

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

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ENOUGH

it is enough to be like the teacher

by Drew Downs

Back when I watched college football, I used to love that there *wasn't* a playoff. It helped us see that our means of ranking are always so arbitrary. And yet the act of one team winning one game is also arbitrary. But this pursuit of greatness, rank, power, glory, is also treated like a virtue, natural, perhaps even righteous. To want to be the best is almost pathologically reinforced by our culture and honored as the highest motivation of them all.

Jesus rejects this near-pavlovian response by saying it isn't cool for a disciple to be above their teacher. It is *enough* to be like them. But this isn't just about power, its about how the powerful see the teacher and seek to undermine him. This isn't about glory and proving anything to the world. Because the world will work to keep you powerless, to prove you are less than. This isn't about merit. It's about power and how the powerful fear those who work for justice.

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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!

Parallel Story

A central thesis of mine about the church is that most Episcopalians want to know the Bible better and tend to feel like they can't. So I tend to focus on the gospel as our center so that people can come to know these four books really well.

This approach limits how much attention we give the rest of scripture, however. And this part of the lectionary, going through Genesis, is offering a story alongside the gospel that is also vitally important. So how do we cover it all, without preaching two homilies each week?

Well, we can't. But I do want to offer a valuable take away for this week. Last week we read about Abraham and Sarah being promised offspring, to which Sarah finds the thought of it hilarious. And this week, we read about her servant, Hagar, who she encouraged Abraham to produce a son with. And now that Abraham has a legitimate heir, the spare becomes expendable.

Far too little Christian focus has been placed on this and on what comes next. That it is Sarah who drives them away and it is God who protects them. He promises Hagar safety and support and that her son will become a mighty nation, like Abraham.

Now, we don't list that promise as one of the covenants. But it no less is one. And it further causes stress on the exclusivity we make of the God/Abraham relationship.

I don't have any big moral convictions or intellectual certainties to tell us all to draw from this, save this one. God chose to be generous while humans still choose to see division.

With love,
Drew+

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FOR SUNDAY

Proper 7A

June 21, 2026

Collect

○ Lord, make us have perpetual love and reverence for your holy Name, for you never fail to help and govern those whom you have set upon the sure foundation of your loving-kindness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

Matthew 10:24-39)

Jesus said to the twelve disciples, "A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

"So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

"Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

For I have come to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,

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and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

Reflection

This passage is among the most troubling parts of the gospel because it is both difficult to grapple with and often misused by some. And this centers around an image Jesus uses to speak about his purpose in the world being to divide it. Which seems both counterintuitive and markedly different from his *other* stated goal: shalom.

Many will mistake this moment for the "real" one, take the image as literal and defend their aggressive, dividing strategy for the way of Jesus. Many others will mistake the moment for metaphorical language and dismiss this notion of division for the *greater* purpose of unity. Both of these impulses are common, but ultimately, mistaken. Because, to Matthew's vision of Jesus, there is nothing incompatible here.

The sword image is not a justification for violence, aggression, dominance, or pressing for supremacy. It is to draw the distinction between the active participation in the kingdom-building work of Jesus and the cultural continuity of families and communities. Which is why Jesus doesn't come to keep the peace of dysfunctional family systems, but to bring the sword of division that helps free those shackled by them.

It is important to remember that healing is "divisive" to sickness as resurrection is "divisive" to death. All unity, like peace, must come through shalom: restoring wholeness, justice, and active peace. Otherwise, the absence of violence can merely hide the presence of injustice for the sake of the comfort of the powerful.

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