Now and then I make a statement to the effect that some aspect of Christianity is very Episcopalian, like how changing water into wine was the most Episcopalian of all the miracles. Well today I am going to continue that trend because I think we might have the most Episcopalian of the saints in Saint Joseph of Arimathea. I say that because of the description we get of him in John’s Gospel which reads, “Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret.” It seems, that like many Episcopalians, he didn’t want to be gauche; he wanted to keep it to himself. I mean if he was too public about this whole Jesus business people might think he was a Baptist and then he might be forced to give up his membership at Arimathea’s Ale and Quail club. But all joking aside I don’t think we can be too hard on Joseph for this anonymity because there are a lot of good things about the types of people who don’t want to draw attention to themselves. In the case of Joseph of Arimathea, when help was needed, he helped. I mean Jesus had been telling the disciples for months that he was going to be killed and yet not one of them thought that maybe they should have some sort of plan about what to do with his body when it was all over. Perhaps they were like the office mate I had in Qatar who thought that the half-empty water bottles he left all over our office just sort of magically disappeared. Whatever the case, here it was the end of the day and Jesus is dead on the cross. And we read, “[Jospeh] asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body.”

I once heard someone say that a saint is not an ordinary person who does extraordinary things but is an extraordinary person who does the ordinary things that no one else will do. And I think that description might do for Joseph of Arimathea and furthermore, I also think it is kind of fitting that we remember him today. Holy Saturday is kind of the neglected day of Holy Week. The other days have snazzy names like Maundy Thursday and Good Friday but today is just Holy Saturday. It’s like the marketing committee forgot to come up with an appropriate moniker and just threw out Holy Saturday when their client unexpectedly popped in and asked what they had come up with. And so it seems right that on this sort of forgotten day of Holy Week we remember a guy who remembered to take care of the thing that seems to have slipped everyone else’s mind. On this forgotten day of Holy Week, I think Joseph of Arimathea serves as a good reminder that sainthood can be found in some very quiet, mundane and forgotten places. It can be found in the places that are often overlooked.

One of my brother’s friends is a marine biologist. He once mentioned that if people pay attention to ocean wildlife, they focus on the dolphins. He said that dolphins are fine but the overall health of the ocean is dependent on a lot of things that are not dolphins and yet it is always the dolphins that people want to save. I think sometimes our spiritual life is like this. It focuses on the big and flashy and misses the small but significant. It is not about the dolphins but about paying attention to things like mollusks and ocean acidification. Sure no one much notices the stuff needed for a healthy ocean, but that does not make it unimportant. Just as in our life as Christians and in the Church, no one pays much mind to the people who clean the toilets in the parish hall, set up the altar or diligently remember everyone on the prayer list. And a lot of the people who do those things are happy that it stays that way. They are happy to have it done in secret. And similarly, I don’t think it is necessarily a bad thing for Joseph of Arimathea’s to be a secret follower of Jesus. Because it seems that in the secrecy he is paying attention to the little stuff; the stuff that may not be glamorous or even noticed. And so tonight let us thank God for all of the people who take care of the ordinary things that the rest of us ignore because without them the church would be incomplete and in the case of Joseph of Arimathea there would be no empty tomb to find tomorrow, because no one but Joseph bothered to put Jesus in one.