

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



August 25, 2024

## DIFFICULT

*On challenge (and hope) in following Jesus*

by Drew Downs

Jesus pushes against the crowds following him in John 6. He drives most of them away. And then many of his disciples respond by saying “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” This remains an open question for the church, it would seem.

We seem relatively comfortable with the idea that following Jesus is a challenge. And yet we also expect it to be easy enough for everyone to do it. Often without trying.

I suspect that most of us embrace the challenge, but desire security. It is like recognizing our faith (and discipleship) is like gambling—so we want a “sure thing” before we put any money down.

And yet the hope (and joy!) is found in the doing and believing *without* the certainty or control. That we might delight in a world that we don’t have to understand and love without fear of loss.

# ORDINARY TIME

2024

## 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!

### **Eating, Together**

This summer, I've made a big deal of eating. The way I've put it is "eat well, preferably together." You might take this as me being a bit food-obsessed, but it is based on two related concepts that are central to Jesus's teaching and ministry.

Jesus eats with so many people and with so much gusto that his critics call him glutton and a drunkard. You don't usually earn that reputation by eating out once and maybe having a couple sips of wine. He keeps "getting caught" eating and drinking with people. Food, and particularly eating with other people, is a central aspect of his ministry. Eating together allows us to embody that ministry. Every meal can be a feast and every feast bears the marks of the holy.

I'm also conscious that not everyone has someone to eat with. And I've tried to make this call to eating together something that all of us can try to do. But I think even this bears a second quality of Jesus's ministry I think *everyone* can embrace. And that is to find the joy that can come with eating *well*. And what I mean by well is by choosing to make one's meal into a feast. A drive-thru burger can be a feast if treated as an opportunity to find joy, because what makes a feast a feast is not expense, volume, or participants, but the desire to celebrate and *en-joy* what we are doing.

These are two spiritual disciplines we can cultivate to enrich our faith. By eating (*feasting*) and preferably, doing so together.

With love,  
Drew

# ORDINARY TIME

2024

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## FOR SUNDAY

*Proper 16B*

August 25, 2024

### **Collect**

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

John 6:56-69

Jesus said, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father."

# ORDINARY TIME

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Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

## Reflection

During this whole section, referred to by many as the Bread of Life Discourse, Jesus challenges the people following him. And for many, it may be striking to notice that many of them go away. This might mess with our conviction about the *attractiveness* of Jesus; where many of us are taught that Jesus himself does the work of bringing people into the faith. This is at the heart of signs declaring "Jesus Saves" in inner cities and on barn roofs. We're often taught that if we just "bring someone to Jesus" then Jesus himself will do the rest. And yet, here in John 6, Jesus sends many people away. Why?

The easy answer is that, as Jesus says earlier, they aren't following for the right reasons (remember, they tried to make him king by force!). I've heard this offered in recent years as a defense of abuse or authoritarianism in the church! Or to dismiss the bulk of Christians as the "wrong kind" because we don't "sincerely follow" Jesus.

The context offers a simpler response. Jesus is suggesting that people simply have the wrong idea; about him, God, and faith. In other words, he is trying to push people to see beyond their physical needs, beyond the material of their own, personal lives, to see what it is that God is doing in the world. Because this is what they are obsessed with (e.g. being fed, who is in charge, what people are "supposed to do"...). But Jesus wants to free of us of this, opening our hearts and minds to the love of Christ. That this is as essential to our lives as food. That it will influence the way we behave and think—even who we are. That we are liberated from desire and power to love and heal the world.

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