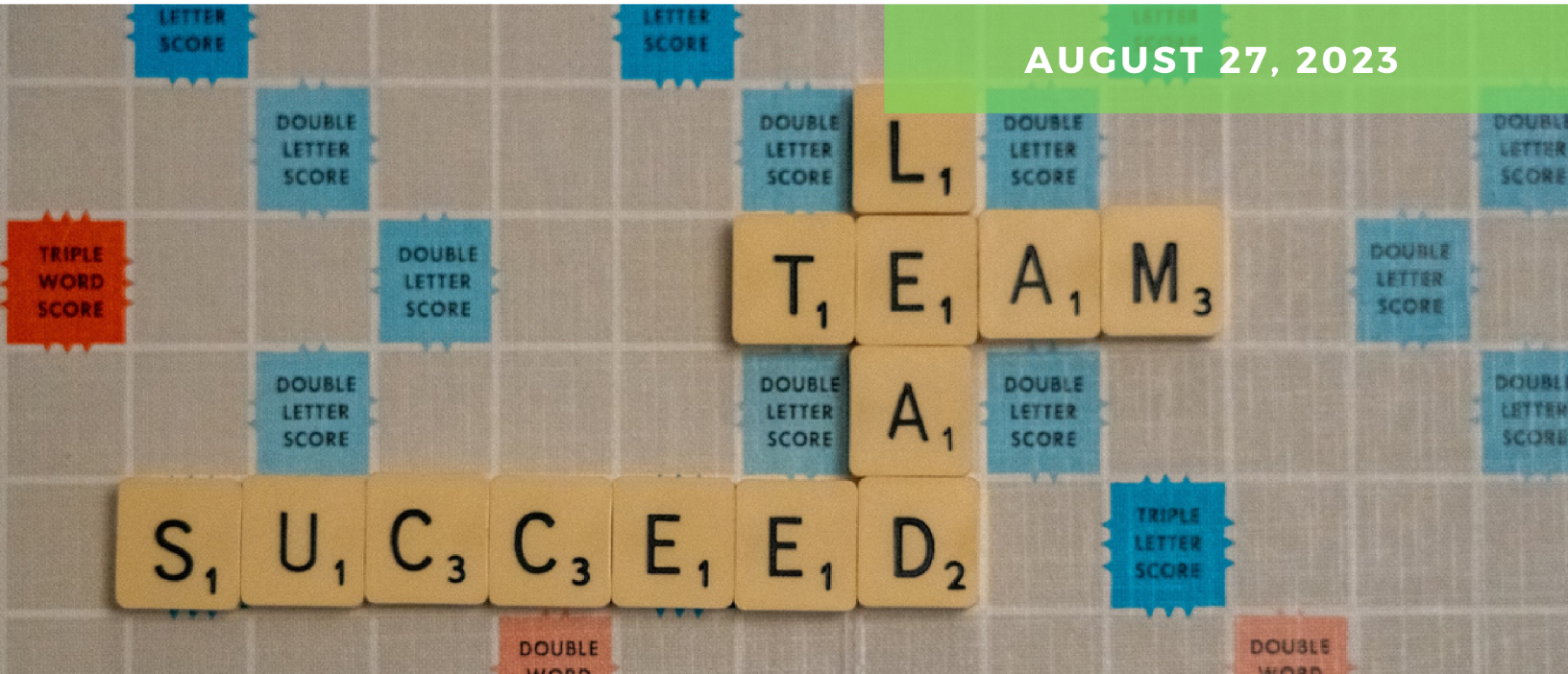


THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

AUGUST 27, 2023



MESSIAH

what does it mean to need saving?

by Drew Downs

Identifying Jesus as the Messiah is a specific act. For sure, it's religious—a matter of faith. But it isn't an empty title. We don't struggle to see the difference between a president and a king, for example.

A messiah is a champion and savior. So we must ask ourselves: what does it mean to need saving?

Sometimes we take to the idea easily. When

we're afraid, in pain, or don't know what to do. Or when we've had a person in our lives who always comes to the rescue, we think that's a thing people can do for us.

Other times, we think the very idea of needing saving is bad. People should save themselves.

What is the Messiah saving us from? What is our need? All of our need? And how might we help one another?

ORDINARY TIME

2023

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!

Leadership

Perhaps the most common way we conceive of leadership is in the singular. There is a leader. They do things, say things, and otherwise have responsibility to at least one other person or some group of people. In this vision, there is a leader and followers.

This narrow vision of leadership is confounded by all the other things we know about leadership and community-building. Such as the participation of the community, the development of leadership within the group, and the sharing of authority throughout the group. In other words, if we merely define leadership as the act of one and the following of the rest, we aren't describing leadership; we're describing authoritarianism.

The style of leadership that Jesus cultivates is entirely different. He describes the quality of leadership by the fruits which spring from it. So, how many leaders are grown? How many people are encouraged? And how capable is the group to handle itself without the leader?

We seem to be going through a moment today in which we expect more from our leaders. Not to make *us* better leaders, but to "show up" and tell us what to do. Which is another way of saying be conspicuously effective. This, however, tells me far less about our leaders than it does about our institutions and ourselves.

We are awfully comfortable blaming our leaders or the inadequacy of our institutions. But we, however, struggle to see it as having anything to do with us.

With love,
Drew

ORDINARY TIME

2023

FOR SUNDAY

Proper 16A

August 27, 2023

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.

PENTECOST

Reflection

This feels like a pop quiz, doesn't it? The professor asks: *Who do people say I am?* That's a simple enough question, I suppose. Just collect what we've heard. Then he asks *Who do **you** think I am?* Now we're on the hook.

This passage is famous for what it seems to affirm: that Jesus actually is the Messiah. It is also famous for setting up Peter as Jesus's #2. This, however, is a bit too utilitarian. While these things *are* true about it, they don't seem to reflect what people would take from this, outside of tradition.

It is much more significant that this happens after Jesus's encounter with Canaanite woman, which we read last week. And what happens in the space between our lectionary readings.

Before Jesus visits the borderlands, he thinks his mission is to save the people of the House of Israel. But now, it seems like the question of *who* is being saved is expanding. Not to people in the family by blood, only. But to people willing to be part of God's new dream for humanity.

After last week's passage, Jesus is confronted by religious leaders again. This time, they demand Jesus offer them a sign. Something to prove he's the real deal. Jesus berates them for ignoring the signs already there and expecting a tailor-made sign just for them. That, as we know, is not how it works.

When Jesus asks who they think he is, it is after they've seen the signs. And after we, the reader, have seen the leaders chastised for ignoring them.

This isn't a story of Jesus's Messiahness or Peter's awesomeness. It's about daring to see in the signs the work of God in our midst. And realizing it has something to do with us.

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