

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



September 5, 2021

COMMAND

A life less optional

by Drew Downs

In last week's gospel, Jesus refers to God's command. It is a word that strikes my ear with great difficulty. I am *thoroughly* an American after all, and the idea of freedom is always central. It is also a word we associate with the military – in the form of commands coming to us as orders to be followed and in the chain of command. But for people of faith, these concepts represent a real challenge to the ethos of our age. Or as Jesus puts it: *human tradition*.

Perhaps more fascinating to the faithful is to measure our reaction to the idea of putting God's interests first. Not just in theory, but in practice. Not because we are to have *no* freedom, but because we are taught by human tradition to demand *total* freedom. Perhaps the example of the child, who wants it all, demands it all, and cannot comprehend why Mom won't give it all. And really, the Mom is simply saying "No. We have other plans for tonight."

ORDINARY TIME

Summer 2021

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

I sometimes pray to God this simple question "What's going on?" Which is also a bit of a misnomer at a moment like this: What **isn't** going on?

Prayers continue for the people of Afghanistan and those who are being evacuated. For Haiti, dealing with multiple disasters *again*. And for those in the path of Ida, especially the people of New Orleans who are suffering mightily.

With the Delta Variant of COVID-19 straining our hospitals and putting a new sense of distress in the hearts of the faithful locally, it continues to be a time in which I must give the *eternally* unpopular word that we must continue to watch and wait and prepare. That as much as *returning to normal* is as much buzzword as it is a genuine hope, it is also neither possible nor prudent.

The better cause is to think about *adaptation*. So we continue to adapt to our moment.

At St. Stephen's this will mean

- a new virtual Newcomers class and Scripture Conversation on Tuesday nights.
- our middle and high schoolers joining High Point, a joint youth group
- our K*I*D*S Worship resuming in September
- Holypalooza and UCM Barbecue on September 12.

Each of these are exciting pieces that I think will bring *new* joy and faith-filled opportunities for us. And each will come to us as something newish. Not entirely new. And yet, not what we've always done. Something very much for this moment.

Drew+

ORDINARY TIME

Summer 2021

FOR SUNDAY

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 5, 2020

Collect

Grant us, O Lord, to trust in you with all our hearts; for, as you always resist the proud who confide in their own strength, so you never forsake those who make their boast of your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Reading

From Mark 7:24-37

Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.

Reflection

This morning we get a pair of seemingly unrelated healing stories. In one, Jesus heals a girl and in the other, he heals a man who is deaf and suffering a speech impediment. I don't know about you, but reading another healing story has become a bit mundane. Haven't we already read a dozen like it? Hasn't he already pulled off this trick? And, most importantly, isn't he *the savior of the world?*

This seems like small potatoes.

It is hard for us to escape reading this without the end in mind. And not just the end of the story, but of the theological conviction that Jesus is not *just* a healer or the Son of God, but that he is part of the Trinity. He is a persona of God. So, yeah, healing should be no big deal.

ORDINARY TIME 2021

What the disciples are experiencing, however, is something all together different. They certainly have seen this man heal people. But they have also seen him compel the storm to stop raging and a legion of demons to exit a single human being. The power Jesus has displayed has struck them with awe and fear.

And because *they* have seen it all, there is little doubt that this would be something like normal. But there are two *new* elements in this story. Both of which demonstrate *new* expressions of power. One is that Jesus manages to heal a girl *that isn't even there* and then in the other, Jesus heals two maladies at the same time: something that appears to be unheard of.

And yet, through all of this, Jesus keeps telling people **not** to talk about it. There are several evident reasons for why he would say this.

1. It isn't time yet.
2. This is dangerous.
3. The mission could be snuffed out.

But I think there is a less *practical* but more *spiritual* reason. Jesus's purpose *isn't* to get people excited about the signs and wonders. His job is to reveal God's work in the world.

And these moments, when God makes miracles through Jesus, make truly wonderful transformations in the lives of real people. Moments that bring *new life*.

I suspect that these people are themselves a sign. Like we are a sign when we know the transformative power of God. They don't need to tell people that a man named Jesus did it, because that isn't the point of the story. And yet they might try to make it the point of *their* story. But the point of Jesus's story is something else.

Wholeness. This is God's promise for us and all creation. And God's command.

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