

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



September 11, 2022

## SINNERS

*people aren't the worst thing they've done*

by Drew Downs

One teaching fundamentally changed my life.

It was in a commentary on the gospel. I've long forgotten which one. Or who wrote it. But they reminded the reader that "leper" isn't a term of dignity.

They pointed out that a person who has leprosy isn't defined by their disease. We don't say that anybody who has or has had cancer is a cancer-er.

But unlike cancer, leprosy was contagious. And it became easy to hate someone because that made it easy to isolate them.

Granting someone with leprosy the dignity of *being a person* first and foremost is generous. *And valuable.*

The same can be said for people who sin. Jesus encourages us to see the person, the dignity, and the possibility of redemption.

# ORDINARY TIME

*Summer 2022*

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## 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!

This is the fourth time since 2001 that September 11th falls on a Sunday. It is an odd occurrence for the faithful; to remember a day that was so shocking and scarring; so terrifying and confusing. A day that we can't help but look back upon.

The tenth anniversary was a Sunday. And while many gathered in New York for a memorial, many of us went to church. And the lectionary passage that day was perfect: Peter asking Jesus how many times he should forgive. And Jesus's response was essentially: just keep doing it.

The legacy of September 11 is not one of forgiveness, however. And that's what made it hard to preach and so powerful to hear that day.

We get a different message this year. Of searching for the lost, showing incredible generosity in the process, and then throwing a party when the lost has been found. When all hope was lost and yet, here it is! The dead has been raised!

This message comes as a response to callousness, division, and hatred. Of the powerful rejecting Jesus's open-hearted welcome and generosity to the outcast.

As we remember all that September 11th evokes in us, let us consider how Jesus responds to cruelty and gossip. Essentially saying: Who doesn't show mercy? Who among us wouldn't show love so generously to the outcast, the immigrant, the poor, the widow, and yes, even the traitor? It is what we do.

With love,  
Drew

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## FOR SUNDAY

*Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost*

September 11, 2022

### **Collect**

O God, because without you we are not able to please you, mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

From Luke 15:1-10

"Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?"

### **Reflection**

Some Pharisees and scribes are grumbling about Jesus. Talking to each other in whispers about who he is hanging out with. Who he treats as *friends*. Obviously the wrong sorts of people.

Part of why they're angry and gossiping is the normal in-group/out-group stuff. But a big part is that Jesus is one of *them*. One who has station by vocation. And people like them avoid *those* people. They are *unclean*.

This is a sentiment we recognize in our own experience. With race, creed, gender, and

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sexual orientation. And we've seen people like these Pharisees and scribes and how they treat people *not* like them. And we don't like it.

The phrase I learned in seminary to describe this grumbling and talking was "parking lot conversations." This isn't referring to the kind of conversations that are extensions of coffee hour, when you like the people you're with and you just keep chatting on your way to the car.

These parking lot conversations are the secret kind about people and about how wrong Person X is for even talking to Person Y. The kind that solidify the in-group's unity at the expense of who "doesn't belong" or "didn't play by the rules."

Notice how Jesus responds to this. He tells three parables about losing and finding: the lost sheep, coin, and sons.

And he begins by saying "which one of you...does not... [leave the many to find the one]?" Jesus makes it sound obvious, elementary. What *anyone* would do. And also, what *everyone* does. If there are 100 Pharisees and scribes, then 99 of you would *obviously* go looking for the lost. Which *one* of you wouldn't?

Jesus offers a bit of the shame that they were throwing at him [which definitely feels good to us, doesn't it?]. But he does it on behalf of the lost. To save the lost. Helping remind *his people* that they are called to this work. Not to abandon, but save.

This, of course, continues in the reading. For we are called the same way. To save. For we are not abandoned. We have one another. We are here, inheritors and collaborators with Jesus's Way of Love. So we aren't in any danger when the shepherd seeks out the lost. Or when we seek the lost.

For who *wouldn't* do this? Because Jesus does.

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