In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear friends, I have a title for this sermon: I call it “Things Both Ordinary and Sublime.” It is an Easter sermon. It is a sermon about how the resurrection of Jesus touches everything! Easter concerns both ordinary earthly things and heavenly things. It concerns both the here and now and the hereafter. The radiance of the Easter blesses everything in sight.

I begin with the mention of fish in our Gospel Lesson for this morning. Jesus is hungry. He asks for some fish. The disciples can hardly believe that it is Jesus standing before them. They know that he died. They know that he suffered that brutal death on the cross. But here he is, standing right before their eyes. They wonder whether they are seeing a ghost. But ghosts don’t get hungry. And so Jesus reassures them that it is indeed he himself by asking for something ordinary. He asks for some food:

41And while they still disbelieved for joy, and wondered, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” 42They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43and he took it and ate before them. (Luke 24:41-43, RSV)

No long philosophical argument is needed here. No reasoning is required to show that Jesus is a living man rather than a ghost. Just give him some food, for Pete’s sake.

Let me list the four passages from today's Bible readings that have caught my attention. Two of them are ordinary kinds of things, and two of them are sublime. I have already mentioned the first of the ordinary things: I mean the piece of broiled fish that Jesus took and ate. The second ordinary thing comes from this morning’s Psalm – Psalm 4. It speaks of sleep. The verse goes this way:

8I lie down in peace; at once I fall asleep; for only you, LORD, make me dwell in safety. (Psalm 4, LBW)

Food and sleep: two of the good things in the ordinary world in which you and I live. Our God is in favor of both of them!

And then we will turn to two sublime things – two extraordinary things. First there is the story in our reading from Acts Chapter 3 about how Peter
and John healed the man lame from birth. In a moment, the man goes from being a lifelong invalid to being a happy man who leaps and shouts.

And the last of the four passages I want to lift up comes from our Epistle reading. This comes from First John Chapter 3. It speaks of a sight we are meant to see some day, and it speaks of a change in us – an improvement in us. The text goes this way:

2Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.
(1 John 3:2, NRSV)

On Easter morning a couple weeks ago we rejoiced at the resurrection of Jesus. Now we see that Easter touches everything, from our food and rest to our eternity in which we see our beautiful Savior and become like him. Glorious thought!

Let’s begin by returning to the piece of broiled fish. A good number of the disciples had been fisherman. They know about fish and they know how to broil it so it tastes good. Jesus would like to have some.

Is there anything more basic to ordinary life than food? Rich and poor are both glad for food. Wait long enough without eating and we will all be glad for some food. The risen Jesus is no ghost. He demonstrates his place in humanity by asking for some food. Recall his feeding of the five thousand on the mountain. He was concerned for his congregation that day. He had preached to them a good long time. Now he was done, but he did not simply turn away from his congregation and focus on other things. He worried that they were hungry:

Jesus said, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” (Matthew 14:16, RSV)

Well, the disciples cannot give them something to eat. Too many people, they figure. But Jesus can feed them and he does. Now, when Jesus is risen from the dead, he is still interested in food. We should believe that our resurrected Lord Jesus is still keenly interested in the daily kind of life that you and I live, including that we and all the world should have some food.

Likewise, in our ordinary daily life, we need to be able to get some sleep. Sometimes I send out emails at 3 o’clock or 4 o’clock in the morning. It is not that I am virtuous, working away into the wee hours. It is simply that I do not always sleep through the night. I fall asleep quickly but sometimes I wake up in the wee hours. Mind is too busy, often with happy thoughts. Sometimes, after studying the Sunday Bible readings, I seem to write sermons in my sleep. So I wake up in the middle of the night, and jot them down, or do some
other reading or writing. I don’t worry about it, except that it leaves me tuckered out sometimes in the middle of the day. I think back to when I was younger, and how I could sleep like a log all night long. You young singers from Mattawan, Michigan, can probably do that — sleep like babies. It is a lovely thing to get a good night of sleep. It’s an ordinary sort of thing, but when the writers of our lectionary were choosing a Psalm for this Easter Season Sunday, I think it is nice that they included Psalm 4. That is a Psalm that Vicar Caleb often leads us in during Sunday night Compline. The Psalm ends by speaking of peaceful sleep:

8I lie down in peace; at once I fall asleep; for only you, LORd, make me dwell in safety. (Psalm 4, LBW)

The Psalm fits with one of the evening hymns we often sing during Compline – the hymn “Abide with Me.” The first verse of that hymn could well be a bedtime prayer:

Abide with me, fast falls the eventide.
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me.

One thing that Easter means is the quite ordinary thing that we can lie down and get some sleep. There is Someone who will stay awake and watch over us. I mean our resurrected Jesus Christ. Food and sleep for us – these ordinary things matter to our Savior.

Now let’s move on to some extraordinary things, some sublime things. Let’s begin by thinking of the lame man in our story in Acts Chapter 3. There was a rhythm to the man’s life. He could not walk to the temple gate where he would ask for alms. He could not walk there because he was born lame. He has never walked. He has never had the joy of getting up, catching his balance, and away he goes, walking. So friends carry him to the temple gate and he spends the day begging. Only this time the disciples come walking by. Peter and John. They walk by and the lame man looks to them for alms. And Peter then says and does something entirely marvelous. The story goes this way:

Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. 7And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. 8And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. (Acts 3:6-8, KJV)
Now, this is not an ordinary thing of life. This is unheard of, that a man born lame can suddenly leap up, stand and walk, and praise God. But this too is part of the meaning of Easter. The resurrection of Jesus means that our Great Physician of body and soul is alive and on duty and one day, for sure, will reach us. This story of the lame man leaping and praising God is one of the happiest stories I know, and it is full of sublime promise for you and me.

Finally let us speak of that mysterious but joyful passage in First John Chapter 3. It speaks of a vision before us and of a change in ourselves. Again, the text goes this way:

2 Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.
(1 John 3:2, NRSV)

Recently, my sister down on the farm on the Eastern Shore of Maryland celebrated her birthday. These things happen. You look up one day and there you are: in your sixties. One of her sons said a nice thing about that. He reminded her that her age means she will see the Lord sooner, and that is a good thing. And to this, both my sister and I say, Amen! It is part of Easter faith, that someday—perhaps sooner than we expect—we are going to see the Lord. We are going to see our Beautiful Saviour. St. Augustine loved to think about that—about the vision of Christ ahead of us. He wrote about it:

Therefore, we are to see a certain vision, my [brothers and sisters], “which neither eye hath seen, nor ear hath heard, nor hath entered into the heart of man:” a certain vision, a vision surpassing all earthly beautifulness, beautifulness of gold, of silver, of groves and fields; the beautifulness of sea and air, the beautifulness of sun and moon, the beautifulness of the stars, the beautifulness of angels: surpassing all things: because from it are all things beautiful.¹

The resurrection of Jesus means this sublime thing: One day, we shall see the Lord.

St. John then immediately lifts up the moral meaning of this vision for day-to-day life. He says that we should purify ourselves, to be like Jesus. His words go this way:

3And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

And this makes sense, now doesn't it? If Easter launches us on a sublime pilgrimage toward seeing our Beautiful Saviour someday, we should try to makes ourselves a bit more beautiful along the way, so that we will be more in harmony with the Beautiful One we shall soon enough see, even Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.