

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

September 6, 2026



## LISTEN

*at the heart of misunderstanding*

by Drew Downs

This week's gospel uses a curious word that I always seem to skim over. Jesus speaks of some kind of division between people and how we might seek reconciliation. And this process, which is mostly, go talk to the person and if that doesn't work, get more people involved, doesn't have agreement or punishment at its center. It has listening. If you go to the person who has wronged you and they listen, then you're as siblings again. Which seems like a low bar, doesn't it?

I know a lot of people use listen like they use the word mind: which implies that they do what you ask. But that doesn't seem to be the point to me.

Listening is active and requires openness. And perhaps this is what Jesus wants us to get at. That the point isn't agreement or getting our own way. But that there be an opening of heart here. Like a first step. Like something is indeed melting and breaking free.

# 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!

### **More Time on Exodus**

I'm disappointed that the lectionary shortchanges the Exodus. We had the birth of Moses, the burning bush, then this week, we're jumping to the Passover. This is hardly enough time to deal with the difficult truth at the heart of this story. That Genesis ends with Joseph saving the world from years of famine and the next book begins with a Pharaoh who "doesn't know Joseph". It is a tragedy in every sense of the word.

We see the bloodlust and paranoia of Pharaoh and the ingenuity and strength of the Hebrew people. We see oppression and resistance. We meet a Moses who lives between both worlds and struggles to embody either. He is fully Hebrew, raised in an Egyptian home with a Hebrew nursemaid and an Egyptian name. And he finds solidarity with his true people, not only because of his bloodline, but because of what that makes him.

We shouldn't jump to the Passover without the many times Moses tries to talk to Pharaoh at the behest of God. How he tries to prevent the plagues. How freedom wasn't won. Nor is it truly earned. These aren't the words that depict the time with the depth it deserves.

Empires cannot be good. Because then they wouldn't be empires. And Pharaoh, like every modern Pharaoh, like every person who would control the flow of information and own the world, cannot resist total dominance and supremacy. He'd risk it all rather than lose one single slave to liberation.

To this, God says *No More!*

With love,  
Drew+

# ORDINARY TIME

2026

---

## FOR SUNDAY

*Proper 18A*

September 6, 2026

### **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**

*Matthew 18:15-20*

Jesus said, "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

# ORDINARY TIME

---

## Reflection

It's a strange choice the lectionary has made to clip this part from a bigger passage. And by doing so, we might miss the meaning.

Before this, Jesus tells the disciples the parable of the lost sheep. Then, after giving them this guidance for dealing with conflict, Peter asks how many times must he forgive: is seven enough? And Jesus is like, multiply that by seven before you're getting into the right ballpark. So this lesson, which appears to be about keeping order in community is bookended by delight and unlimited forgiveness.

What I want to focus on, given this context, is the evolving character of relationship that Jesus seems to be offering here. And this, to me, seems much more the point than it is the prescription for discipline some would make it to be. It speaks at the beginning of siblings and in the end of gentiles and tax collectors. Out of context, this might read the devolving of relationship or worse, a justification for shunning. Such a reading, however, seems out of step with Jesus in virtually every way, as Jesus actively *welcomes* such people.

This seems more like a reminder that we rely on our common relationship when dealing with our siblings. And when that doesn't work, perhaps we need to defamiliarize before we can reconcile. In this way, Jesus seems to be suggesting that part of the problem in dealing with someone who has sinned and broken our common community is in our own sense of who they are. To this, Jesus invites us to open up. That we might actually have more compassion for them if we saw in them, not brother or sisterhood, but that they, too, are an outcast from an unjust society. That maybe what separates us is that we see ourselves as siblings rather than people with common cause.

---

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

STSTEPHENSTH.ORG

---