

The Sunday Missive – May 15, 2022 The Fifth Sunday in Easter

Hymn 182 Christ is alive! Let Christians sing

Christ is alive! Let Christians sing. His cross stands empty to the sky.
Let streets and homes with praises ring. His love in death shall never die.

Not throned above, remotely high, untouched, unmoved by human pains,
But daily, in the midst of life, our Savior with the Father reigns.

In every insult, rift, and war where color, scorn or wealth divide,
He suffers still, yet loves the more, and lives, though ever crucified.

Christ is alive! His Spirit burns through this and every future age,
Till all creation lives and learns his joy, his justice, love, and praise.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDofJBQd3ww>

The Collect of the Day

Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Acts 11:1-18

Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and

birds of the air. I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' But I replied, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' But a second time the voice answered from heaven, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.' This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.' And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life."

Psalm 148

Alleluia! Praise the Lord; praise God in the heights* ***Praise God, ye angels, ye Heavenly Host.***

Praise God, O sun and moon* ***Praise God, ye shining stars.***

Praise God, ye heavens, ye waters beyond the heavens* ***Praise God all creatures of the earth.***

Sea creatures and all ocean depths* ***Fire and hail, snow and mist.***

Ye stormy winds that fulfill God's command.* ***Ye mountains and all hills****

Fruit trees and all cedars; beasts, both wild and tame* ***Reptiles and birds; kings and queens of the earth***

All ye maidens and young men* ***Ye old and young together.***

O praise the name of the Lord* ***Whose name is exalted, Alleluia!***

Revelation 21:1-6

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

Hymn 184 Christ the Lord is risen again

Christ the Lord is risen again! Christ hath broken every chain!
Now through all the world it rings that the Lamb in King of kings.
Alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! Christ, our Paschal lamb indeed,
Christ, today your people feed. Alleluia!

He who gave for us his life, who for us endured the strife,
Takes our sin and guilt away that with angels we may say:
Alleluia!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wHhtVLI3xs>

John 13:31-35

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews

so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

For You -- Easter 5C

One of the great American plays, written by Moss Hart and George Kaufman for the stage and screen, deals with the hi-jinks and unconventional lifestyle of a wacky family on New York's Upper West Side. Presided over by Grandpa Vanderhof (John Barrymore's part in the movie), they come to ideological blows with the much more conventionally proper and wealthy Kirby family, when granddaughter Alice falls in love with their son Tony. Grandpa at one point delivers the signature speech of the play to Tony's Wall Street Dad: "Maybe this'll stop you trying to be so desperate about making more money than you can ever use. You can't take it with you Mr. Kirby, so what good is it? As near as I can see, the only thing you can take with you is the love of your friends."

You Can't Take It with You is of course the name of the play, and it's one of the USA's most accurate and entertaining self-analyses. Most of the serious decision-making and reality-facing in the family takes place around the dinner table, and that's what makes the play hit home so effectively. Those of us who grew up having dinner together with our families most every night, are aware of the powerful effect it had on us. Yes there are plenty of horror stories, but many a study has shown that family dinners nurture souls and minds as well as bodies. It's at the table we learn our values and how to ask tough questions of others. And if we didn't grow up this way, God is nevertheless longing to offer us comparable kinds of loving interaction and formation in other ways. We find them in places where true stories get told, where true (albeit tough) love is on display, and where, whatever the

outside world is putting us through, acceptance is always available (with an occasional time-out).

As we continue our exploration of John's Gospel, we work back from its wondrous conclusion, looking for clues about who we are as the family of Christ, and how we must live now that Jesus has claimed, then left us. We are bidden both to accept our condition as human beings and to revel in the awareness of being part of something far greater than ourselves. We are also instructed to feed God's sheep, ie: each other. Today we are commanded to "Love one another, as I have loved you." Jesus is at the dinner table with his family, and the outside world is about to put him through something unspeakable. He is at the dinner table where all are accepted, even that bad apple Judas, who rushes off before the dessert, and who misses the best and truest story. That is the story Jesus tells next: You can't take anything with you except the love of your friends. Just like Henry Travers as Grandpa Vanderhof would observe at the Booth Theater in New York some nineteen hundred and three years later.

But what does Jesus mean by calling this a new commandment? Holy scripture has been talking about neighbor love for hundreds of years, at least since Leviticus, and doubtless long before. What's new about this commandment? Love one another as I have loved you. Isn't that just Good Samaritan talk? We got that already, The Golden Rule – it's common to all the world's great religions. So what's new? What is the deeper truth, the greater authenticity Jesus wants the family to get ahold of tonight around the dinner table. What is the next level of love?

The great storyteller Ira Glass observed that stories can be boiled down to the following formula: $1+1=2$. That makes a story. But, says Glass, the stories that we remember, that transform us, the ones we love proceed according to the formula $1+1=3$. What's an example? Lover+Lover = Family... Poet+fork in the woods=All the difference... and of course the story we talk about here: Fisherpeople+Jesus=Grace. What is it about loving as Jesus loved

that makes 1 and 1 into threeness, trinitation, the whole being greater than the sum of its parts?

I know a man whose story might give us a clue as to what Jesus is trying to get us to live like. Now this fellow would blush for shame or maybe laugh out loud if he thought we were talking about him as an 'Imitation of Christ' or some sort of model, but his story does shed a little light on that triangularity. Mike fell in love and got married. He and his wife had a baby, and they sat at a dinner table that had belonged to great-great-grandparents, and where every night they came together to play with the baby and wipe carrots and worse off the floor and the high chair. It was sweet.

Now Mike's job was exciting, but it took him away from home quite a bit. In his field, success can be measured by how little you are home. So one day, he's in the middle of a job, and he gets a call from home: "The baby just took her first step." Much to the amazement and mild embarrassment of the people on the jobsite, Mike gets all choked up and has to take his own time-out. Within a few weeks, he decided his priorities were wrong. He quit his job and found a way to work close to home, where he wouldn't miss any more milestones, and the dinner table would be an everyday reality instead of an occasional holiday. So far, so good. If you can manage it, arrange your life so you can care for and be cared for by those you love. Nothing new about that.

Fast-forward a few years. Now there are three babies, and Mike's life is chock full of their doings – it's wonderful. But he and his wife have sought counseling and come to realize that their connection is nowhere near deep or strong enough to last a lifetime. They agree to divorce. At first there is some bitter fighting, some acrimony, with each of them adamant about this, that or the other thing. But here is where grace came into their lives in the person of a gifted therapist and the spiritual gift of willingness to change. Here is where Mike and Laura's family story went from 1 and 1 equaling 2 to the threeness Jesus

commands. From the time of their separation, and continuing to this day (with a couple early kerfuffles), the two have remained a family in this sense: each tries to live by the motto, “It is my business to want our children to have the best possible relationship with their other parent.”

It sounds simple, but it is revolutionary. It is in fact resurrectional. The marriage ended, but the family rose again and have prospered. Last week we said that Jesus did not come to abolish the human condition, but to transform it. People split up. Couples divorce; that is the human condition. But oh the transformation when a commitment to love and care is maintained (even enhanced) beyond the separation! In our story from Acts today, Peter goes through a dream seminar and oral exam on the subject of inclusiveness, with the same result. No matter how estranged or combative or strange our neighbor may be, they are just as much children of God as we are. But more: our vocation, our hope, our salvation as Christians is to have our first priority be that the other one, the prickly neighbor, the “ex” have everything we want out of life. It’s a tall order, it’s a scary fantasy, it’s a risky business. But that is the new commandment Jesus gives his family at the dinner table: make friends with your enemies, and then whatever comes up, whatever goes down, make it your business to love one another juuuuuust a little more than you love yourselves.

The New Heaven and New Earth come about when we become willing to get well Jesus’ way, which is not by triumphing over others? Are we willing to have a beginner’s mind, a follower’s heart as a basis for our daily living? Can we turn things over to God’s good guidance as a way to get out of the argument and stop fighting? These are the only hope we have for tackling issues such as intolerance, bigotry, isolation, disconnectedness and self-absorption. It’s not enough just to be alive: we will know a New Jerusalem only when we find joy in compassionate service and self-forgetting.

WLP Hymn 775 Give thanks for life

Give thanks for life, the measure of our days,
Mortal, we pass through beauty that decays,
Yet sing to God our hope, our love, our praise,
Alleluia, Alleluia!

Give thanks for those who made their life a light
Caught from the Christ flame bursting through the night,
Who touched the truth, who burned for what is right,
Alleluia, Alleluia!

And for our own, our living and our dead,
Thanks for the love by which our life is fed,
A love not changed by time or death or dread,
Alleluia, Alleluia!

Give thanks for hope, that like the wheat, the grain
Lying in darkness does its life retain,
In resurrection to grow green again.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4e8vF8R5zg>

Or...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tE-7fTeIBqM>

Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

W. B. Yeats