


# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



May 8, 2022

## INSIDE

*a challenge of inclusion*

by Drew Downs

Everyone loves inside jokes. They are a kind of special language between people who "know". Like a secret handshake.

To the rest of us, it naturally sounds like nonsense. Which is half of the fun for the insiders. They don't *just* get the secret code. They get to see how it makes other people squirm. But for those outside "the know," it is less enjoyable. We often feel *excluded*, even if it's something we have no interest in.

That is the thing about being inside *and* outside. There is a lot of assumption, miscommunication, and flat out rejection going on that we mostly refuse to admit to.

The funny thing, though, is just how much all of that anxiety is about *nothing*. How often are inside jokes unexplainable? Usually, we're not really *excluded* from the joke. It just isn't something for us. The true object is to get everyone in on the fun.

# EASTER

*Spring 2022*

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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!

We have a couple of opportunities coming up that I am really looking forward to. And I am very eager to share them with you.

Sunday, May 22 will be Youth Sunday: a special service at 10:00 led by the youth of the High Point Youth Group. The music, prayers, readings, and preaching will all be youth-led. It will be a fun and faithful experience and a fantastic opportunity for St. Stephen's to offer as host that day.

Much like Holypalooza, Youth Sunday is an opportunity to worship in eccumenical partnership with our neighbors from Central Presbyterian and Centenary UMC as well as Unity Presbyterian.

We will have our regular 8:00 service that day, but I encourage you to join us at 10:00 for this special gathering.

We are also excited that the diocese is hosting the Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry on his visit to the Indianapolis area the first weekend in June. A special Eucharist is being planned in Bloomington for June 4. It is sure to be a blowout!

We are looking at ride-sharing or other possibilities to get as many of our people there as possible. If you would like to participate, please let us know so we can include you!

With love,  
Drew

# EASTER

*Spring 2022*

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## FOR SUNDAY

*Fourth Sunday of Easter*

May 8, 2022

### **Collect**

○ God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people: Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

From John 10:22-30

"My sheep hear my voice."

### **Reflection**

This is an extremely dangerous passage. I hope you know me well enough to know that I don't share these words lightly. Nor do I do so with *any* joy. This is a dangerous passage because of what some people *want* it to say.

Throughout the gospel of John, Jesus threads a really tight idea about the children of God. Who it is that God's grace and love goes to. And ultimately, the case he makes is that 1) all of us are inherently God's children, but 2) some of us don't *really want to be*, so 3) God won't give grace to them, but 4) they can always choose to receive it.

It is a complex and convoluted way of saying *yes there are boundaries and here is why they matter*.

# EASTER

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The problem, of course, is that John's version of Jesus is always talking about the line between in and out *and* the threat of being outside the line. And we, naturally, gravitate to expanding on the threat of *not* being inside the line rather than the myriad times Jesus puts us all inside the line.

Of course, this is one of the times Jesus argues that some people aren't in. And worse, we encounter John's use of "The Jews". It is hard not to read this as if Jesus (a Jew) is saying Jews are being condemned by God for not believing Jesus is the Messiah. And I honestly don't have a good response to that accusation. At least, not one that is terribly satisfying.

What I *can* say is that this *is* a leap in logic. And not one that makes a lot of sense in the first century when John was writing, some sixty years after the events depicted. Jesus isn't condemning Jews as a Jew followed by Jews.

The leap we make is built on the statement that they don't hear his voice, but his sheep all hear him. Some jump straight to the heresy of supersessionism: that Christians came to replace the Jews. What comes to my mind is a story I was once told by a church musician. He was talking about how to deal with a person who complains about a single music choice during a service. He asks if they liked the rest. They do, just not that one. So the musician said, obviously that piece isn't for them; it was for someone else.

The way John depicts Jesus is of a generous shepherd, calling out to all of the sheep. Anyone can come in—he keeps the gate wide open. Just...do it. It is open now. it was open then. It will be open tomorrow. But don't wait, because Jesus wants to offer the vibrant life of faith *now*. His desire is for all to be together *now*.

Christians have a long history of wanting certainty of that tomorrow, of the metaphysics of God and the order of creation, and an extreme desire to be right (with the adjoining privilege of condemning the wrong). Even this passage, in all of its challenge, refuses that satisfaction.

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