

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

September 29, 2024



SEASONING

the saltiness of living well

by Drew Downs

Jesus speaks of his disciples being “salted with fire,” which is a far more useful image than it sounds. Fire and salt both have a strange reputation in modern American thinking. But they are seasoning and inspiration, preservative and passion.

His speculation that we are seasoned by God, our flavor is enhanced and awakened by grace. But if flavor enhancer loses its flavor, there isn’t a way to get that back.

This, however, isn’t a scarcity image. It is to speak to the absence of alternatives to the abundant, inspiring grace of God. That our lives are enriched and seasoned, not merely by aging, or perhaps even human experience, but by grace. We have joy in our lives. We have thrills and love and hope in our lives. We have passion and compassion in our lives because God invites us in to experience it and we embrace this grace with anticipation and hope.

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!

A Transformational Opportunity

This Sunday, we're offering a workshop for the people of St. Stephen's. It is an opportunity to explore our **purpose** and our **joy**.

Facilitated by myself and two members of the congregation, this workshop will offer us a model we can use to look at our church, our practices, and our lives in a new way. To say that I'm excited by this is an understatement (I'm also really nervous, friends)!

The model, which is called Gather Transform Send, helps us name what it is we are seeking—while inviting us to examine what helps us experience that in church.

Having worked with it at the College for Congregational Development this summer, with our team of learner/facilitators, and with our vestry the last two months, I can speak to the exploration we are invited to, and the opportunities for transformation in our lives, practices, and expectations.

Please join us Sunday, **September 29** at approximately **11:30 am** for this fantastic opportunity to explore the grace of God in community.

And don't forget to join us the following Sunday, October 6 at 4 pm for the annual Blessing of the Animals! We gather for a short service of prayer, blessing, and remembrance in the Mabley Garden of the church.

With love,
Drew

ORDINARY TIME

2024

FOR SUNDAY

Proper 21B

September 29, 2024

Collect

○ God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Grant us the fullness of your grace, that we, running to obtain your promises, may become partakers of your heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

Mark 9:38-50

John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

"If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

"For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

ORDINARY TIME

Reflection

There's a word for what the disciples are wrestling with in this week's passage: *unsanctioned*. There is someone doing Jesus stuff without being a disciples. He isn't enrolled in the program; he doesn't have the certification; he isn't known to the treasurer. And this clearly upsets the disciples.

This is a familiar concept in the modern world—and it has several parts of it that cause frustration for the disciples (and readers!). This is someone they don't know so they don't know if they can trust him. He hasn't been their from the beginning, so there is concern about his experience. And he isn't under the guidance of Jesus, so they don't know what will happen.

I suspect there's a deeper emotion, however: jealousy. They've put in all of this work and he hasn't. In modern labor terms, we call this the free rider problem. There is someone who benefits from other people's work (gets a free ride) but doesn't need to contribute to making the work sustainable (he doesn't pay his dues). Here is someone running around, being Jesusy without giving up everything to literally follow him.

What is curious for us is that this movement organizer doesn't agree with the disciples. In fact, he forbids them from discouraging him. Why? Because the man is doing the work they are called to do. *Effectively*. There's a kind of don't-mess-with-it vibe around this moment.

Jesus seems to treat the disciples here the way he treats the Pharisees and the Scribes around Sabbath teaching, saying that they shouldn't get hung up in process when the point of the thing is to participate in the inbreaking grace of God. Process is important—to a point. And it can distract us from what we ought to see with our own eyes: that the grace of God is spreading.

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

STSTEPHENSTH.ORG
