

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

August 30, 2026



BEHIND

the instructive rebuke of Peter

by Drew Downs

The two pieces of Jesus's rebuke of Peter in this week's gospel to keep in mind are these: 1) Peter is *literally* out of line—as disciples he's supposed to be behind Jesus, his rabbi and 2) his attempt to protect Jesus runs counter to the will of God.

The physicality of the moment belies its spiritual depth because Jesus isn't mad that Peter is questioning his authority or even exercising his own new moral authority. It is

how divorced he now is from what God wants. This is supposed to startle the reader profoundly because in the preceding verses, Peter seems to speak as God. And now, his voice is Satan's. Don't get twisted by literalism here, as Peter becomes misaligned from God in seconds. And Jesus's corrective, "get behind me," an instruction to both Peter and Satan, is a stark reminder of order and relationship. Peter's seeming pragmatism is very much not what God wants.

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!

The Rest of the Story

Before I left for vacation, we were just meeting a conman named Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham and Sarah. And when I came back, we were jumping into the beginning of Exodus. I want to take a second to reflect on this narrative that covers most of Genesis; the people we refer to as the patriarchs.

It was remarkable that this story was ever told, because it doesn't make the people's ancestors look good. At all. In fact, it would seem to do the opposite of what hagiography would want: setting a bad example for the people and showing the weakness of their ancestors. This, I believe, also reflects the remarkable difference in the God who made a relational commitment to Abraham in the first place.

Unlike all other gods, God was looking for relationship, not blind service and sacrifice. This is at the heart of the Genesis narrative and reverberates throughout the rest of Hebrew Scripture, especially when the people want to treat God like the other gods, with total deference, rather than the one who picked Abraham out because he was the only one who wouldn't!

Abraham isn't the best father or leader. He creates a rift with his son he cannot repair. Jacob keeps running from responsibility for his actions. And, at the end, Joseph can't not talk about his dreams. This isn't a story of *good* people. They are just people. They didn't get lucky to be chosen. They were just chosen. Because they aren't the point. God is. And God made a commitment to unconditional love.

With love,
Drew+

ORDINARY TIME

2026

FOR SUNDAY

Proper 17A

August 30, 2026

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

Matthew 16:21-28

Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?"

"For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

ORDINARY TIME

Reflection

This passage is inseparable from the one that comes before it, though the lectionary has tried. We read the first half of the story last week, when Jesus asks the disciples who people say the Son of man is and then who they say Jesus is. When Peter tells Jesus that he is the Messiah, Jesus calls him the rock, the church's foundation. He hands the metaphorical keys to the kingdom of heaven to him.

So then Jesus says that he's heading to Jerusalem where he will die. And the guy with the keys, is like, *that's not gonna happen. I'll prevent it.* Awe, sweet Peter. Always missing the point.

Jesus has given Peter the place to measure the future, to bind and loose the people of the world and the first thing he does is attempt to use that power selfishly. Because he doesn't want to lose Jesus or he doesn't want his movement to die. Peter has suddenly stopped thinking like God and returned to his flawed humanity. Which is as predictable as it is sad.

Meanwhile, Jesus knows the movement won't die with him. That, as much as we will come to name it after him (or at least his office as Christ/Messiah), the future doesn't rest in the hands of Jesus, but in people. The ones who make up the movement. Who bind and loose.

And yet, and this hits like a paradox, we don't get to make it about us. It is dependent on us, but the work is our serving, our community. It is sacrifice and it is love. Like serving food to others and not worrying if there's enough for us. Because the equation isn't about their benefit or your satisfaction, but the will and grace of God. And we are to be tuned into this as much as to ourselves.

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