

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

October 2, 2022

## SIZE

*hope and an aspirational faith*

by Drew Downs

People really seem to like the teaching when Jesus describes the *potential* of faith that is as small as a mustard seed. Few things are as captivating as the idea that the tiniest bit of faith is all that's needed.

In action, however, we refuse this teaching.

We ask for massive signs that we're on the right track or for people to hit us over the head with proof that they really do want to

help us. We expect faith to always display in spectacular ways.

This is reasonable, of course. It is Jesus who speaks of tremendous transformations of the world, after all. Revolutions which topple whole kingdoms and reorder the world.

It is striking, though, to have this reminder, about the tiniest of faith. Because it means we probably **do** all already have enough.

# ORDINARY TIME

*Autumn 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!

Getting COVID at the beginning of the program year really throws off one's timing. I don't recommend it!

And yet *living* continues. I was going to use the phrase "time marches on," but time isn't the only thing that happens. We can't abstract time out of our experience of living.

We often speak of time as if it were something we can isolate from our lives. It's how we wake up one day and realize we're older than we remember being (or at least the people around us are). It is also how we can speak of the happenings of the world without connecting with our stake in it.

One of the things I have tried to avoid doing since March 2020 is participating in the abstraction of time; pretending that somehow *living* was put on hold by the pandemic. That we didn't have *new* experiences and new opportunities; as if the experience somehow didn't count as life!

My life wasn't on hold for a couple of weeks. But that language reveals ***a lot*** about what we actually value about life.

And yet, here we are! We hosted Holypalooza, gathered for our annual picnic, and this week, we kick off the year with K\*I\*D\*S Worship.

So much living! Indeed, even the tiniest bits can transform lives.

With love,  
Drew

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## FOR SUNDAY

*Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost*

October 2, 2022

### **Collect**

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve: Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

From Luke 17:5-10

"Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded?"

### **Reflection**

Compilers of the Bible translation we use (NRSV) label this section: "Some Sayings of Jesus" which is kind of hilarious. Obviously they think its a small grab bag of teachings which are probably less than significant. In other words, too small and disparate to rate a heading.

Given that this passage contains the teaching of the mustard seed, this is quite ironic.

There is a teaching which is not included for the day, making this group of "some sayings" into a total of three.

# ORDINARY TIME

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The first saying (Luke 17:1-4) describes how we relate to one another. That we ought not cause another to stumble and likewise, we must prepare to forgive another who repents.

Jesus doesn't use the phrase here, but I'm really fond of the language of "the stumbling block". In a related teaching in Matthew, Jesus says not to be a stumbling block, which is funny to think about anthropomorphizing an object one trips on. But in saying that we should avoid *becoming* a stumbling block, Jesus is essentially saying, stop throwing yourself down in front of other people's feet to make them trip.

The most obvious examples of this are those who enable an alcoholic to drink. But that is almost *too* obvious. A better example might be when we fuel another's outrage.

Jesus follows that up by speaking of forgiveness: forgiving the repentant.

Both of these are things we take as obvious and yet struggle to embody.

How often do we tell each other it's OK to cheat? Do what we want? Demand our way? And how often do we pretend it is virtuous *not* to forgive? That the right answer is to condemn? How easy it is to make others stumble and refuse to forgive!

Jesus then teaches that the tiniest speck of faith is enough to do great things.

And then, when he finishes here, Jesus reminds us of how we relate to the ordered world. How we expect servants and slaves to serve. Not for reward and encouragement, but because it is their place. And *that* is our place with God.

It is a bit of a grab bag of sayings, but it is undeniable that there is a theme. And that we struggle to relate to what Jesus is saying, mostly because we don't want to, shows how much we struggle. And how important forgiveness and a speck of faith truly are.

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

STSTEPHENSTH.ORG

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