

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

March 5, 2023



LITERALISM

and other intentional misunderstandings

by Drew Downs

I often marvel at the many ways we choose to misunderstand each other.

We groan at the old joke: I just flew in from Orlando and boy are my arms tired! but we often take each other in such stark terms.

Literalism, as an understanding of the world, is related to concrete sequential thinking: an early stage in the development of language and communication.

We all go through this developmental stage. In a sense, we're all born as little literalists. Then we learn about nuance and complexity.

We may desire to keep everything simple. So we use literalism, not as merely one choice among many, but as a means of intentionally misunderstanding. To *avoid* the complex truth. And to maintain our convictions. Not as generous conversationalists, but as warriors, defending truth.

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WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Being Changed

As we gather each year for Ash Wednesday, we are invited to keep a holy Lent. Not because we're bound to make it *unholy*, but because we need the reminder.

It begins by reminding us that the early Christians were reminded that this is a season of repentance. We invite new people to repent *and our own*.

Early Christians spent the season of Lent, not just preparing for the *holiday* of Easter, but for the very change that it brings.

Resurrection is change. Being changed.

In Easter, God changed the rules. About life and death. About repentance and forgiveness and mercy and love and what it means to be human.

Our job in Lent isn't abstaining from chocolate because there's something wrong with chocolate. It's introducing self-discipline so that we take the five seconds to realize that change is the very nature of our existence. And that soon, we may have to reckon with the idea that someone who hurt us, who we have every reason to hate, has indeed changed. And we need to show mercy.

This is our work. To prepare ourselves. For the change. To be changed. And to be changed by letting other people in our lives change, too.

With love,
Drew

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FOR SUNDAY

The Second Sunday in Lent

March 5, 2023

Collect

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

John 3:1-17

There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as

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Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Reflection

This is still early in Jesus's ministry. The miracle of the wedding at Cana and then other unnamed miracles seem to have spread the word of Jesus rather quickly, though not everywhere yet. It is also apparently developing a kind of infamy among the religious leaders. Nicodemus doesn't feel comfortable coming to Jesus when he can be seen.

I can't help but think of the long history of secret-keeping, particularly among the people needing help. Even today, when therapy is so normal, it is still something people hide. Not because of mere embarrassment, but genuine backlash. People lose jobs, friendships, and even their lives because they have the audacity to ask for help.

Even in this most enlightened of eras, the idea of seeking help is abnormal. Our culture expects rugged individualism and celebrates the "self-made man". Concepts we treat as universal and necessary—which cause a great deal of harm.

Nicodemus seems intent on misunderstanding Jesus here. But we find out later that he is a secret disciple. He has had to live his life as a lie because the institution wouldn't accept him. This is tragic. And exposes, not so much his sin as the institution's.

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