

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

August 23, 2026



MESSIAH

the man, the myth, the mystery

by Drew Downs

When Jesus asks the disciples who *they* say Jesus is, Peter offers “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And after commending Peter, Jesus says don’t say that to people.

It is easy from our perch to affirm Peter’s statement—we’ve built an entire theology around it. Our tradition is predicated on this being true AND something we tell other people about.

I am more and more convinced that this is the paradox at the root of God. That we aren’t supposed to talk about things we can’t not talk about. And that the reason isn’t that we are to be secretive or that we’re terrible at keeping secrets, but that our words are incomplete, our certainties too convicted, our hopes too narrow, and our dreams too small. For in this claim, that Jesus is Messiah, rests truths, distortions, and expectations, only some of which are real.

ORDINARY TIME

2026

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!

Sabbath as more than rest

God creates Sabbath for the Hebrew people as an invitation to something essential to life, to the practice of living. That, at the end of a long week of work and responsibility, of obedience to social forces and familial relationships, we take time to stop. Yes, to rest the body and mind. But not to prepare for next week's slog, as if rest itself is only there to prepare for more work like some optimized perpetual work machine.

Sabbath restores us *to* alignment. It produces justice in the face of *in*justice and unites all people of every station into the same quiet stillness.

One of the popular mistakes in Christian witness to this command is that we would seek to maintain the disorder through the Sabbath time. Wives still cook and clean for the whole household and minimum wage workers make the food we order for brunch. Prisoners remain incarcerated and the hungry are arrested for stealing food from trees.

Sabbath isn't just rest. It's about restoring wholeness. Wholeness that isn't personal or obligated, like reading a weekly self-help book. This is a communal defiance of disorder, of distortion, of inequality and inequity, to restore justice, peace, health, and wholeness to everyone. It is, at its heart, the story of freedom.

I had time away for a few weeks, with vacation in Michigan and the final residency of my MFA in Creative Writing. And it wasn't entirely restful, either. It was full of anticipation and writing and rehearsal and feasting and crying. This, too, is rebalancing. And this, too, is communal.

With love,
Drew+

ORDINARY TIME

2026

FOR SUNDAY

Proper 16A

August 23, 2026

Collect

Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in unity by your Holy Spirit, may show forth your power among all peoples, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

Matthew 16:13-20

When Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

ORDINARY TIME

Reflection

The two questions Jesus asks are important to discipleship. The disciples have little reason to know this and we have little reason to know why. It is the answers, we might think, that are important. As if Jesus is gathering information or testing them or what have you. But this has far less to do with matters of certainty in response than with answering as an act of faith.

How much of modern Christianity is wrestling with what others say about Jesus? "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" meant for the disciples, the word on the street. And it could mean the same for us. And it could also mean Aquinas and Tillich and Pope Leo XIV as much as your neighbor or the Defense Secretary.

What do we receive as the image of Jesus from others? From the world? From how people talk about him.

Then we have the other question: "But who do you say that I am?"

That is the witness; and the personal declaration. Perhaps one that begins with what others say and blended with one's own experience, reason, and understanding. Something closer to the truth, perhaps.

It is worth noting that the crowds are mostly guessing. They have a vision of what they think Jesus is *supposed* to be, shoehorning him into previous embodiments of divine truth. In this way, their answers are both safe and wrong. Peter, on the other hand, seems to shoot for the moon. Something they haven't seen before and something they don't really know: a Messiah.

I suspect Jesus is less concerned with whether this is the best answer, like a multiple choice test, but that this is what Peter sees. And this, too, is true.

ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
215 N. 7TH ST TERRE HAUTE IN 47807
812.232.5165

STSTEPHENSTH.ORG