

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

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SINNERS

loving those who need love

by Drew Downs

Jesus highlights a conflict that still plagues the faithful. When leaders condemn him for hanging out with the ritually impure and traitorous, he responds incredulously. It as if they think he ought to hang out with those who don't need the help. Clearly they did. And many do.

Faithful people of every age create walled communities for the faithful and refuse contact with the outside world. They make

their own music and reject having any kind of real relationship with people outside their tradition.

Why then do so many people today ignore Jesus on this? I think because much of protestantism has focused on our *all* being such sinners in need of this *from Jesus*. Which misses the *other* half of what Jesus is communicating: that the faithful don't need the attention. They should give some, too.

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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!

Ordinary Time

This week we enter the half of the liturgical year we call Ordinary Time. We've been through several seasons: Advent, Christmas, the Season after Epiphany, Lent, and Easter. Now we're in the time when there isn't a season. It's just . . . ordinary time.

Because of all of that stuff we've been doing since last November, it is kind of nice to just not for awhile, you know? To just move ourselves into ordinary after month upon month of extraordinary. Of course, it can get a little old after awhile, but still, it can feel refreshing to come back to the main story.

This is what I like best about Ordinary Time. We essentially read the gospel in order from here until Thanksgiving. We had the call stories in Epiphany and the first bits in the weeks after, so we return to it now, still early, and make our way, through the gospel as we go through the summer, until finally we arrive outside Jerusalem as we prepare for Advent.

There are rhythms of the church year that are built around getting people to know what are traditionally described as the most important parts (around the principal feasts, Lent, and Holy Week). But this only works when our foundation of "ordinary" is firm. When we actually know what Jesus teaches throughout his life in ministry and how he responds to the challenges he faces. It is, much as John Dominic Crossan has argued, that Jesus's life and ministry is more than just about his birth, death, and resurrection. We learn from him: his life and work.

This is a great time to follow the whole story.

With love,
Drew+

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FOR SUNDAY

Proper 5A

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Collect

○ God, from whom all good proceeds: Grant that by your inspiration we may think those things that are right, and by your merciful guiding may do them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me."

And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made

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well. When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, "Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. And the report of this spread throughout that district.

Reflection

I often worry that we don't consider how radical Jesus is being in moments like this. Of course he eats with the tax collectors and sinners! Of course he heals people! That's the miracle of Jesus! But then we might suggest the radicals in our own time just "shut up and dribble" or we treat Jesus like the one to make things right, not us. It is almost as if the thing that disqualifies people from being listened to today is just fine when Jesus does it. He is the Messiah, son of humanity, persona of God after all.

But the sequence of Jesus's work here in the first third of Matthew's gospel is radical event upon radical event. The Sermon on the Mount invites a dramatic restructuring of the world. He then goes on to heal people, including gentiles. He sits with the impure and calls a traitor to be a disciple. He somehow heals a woman without intending to and then raises a child from the dead. This isn't normal stuff here. And nobody in the gospel narrative is treating it as such. Perhaps we shouldn't either.

The radicality of Jesus's work is an essential part of his story *and* the gospel itself. Because how things were wasn't good enough. Just as how things are isn't good enough now. and I suspect that our own sense of the work we're called to do would greatly benefit from embracing such a vision of purpose, of love, that expands the range of our work. That our commitment is to God's Way of Love more than it is "winning" anything about anything in this world. Or just getting along with it either.

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