

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

December 11, 2022



## GREATNESS

*toughness and path-straightening*

by Drew Downs

When John the Baptist checks up on Jesus from prison in the Gospel of Matthew, we are tempted to see this as unbelief, doubt, or confusion. Jesus dismisses those thoughts.

He then asks the crowd what they expected from him? "A reed shaken by the wind?" There is a sense in Jesus's response that he speaks of John and his ministry as requiring toughness. The image of a rugged individual standing up for a cause.

While such an image can be comforting to some, it isn't universally so. Especially in light of John's potential skepticism of Jesus! Is he inclined to call Jesus "soft?" I think we're supposed to believe the answer is yes.

Jesus goes on to proclaim John's greatness among people. And I suspect it has less to do with toughness in the abstract, but in relationship to his mission. He was preparing the way for God. That's the point.

# 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!

### **Gaudete**

This week we celebrate the Third Sunday of Advent, often referred to as Gaudete Sunday. *Gaudete* is Latin for "rejoice," the first word in the Introit for that week's mass.

The tradition that developed around Gaudete Sunday is guided by that spirit of *rejoicing*; a sentiment we more associate with the Christmas Season than Advent.

In recent years, we mark this day with a rose-colored candle in the wreath and vestments for the Eucharist. But the themes of the season continue: we are still preparing.

For earlier generations, Gaudete was a respite from penitence: as we would mark the season as a "little Lent". And many still adhere to this philosophy of the season. But I find such a response limiting. That solemnness is characterized by abstaining from pleasure for the sake of growth. This season in which we prepare for the Incarnate Joy to be with us, feels entirely different.

The need for a reminder, here in the middle of December, that we are to *rejoice* in the glory of God to come, is no less valuable now. In fact, I think it is even more so. For we are called to rejoice, not in presents and music, cookies and greens returning to our lives, but for a God breaking into the world with an eternal gift of love for us. Let us rejoice that this promise is for the whole world.

With love,  
Drew

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## FOR SUNDAY

*Third Sunday of Advent*

December 11, 2022

### **Collect**

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

From Matthew 11:2-11

[Jesus about John] "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? "

### **Reflection**

Last week, we were introduced to John the Baptist in the Wilderness. Now, this is much later. Jesus's ministry is in full swing. John has been arrested and is languishing in prison. And from there he sends some of his disciples out to get the real dirt on Jesus.

It is quite a sympathetic moment, I think. Most of us can imagine how difficult it must be: expecting such great things from Jesus, the prophecy. And then find ourselves ... underwhelmed by the results.

I'd hazard a guess that if it were us, we'd be doing the same thing.

# ORDINARY TIME

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I also suspect that if we were in Jesus's shoes, we'd be defensive. *How dare he question me!* Or perhaps a bit more explainy: *You don't know what my mission really is, John. How could you? Don't you trust me?*

Thankfully Jesus isn't so defensive. He sends back word to John: keep watching.

Then as he goes, Jesus turns to the crowd, who no doubt watched all of this play out, and he asks them what they left the city to see.

They were minding their own business, trying to survive, and heard about this prophet wandering in the wilderness, baptizing people in the river. They left homes and security to check it out.

What compelled them? What drew them? For the world to stay the same? For things to be difficult? For the powers that be to rule forever? Of course not!

And who did they expect to find? Someone that reinforced that order? A dude dressed like a king? Or did they expect a prophet?

Do you expect him to offer you power or freedom?

The Way that Jesus offers us is not a shortcut to power or the certainty of supremacy. It isn't the luxury of wealth or the attraction of privilege.

Jesus invites us to the courage found in the wilderness; the hope found among the people; faith that leads to change; love that moves mountains on behalf of the oppressed.

Not what we expect to want, but what we most desire.

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

[STSTEPHENSTH.ORG](http://STSTEPHENSTH.ORG)

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