

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost  
August 23, 2020  
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## Jump In

Out of the many words that might have been; out of the hundreds we hope to hear; out of the dozen sermons I half wrote, and the one I'll deliver: May a word of your Kingdom be spoken here. Amen.

I heard this story from a rerun of the West Wing back when one of the only cable channels that Allison and I could get was Bravo really fuzzily. I was really surprised at the production value of Project Runway when I finally got to see it for real and not through a layer of fuzz. It was quite impressive. Anyway, simply because NBC can run cheap episodes of the West Wing over and over and over on Bravo, I saw it a lot, and this story has the ring of an old classic of truth that he got it somewhere else and just put an Aaron Sorkin spin on it. Leo McGarry tells Josh Lyman this guy is walking down the street when he falls in a hole. The walls are so steep he can't get out. A doctor passes by, and the guy shouts up, "Hey you, can you help me out?" The doctor writes a prescription, throws it down in the hole and moves on. Then a priest comes along, and the guy shouts up, "Father, I'm down in this hole. Can you help me out?" The priest writes out a prayer, throws it down in the hole and moves on. Editorial note: I'd like to think that the church would have done more for this man, but our savior told a story much like this and the church didn't then and it doesn't now, so oh well. Then a friend walks by. "Hey Joe it's me. Can you help me out?" and the friend jumps in the hole. Our guy says "Are you stupid? Now we're both down here." The friend says, "Yeah, but I've been down here before, and I know the way out."

We don't always know when we're in over our heads. We can be certain—we don't like it. Christians don't like being in over their heads. Unfortunately, by their nature they're supposed to be. The word *ecclesia* that we translate "church," means "called out." Called out of normalcy. Called out of conformity to the world and its norms. Called into the hole. Not because we always know the way out, but because our friends are down there.

It's important to acknowledge when you're in a hole. It's important to acknowledge that you belong there. It's time Christians got used to being in over their heads. Time we got used to being in over our heads because we are. We are stripped of the usual hallmarks of Christianity. No Eucharist. No sanctuary. No singing, as a choir or congregation. No priest. It's not the worship we're used to. It's not the church we're used to. And you can tell how much we need it because we're on it steps if we can't be inside it. We're deprived of the usual practices, the usual crutches we would use, the usual identity we would draw upon. If we are only Eucharist, if we're only sanctuary, if we're only our songs, if we're only our clergy, then what is left. If we're churchgoing and then some, what is that then some? What is that then some that we can be when we can't be Eucharist and sanctuary and singing and the priesthood. Because Jesus had a warning for us. As much as he was empowering Peter with, in Roman Catholic theology, the power of the keys—the power to bind heaven and earth as the church needed to in its participation in God's project. But as a warning: beware what you are when you don't have these things. Because your actions will have consequences. Whatever you bind in your conversations at home, whatever you bind in your committee meetings, whatever you bind at your workplace, will be bound outside it.

Whatever you loose in a conversation, whatever you loose in a sermon, whatever you loose in your services, will be loosed out there. And what will happen to the people who are stuck in holes? What will happen to you when you fall in? What will you find bound? What will you find unleashed? How will you be known when you're in over your head?

Paul lets us know, "You will be known as the body of Christ." One body with many members. It's tough being a part of that body. Paul writes, "I write to you not to puff you up, but to remind you of your mutual obligations to one another that none of you will think yourself more highly than another." How do we become known as much for our love as we are for our liturgy? We do it by being active members of the body of Christ. Not by thinking more highly of ourselves, but by pushing ourselves into service. Jesus tells us the last will be first and the first will be last. You will wash feet, something you can't do in a pandemic and I wouldn't recommend doing this generally because it's tough—and awkward—but it's the service that matters. The Christian is inoculated against superiority and supremacy, or should be, because our first instinct is to put someone else's needs, someone else's story, someone else who's lost in that hole, first. We are not to be conformed by the world. We're to recognize all the ways that we're in over our heads, and when we find someone else in over their head, we jump in on their behalf. We put others needs first.

Too often we are so interested in our diversity that we are all too happy to proclaim that we should begin to see everything from other people's perspective. You gotta see the other side. When really what we're saying sometimes too often is that we want our side to be seen. We're Episcopalians. We can walk it chew gum at the same time. We can be reformed, Protestant, and catholic all at once. And we can tell both stories—the story of the person down in the hole and a person about to jump in on their behalf. Because we can be both of those people, because we *are* both of those people. Because we know about the one who jumped in on our behalf. We might not know the way out—and in fact, we probably don't—but we jump in the hole not because we know the way out but because we should be there when that person finds their way. Whatever the way forward is, it will be together. We as Christians need to get in over our heads. We need to be called out. We need to call each other out. We need to see through the fuzz of a television screen. See through the fuzz, the gauzy beauty of liturgy, to the love that animates it all. The love that we should all be a part of.

"Are you stupid, now we're both in the hole."

"You're absolutely right. I've been down here before, and I'm here to stay."

Amen.