

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

October 10, 2021



STUMBLE

It's about other people

by Drew Downs

There's a challenging phrase Jesus uses in the gospel of Mark: stumbling block. He tells his followers not to be a stumbling block: the block positioned at someone's feet that trips them. That causes them to stumble and fall.

While it is easy to think Jesus doesn't want us to get in each other's way, I don't think that's really the point. It's about placement, intention, and exploiting ignorance. Don't make the *innocent* stumble, he says.

In other words, **don't trip them!**

For many, though, the word stumble carries all of the weight. Because we see stumbling as inherently bad. It isn't.

We stumble. All of us. And we fall down. We also get back up.

The problem for Jesus isn't stumbling. It's pushing your neighbor down to get ahead.

ORDINARY TIME

Fall 2021

WHAT'S GOING ON

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

-Marvin Gaye

It is easy to say that this hasn't been an easy year.

And yet, we've adapted. Sometimes with great humility and gratitude.

Other times...well, let's just say that we did it and leave it at that. *Yes, we adapted. OK, now let's move along.*

The thing about adaptation is that it isn't inevitable. It's a choice. A conscious choice to make the most of a changing environment. In other words, it isn't merely a single organism that adapts for survival, but a community of organisms helping one another become more capable of *all* making it through.

For us, adaptation *continues*. And we choose to make the most of our moment. Which doesn't require perfect or dwelling on the past. It is about living into this moment in a way that gives us a better tomorrow.

We're beginning our fall stewardship season with an appeal to make our next year a vibrant one because we can *choose* to do so. We are also raising additional funds to "Preserve the Panes": our stained glass. This is a much-needed capital investment.

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve this community with love and generosity. And the opportunity to *choose* to adapt. And grow. And become what God calls us to become.



ORDINARY TIME

Fall 2021

FOR SUNDAY

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

October 10, 2021

Collect

Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, that we may continually be given to good works; 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 10:17-31

"Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words."

Reflection

Let's all take a second to acknowledge the elephant in the room.

Jesus really is saying that having wealth is an impediment to entering the kingdom of God. There is no denying it.

And I think every one of us feels compelled to wrestle with what that means. What it means in the abstract, universal sense (does wealth itself have a demonstrable effect on people?) and in the personal sense (am I in trouble if I have anything?). This leads us to the need to define wealth itself (what counts and how much is "too much"?).

ORDINARY TIME 2021

This line of thought is not only reasonable; it is inevitable. And I think it is precisely what Jesus expected.

His words were bound to strike us as deeply challenging because they struck the disciples that way. Notice their response is "Then who can be saved?" It is **not** to ask "what counts?" They assume *everything* counts. They assume *they themselves* count as wealthy. In fact, they assume Jesus is asking too much of them - and *they* aren't even as wealthy as the pious young man Jesus just scared away in verses 17-22!

I suspect this is precisely what Jesus assumed would happen. I also suspect it avoids the point.

The point is that it is hard for a person to force their way into the Kin-dom, dragging their wealth with them. ***Because that's not how you get in.***

The pious young man wants to know what he needs to do ensure he gets in. He is essentially asking *What is the proper code to the lock?* because what he wants is to make God let him in. He doesn't *want* to rely on God's generosity.

We don't get in by believing the right things or behaving the right way. Participation in the kin-dom doesn't arise from our actions which ultimately *mandates* that God lets us in. There is no secret code.

It is by God's grace that we enter the kin-dom. Grace that is given robustly to the poor, the weak, the powerless, the sick, and the abused.

We don't *earn* this grace. But we can be confident that in demonstrating that kind of grace, we can be assured of receiving it. Because *that* is the nature of God's creation.

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