

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

October 4, 2026



TENANTS

we're called to love the land

by Drew Downs

The longer the disciples follow Jesus, the more challenging his teachings become. They have learned much, developing some prudent expectations of what God wants from them. About faith. And what it means to serve. Now that they're in Jerusalem, however, the teachings take a darker turn and those expectations now fit into a bigger story about Jesus's death and their budding responsibility for the gospel. God has planted and in them is the fruit.

They have developed expectations about two kingdoms: one that is of heaven and one that is of earth. And this knowledge and proximity to Jesus has them feeling special. Better than others. Competitive. And Jesus isn't here to humble them exactly, but to help them to train all of that teaching and learning and expecting onto earth and heaven. All of this reward we may want to earn is how it works on earth, not heaven. We aren't working our land. This isn't our fruit. It is all God's.

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!

Saint Francis

The story of Francis of Assisi is a reverse rags-to-riches full of moral conviction. He was the wealthy scion who gave it away to live *intentionally* in extreme poverty. As the church says "Of all the saints, Francis is perhaps the most popular and admired but probably the least imitated; few have attained to his total identification with the poverty and suffering of Christ." His is, as they might say, a perfect example . . . for someone else.

I'm not sure we ought to follow Francis's example, however. Life isn't about seeking an end to excess by experiencing pain! But his example reflects something more valuable than wealth: living a life centered on God. On the beauty of creation. On living within the confines of such a blessed life.

We associate his feast day with animals, blessing, and humility, which is all fitting to the saint and the tradition. But there is also something a bit easy about this. Like a Disney take on a Grimm fairy tale. None of this is bad, mind you. It has its own moral center that is valuable and meaningful. Heck, we'll be honoring our blessed pets at church that afternoon (4:00, this Sunday!). But it removes a big part of the story. And in Francis's case, I dare say, the most important part.

We can choose to let go of the things that bind us to economic hamster wheel. And we can choose love instead. To love our neighbors as ourselves, yes. And to love the earth as a manifestation of God's love. Not for our gain, like another kind of wealth, but as manna from heaven, as shared, as all a gift.

With love,
Drew+

ORDINARY TIME

2026

FOR SUNDAY

Proper 22A

October 4, 2026

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

Matthew 21:33-46

Jesus said, "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures:

'The stone that the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone;

this was the Lord's doing,

and it is amazing in our eyes'?

ORDINARY TIME

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls."

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

Reflection

We're at the beginning of a collection of darker parables Jesus tells which push the disciples (and modern readers) to work harder to make sense of them. Their tone is dark, vengeful, and not what we expect from Jesus.

It may help to remember what Jesus teaches right before this, in last week's gospel. In that one, Jesus tells a parable of two sons: one who says the right thing and doesn't do it and one who says he isn't going to do the thing but does in the end. Which one is better in God's eyes? The one who *does* the thing. But the story doesn't end there. Jesus pushes the way his readers classify themselves and others. That there are people we *call* sinners who are ahead of us in line because they're doing the right thing *now* and we, in our judgement are now doing the wrong thing.

In this parable about "the Wicked Tenants," Jesus is putting the leaders on the hot seat because they are the ones doing the sorting and thinking of themselves as the "true" followers. But in the parable, they see themselves as they are in Jesus's eyes: judging, as the ones whose great, eternal reward is removed and given to the unworthy.

The idea of God judging us is difficult enough to worry about. But the parable relies on people's expectations of certainty and joy at *our* greatness, our pride of place. And then, in light of that, turns it over and says these things we're taking delight in are not good in God's eyes. That some of the people we despise are doing this better than we are. And *that* stings.

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

STSTEPHENSTH.ORG
