

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



August 28, 2022

STANDINGS

ranking is overvalued

by Drew Downs

Until the Chicago Cubs won the World Series a few years ago, they were the definition of *optimism*. They weren't known for *winning* a lot, but for losing. In spite of this, their fanbase rivals the Yankees: the team most associated with winning.

Where teams reside in the standings *right now* has a big impact on fans. Because we want our team to win. To be first. Which also means we need others to lose. Then, when

our team *isn't* first, we say "maybe next year."

Of course, there can be only one winner. And more often than not, it *isn't* the most talented or most deserving.

We expect ranking to tell us something inherently true about *our* value to society. Usually it just tells us who got lucky or who started out with more money to spend.

ORDINARY TIME

Summer 2022

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!

One of the things I was taught in seminary was that the priest is to not center things around them. In leading a congregation and in storytelling. Our focus is Jesus. Our guidance is Scripture. Our resources are the church, tradition, and one another.

Sometimes this teaching seems opposite the leadership gurus whose books dominate the book store. Other times, this has stood against congregational expectations.

So, as an offering to others, please indulge a personal thought, knowing it fits within our moment—both in our world and in the lectionary!

I've spent **years** focused on productivity, effectiveness, and viral communication. And there's something never-ending about it all. Like there is no end to having to do it. And as much as we sacrifice ourselves to it (like a God), it will never be satisfied. There is always more to do.

I suspect that what I'm finding the hard way, and observing in many of those around us, is the realization that we were *right* in recognizing that we aren't perfect. But we were *wrong* in thinking we could change that through productivity tricks. Not because we *can't* change (and therefore we shouldn't try—which is a truly *terrible* conclusion) but because we think we can do it alone. Without other people. And by sheer will alone.

We need each other. Community. And that is where *everything* starts.

With love,
Drew

ORDINARY TIME

Summer 2022

FOR SUNDAY

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

August 28, 2022

Collect

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

From Luke 14:1, 7-14

"When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host..."

Reflection

It is undeniable that Jesus is talking about ranking and social hierarchies. The kind that we are born into and the kind we make up for ourselves. Which also means the kind that we both loathe and yet keep reinforcing.

To make things even worse, Jesus is a dinner guest in someone's home. And that is where he's talking about how awful hierarchies are and why you shouldn't invite people who get you things to your parties. Instead, invite people who have *nothing* to offer you. Both in terms of stuff and in terms of prestige.

ORDINARY TIME

Of course, everybody knows that Jesus has been invited to an exclusive gathering. And we also all know why. For the same reason *anyone* gets invited to an exclusive gathering: either you are in the club already or you have something to offer the club.

To this, Jesus throws shade in the form of a reasonable teaching.

He says, essentially: *When invited to something, don't take the best seats. Because someone **more important** might show up and then the host is going to **have** to ask you to move.*

What strikes me today about this is that Jesus implies that they possess a kind of self-awareness that I'm not sure they [we] *really* possess. So it kind of lands like an insult.

Can you imagine being at a fancy dinner with your fancy friends and the new guy says, *Hey, maybe not sit in the best seat because someone fancier than you might show. Anyone who is *already* shrewd would be like, Dude, great advice. Better to move up than down.*

But the thing that unites this group of people is being fancy. They all think they're the big fish who deserve the best seats. They tell each other to *Fake it till you make it*. So you *take* the best seat and wear it like a boss. I don't suspect they *expect* someone would unseat them. And if they do, no big deal. They've gotten where they are doing exactly that.

Jesus is telling us the truth about social standing is that it is **entirely** bankrupt. Not one thing about *its structure* fits in the Kin-dom. But our proclivity to *lift* people up a broken system who need nothing would be a *huge* deal for the people who are *held down* by the system. Imagine if we could reverse engineer our impulses to serve rather than gain? We might be taking Jesus seriously.

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

STSTEPHENSTH.ORG
