

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

NOVEMBER 26, 2023



THANKFUL

WHEN?

the persistent existential question

by Drew Downs

In this week's gospel, Jesus offers a familiar dialogue about serving him through our service to others. And he totally gets what we would say.

"Lord, when was it that we saw you..." A kind of self-interrogating question about time and self. When did this happen? Can I even remember? Was my past self a good person? And does this effect my present self? Can I still be a good person?

This is the same interrogation we do with race and identity. And is often the kind of interrogation we avoid doing today. Wanting to be good, we don't really *want* to know the answer. Better to just assume we did it right.

What if there isn't a checklist or a measuring stick? Just a genuine sense of character. Were you like Christ to people who needed Christ's presence? Or did you reserve that for the people who could help you out?

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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!

Thanks Giving

Thanksgiving is a holiday full of emotional complexity. We associate it with families, gatherings, and big dinners. It is also a holiday built on predictability: the same foods, the same football, the same parades...when life isn't all that predictable. Families change—we move, age, adapt—and these traditions become points of aching and longing. If we *don't* have the right food or can't be with the right people, it can throw the whole thing off.

The one thing I don't want to do is assume anyone has the same view of this holiday as I do. That everyone will be sitting around the same kind of table with the same exact foods. And that every one of us has been around that same table for always.

Isn't it funny, though? That we get so engaged with these ideas of rootedness, sameness, and an intractable attachment to the past on the very day we celebrate a mass migration and a dinner spent entirely separated from our past?

A day we mark as the day for giving thanks. Giving thanks for what we have and what we have had.

And as people of faith, we give thanks to God for much more than food, shelter, or family. For the air we breathe and the community we live within. For our partners in the neighborhood and for the joys of gathering with anyone (or no one!) and being thankful for all beautiful and nourishing things. May we honor all of it in our diverse ways this week.

With love,
Drew

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FOR SUNDAY

Proper 29A

November 26, 2023

Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I

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was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Reflection

Twenty chapters after saying “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” Jesus rests his case before the court of public opinion. This is an argument he has made throughout the gospels—that the kingdom of heaven is for people who care for people—comes to its conclusion at a show trial with the powerful inheritors of a kingdom of earth.

Jesus’s vision—that our love for God is mirrored in our love for people—is clearly represented in Christian thought. Perhaps more than in our action.

The cutting truth in this final teaching, however, is that it isn’t sufficient that we *think* the right things, or have the best intentions. But we are to *do* the right things. And particularly in support of those with less opportunity, power, or influence.

Receiving this reminder over the weekend of Thanksgiving offers its own insight. Giving thanks is a practice of humility; it directs us to see ourselves in relationship with others. To see our neighbors as partners in a divine project of grace, hope, and love.

And with the right vision in place, we might have everything we need to be of humble service to all of those divine neighbors.

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