

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



SEPTEMBER 3, 2023

## STAND

*getting behind the hard-working Jesus*

by Drew Downs

When Jesus tells his followers that he's going to die, most of us get behind Peter. Who wouldn't stand up; committing to keep the armies away from the Messiah? That we think this is the most natural response to the moment shows how normal Peter is. And how much we struggle to hear what Jesus is telling us about this messianic campaign.

The bravado of conflict, with the assurance of commitment, make the whole thing seem

like the right thing to do. But the problem isn't the impulse to protect, but the one that pulls Peter out of place behind Jesus. When he steps in front of Jesus (to shake some sense into him), he isn't following him. He's trying to make Jesus follow him.

This isn't a maxim about leadership, but about our trust in THE Messiah. In Jesus. And our understanding of the project. To love, sacrifice, and give for the sake of the world.

# 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!

### Following

Heading back to school, we fill our backpacks, decorate our lockers and classrooms, and prepare lesson plans. We recognize the kind of leadership the teacher displays to the class. But there is a kind of leadership the class will (or won't) display with itself. Generous, listening, engaging, encouraging—or competitive, disruptive, spiteful, and discouraging.

Much of the literature out there focuses on the qualities of leadership, but there isn't a lot about being a good follower. Especially when we struggle to see that the best followers *lead*. And this can feel counterintuitive; especially when we cast leaders as *actors* and followers as *reactors*.

Being good at following takes way more than being reactive. If you've ever followed someone in a different car, you recognize the important skills of anticipation, trust, and communication. Following well takes real skill. Sometimes *more* skill.

Following Jesus in 2023 means developing all of the skills we associate with both: with being a leader and a follower. And thankfully he has communicated this stuff throughout the gospels. Listening, giving, hoping, trusting, loving.

We talk like following is easy. We can critique from the cheap seats and never put any skin in the game. Because we think we have no impact on the outcome. But we couldn't be more wrong. Being good at following is often the biggest difference maker on any team.

With love,  
Drew

# ORDINARY TIME

2023

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## FOR SUNDAY

*Proper 17A*

September 3, 2023

### **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."

# PENTECOST

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## Reflection

There's an old preacher's story that tells of a time when the preacher weaves a tale about people living in absolute poverty. And at the end of the story, the preacher uses a four-letter word, to the horror of the congregation. Then he points out that the greater horror was the poverty. And that the outrage is misplaced.

This story comes to mind when I think about this moment; when Jesus says to Peter "Get behind me, Satan!" It is the kind of alarming, name-calling, uncouthness that we are so prone to be outraged by. But, for Jesus, and any devoted follower of his, the far greater sin is what Peter was trying to do: prevent Jesus from accomplishing his work.

Yet, the idea of being a distraction or a stumbling block is just not our idea of sinfulness. At least when it comes to keeping people from dying, for instance. But I'm sure I'm not the only one who gets distracted by trying to forgive other people's distractiveness.

Of course, Jesus isn't calling Peter names. And he isn't casting him aside or humiliating him in front of the class. However, Peter is displaying hubris, stepping out of line, and threatening to derail the entire project.

At the root of this moment is Peter's misunderstanding. Of his role, of disciple behavior, and of Jesus's mission. And the reason for the misunderstanding is not ignorance or stupidity. It is in a conviction— but one that does not come from God. A conviction that winning looks like the death of others, not of self. That the one who he just named Messiah should conquer. And that Peter's role is to protect life in all circumstances.

God's project is about life, death, and new life. By attempting to protect Jesus from dying, he's preventing new life from being created. Our own impulses to protect have the potential to blind us. Not from the good we are trying to do, but the good that God is trying to do...that we, in our virtue, are preventing.

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