

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

November 13, 2022



## TESTIFY

*having the words to say*

by Drew Downs

In the midst of talking about persecution, Jesus offers a kind of better-said-than-done bit of optimism. He tells his followers not to worry about what they are to say when being prosecuted. Don't plan it out in advance. Jesus will give them the words.

That is some advice, isn't it? Don't plan. I'll help you wing it. I'm not sure it offers the clear vote of confidence most of us are after. But I have to admit I find it reassuring.

As one prone to a fair share of anxiety when speaking in front of crowds, I really do prefer to plan it out. The funny thing, though, is I'm not sure it makes me any less nervous. The anxiousness remains. It's just...different.

It is also hard not to hear this in light of All Saints' Day—our commemoration of those who shared their witness with the world. Their courage, along with Jesus's promise, gives me courage, too.

# 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!

**"Go forth and rest!"**

This year's diocesan convention was full of excitement and joy. We gathered in Plainfield for a robust time of learning, sharing, and doing the work of the diocese together. It felt familiar and hopeful.

I also felt how much has changed since fall of 2019. One person I turned to for counsel has moved to Chicago. Another has retired. And then there are new friends to connect with and learn from.

As the Episcopal Church in central and southern Indiana, we made two noteworthy commitments:

- We followed the lead of General Convention and committed to paying our vocational deacons who are under the age of retirement.
- We committed to adopting the anti-racism covenant that was written by the bishop of Missouri and for each vestry to consider the covenant as well.

Then at the closing Eucharist, the bishop reminded us that she always gives us a charge. And this year, her charge was to "go forth and rest!" Because the last three years have been tough. And the next few aren't going to be any easier. "God needs us ready, not weary," she said.

Over the next two weeks, we'll be celebrating our annual gathering of gifts and gratitude. As we do, think about how the gift of rest fits into our work at St. Stephen's. Offering rest to each other. Rest to a stranger. Making time to rest to restore ourselves. A true gift for those who are most hungry for it.

With love,  
Drew

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## FOR SUNDAY

*Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost*

November 13, 2022

### **Collect**

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

From Luke 21:5-19

"But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls."

### **Reflection**

Jesus and his disciples are leaving the Temple. It's the time we honor as Holy Week. The students are marveling at the size and scope of the place. Country folk in the big city for the first time. Everything is bigger there. Everything a marvel.

Jesus snaps their attention like he fears they're being intoxicated by the great city's charm and the Temple's grandeur.

This, of course, is the second Temple. The first was built by Solomon to contain God on earth and was destroyed by the Babylonians. Half of the people were taken into exile. The educated people. The scholars. Teachers. Priests. Leaders. All taken away.

# ORDINARY TIME

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In Exile, that half is integrated, fattened up, compelled to stay in the beautiful city of Babylon. The new wealth and the destruction of home are quite enticing arguments.

When the Babylonians are defeated and the exiled Hebrews are invited to return home after decades, the ones who choose to go, return changed to a changed people. Reintegration isn't easy. Everything is different. But they do have a common goal: to rebuild the Temple to give God a home again.

The words Jesus offers the disciples about the Temple and the future are frightening. They betray a seeming hopelessness and inevitability that makes us just as uncomfortable as the specter they offer: division, hatred, and violence.

They also serve as a stark reminder that the disciples' work isn't pie-in-the-sky or magic that happens without our participation. God doesn't work like that. These potent earthly forces cultivate destruction. And the human impulse is to destroy in return.

How alluring the city is to the disciples and how grand the Temple may be, these are no less human constructions to our vanity, pride, fear, and anxiety. They project the majesty of God and yet we can't protect them from erosion by age, inclement weather, or violent disagreement.

Jesus doesn't want our heads intoxicated by grandeur or spectacle when neighbors would destroy neighbors. He wants us quick-witted for when family would place country, tradition, tribe before God.

As gloomy and difficult as this is to hear, it's also a wake-up call. Not so much a blunt pessimistic rant, but a necessary reorientation. We already understand that following Jesus isn't easy. But this is the reminder that the way of Christ is fundamentally different from the way of the world. A reminder as true now as ever. But a reminder as *hopeful* as ever. Because we have purpose. And endurance. And the love of God to share.

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