

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



OCTOBER 29, 2023

## LOVE

*it isn't really a suggestion*

by Drew Downs

A word I generally shy away from using is command. In part because Jesus doesn't use it all that much. And in greater part because Jesus speaks more about invitation, calling, and the Spirit's guiding us. That all seems closer to God's desire than "command".

But Jesus is clear about following God's commands. Even if he parses what that really means. And Jesus is clear when he is offering his followers commands.

The most consistent command is to love. About this he does not equivocate. We are to love God and our neighbors as ourselves.

There are different ways we can render this command in the positive. Being generous, encouraging, supportive. But let us remain focused on its fundamental character as command. It isn't a suggestion. Anything short of it is failure. Intentional or not. Even if someone else starts it.

# ORDINARY TIME

2023

## 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!

### Hallowing

As the leaves turn orange and our mornings turn cold, we approach Terre Haute's favorite holiday: Halloween.

For those who haven't lived elsewhere, you might not realize just how much this city Halloweens. Two days of trick-or-treating, plus a downtown trick-or-treat if those other days *don't* land on a Friday. Not to mention all of the offerings of trunk-or-treat by churches and schools. Kids can collect candy all week!

The name Halloween is a shortening of its original name: All Hallow's Eve. And just like Christmas Eve, most people have moved the festivities from the day to the night before.

For Christians, this represents a potential three day festival. On Halloween, we mock death by playing dress-up as ghouls and ghosts in macabre demonstration of death's weakness to control us. Then, November 1, we celebrate All Saints' Day, when the saints, martyrs, and patriarchs are *hallowed* by the faithful for what they offered the world in life and continue to offer it in heaven. Lastly, on November 2, we celebrate All Souls' Day. Here, we honor all those who have died. As a reminder that few of us get to be named saints. In fact, most of us are sinners. Yet, these too are hallowed. For even death cannot still the power of God.

Hallowing God, the saints, and all of the dead is our privilege, our honor, and our willful celebration. A notable part of our Way of Love.

With love,  
Drew

# ORDINARY TIME

2023

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## FOR SUNDAY

*Proper 25A*

October 29, 2023

### **Collect**

Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

Matthew 22:34-46

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." He said to them, "How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

'The Lord said to my Lord,  
'Sit at my right hand,  
until I put your enemies under your feet''?"

If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?" No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

# ORDINARY TIME

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## Reflection

The interrogation is coming to end. The Temple leaders and their many supporters are running out of traps to set for Jesus. So the last one comes from a lawyer. He's straightforward and to the point.

Which commandment is greatest?

This is a clever question, we should admit. Simple and direct. Easy and yet deep. One that Jesus could get right and still be wrong. For it is fair to argue that the first of the ten commandments is its greatest—but it is also a live debate.

Jesus expounds on that response, however, naming a teaching from Leviticus alongside it. Directly tying the love of God to our love of neighbors.

It is hard to be Christian and not be familiar with this teaching. We site it constantly as the Great Commandment—but with the two teachings as one. Love God, love neighbor as self. One command for us all.

There is a beautiful simplicity to it. And yet, we also understand how complex it is. To respect others as we want to be respected. To forgive as we want to be forgiven. Love. Compassion. Generosity. All of these things. The things we want and crave are things we offer to our neighbors with that same zeal. And to tie all of that up in love of God?

We know this as command. And we know just how difficult it remains to practice. How often we indulge ourselves—dare we indulge others? Do we *truly* love our neighbors as ourselves? We probably have room to grow. And therefore, what does that say about our love of God? Probably some room there, too.

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