned author Marilynne Robinson: “The Book of Books: What Literature Owes the Bible”. It is a lovely article and worth a read on its own; in the meantime, allow me to give away the thrust of the piece.

Robinson posits that, in the Bible, the narratives of ordinary people are given meaning. For her, literary realism follows suit:

*The great assumption of literary realism is that ordinary lives are invested with a kind of significance that justifies, or requires, its endless iterations of the commonplace, including, of course, crimes and passions and defeats, however minor these might seem in the world's eyes. This assumption is by no means inevitable. Most cultures have written about demigods and kings and heroes.*

Certainly at Christmas we celebrate our king and hero, Christ. But celebrating Christ cannot be separated from telling the stories of those he encounters and with whom he identifies: the lowly, the weak, the tax-collector, the fisherman... the ordinary. The story of Emmanuel is brought to life when normal shepherds meet the baby in a manger. In this week's texts, the baby Jesus is brought to temple for a traditional ceremony and two rather ordinary elderly people recognize him as the Messiah.

As we look to this weekend for resolutions about our ordinary days and ordinary lives, I wonder what we have inherited from our Bible that we take for granted. Perhaps, as Robinson says, “in its emphatic insistence that the burden of meaning is shared in every life, the Bible may only give expression to a truth most of us know intuitively.” Or perhaps this is *not* something we know at all. Where, I wonder, do I treat the lives of others as meaningless? Where, I wonder, do we fall short of our extraordinary Biblical heritage and think too little of our ordinary brothers and sisters?

I hope you have each enjoyed an exceptional holiday, full of peace, love, and joy. As we look to the New Year, I hope you experience all of the blessings of ordinary days, ordinary family, and ordinary friends.