

Sunday Missive – March 29, 2020 -- The Fifth Sunday in Lent

Some experiences in life are more disorienting than most. These COVID 19 days are the strangest yet. How is it that time can go faster and more slowly simultaneously? The calendar seems frozen as we hope and wait for better news, but every day seems to go from coffee to dinnertime in nothing flat. Perhaps we can learn to be more mindful of our moments and what each contains as this saga unfolds. We are being forced into the humble awareness that Nature is indeed more powerful than humankind. We are visitors here. In his second letter, Peter reminds us:

“But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.” 3:8

As I do things around our church buildings, it is disorienting for it to be so quiet and empty, and to know that it will remain so for a while. Yet there is life in the gardens – with no small thanks to our Junior Warden Sarah DeLong, and the birds, the bees and a few pesky rodents -- and there is activity pulsing through our church family. It is not taking the form that you and I have known, but every prayer, every phone conversation, every email and kind thought and telecommunication is taken up and bounced back among us to the good.

Last Sunday, Lois and David Henderson became great-grandparents for the first time. Mia Lynn Henderson was born to their grandson Matthew and his wife Megan up in Oregon – Hallelujah! (even during Lent).

Good wishes come from Pat and Frank Lakeman in Washington and Dottie and Frank Andrews down in Orange County. Many thanks! I invite you to email or call me with stories and prayers and any news you have to share. sssymington@gmail.com

Our Outreach committee has given a gift from all of us to CAPSLO, whose challenge of helping the destitute survive is more crucial now than ever.

KC Caldwell of the California Central Coast Pastel Society writes: “Thanks so much for always welcoming us to Erickson Hall. We love what the people of St. Peter’s do for community arts programs here.” And we’ll get back to it as soon as the crisis abates.

Many thanks to all of you who have been mailing in your contributions. The bills keep arriving and it is gratifying when we can pay them!

Below you will find internet links to Sunday services in a few places. There are many options available; "Seek and ye shall find!"

What follows is a more traditional form of Common Prayer for your enjoyment. May God bless and keep you and yours.

Collects for the Day

O God of Love, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed child to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek and find such grace, bring the nations into your fold, pour out your Spirit upon all flesh, and hasten the coming of your kingdom, where there is no strife nor hatred, but only peace. *Amen.*

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of humankind: Grant us grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

[Ezekiel 37:1-14](#)

Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord..."

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

Hear my voice! Be attentive to the voice of my supplication!

If you should mark iniquities, Lord, who of us could stand?

But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

My soul waits for you, more than those who watch; more than those who watch for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with God there is steadfast love, and with the Lord is great power to redeem.

It is the One who will redeem Israel from all her iniquities.

Hymn 11

Awake, my soul, and with the sun
thy daily stage of duty run;
shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise
to pay thy morning sacrifice.

Lord, I my vows to thee renew;
disperse my sins as morning dew.
guard my first springs of thought and will,
and with thyself my spirit fill.

Direct, control, suggest, this day,
all I design, or do, or say;
that all my powers, with all their might,
in thy sole glory may unite.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
praise him, all creatures here below;
praise him above, ye heavenly host:
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

[Romans 8:6-11](#)

...The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. If Christ is in you, though the body may be dead, the Spirit is alive..."

From John Donne's Litany

From being anxious, or secure,
Dead clods of sadness, or light squibs of mirth,
From thinking that great courts immure
All, or no happiness, or that this earth
Is only for our prison framed,
Or that Thou'rt covetous
To them whom Thou lovest, or that they are maim'd
From reaching this world's sweet who seek Thee thus
With all their might, good Lord, deliver us.

[John 11:1-45](#)

After this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again. Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Jesus said to them, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

We are given a rich set of readings today, shot through with stimulating metaphors. Ezekiel, forced into exile by the rivers of Babylon at the age of 25, tells a story that takes us sharply away from anything we might call everyday experience. Even the monumental stories of, for example, Noah and Moses, take place in contexts that we can at least partially imagine. Singular individuals they are, yes, in archetypally grand situations that beg belief, but we can certainly picture how tough it is to be the number one leader of a big and important adventure or expedition like those two. Likewise, the days we are living through right now will doubtless result in lessons to be learned -- about humility, about cooperation, about preparedness, about denial -- if only we will heed them.

The immediate message of Ezekiel's story is that Israel will once more rise from defeat and pain and shameful exile to strength and happiness and ownership of their own land -- at least for a time. But what a colorfully bizarre way of telling us. A valley full of dry, busted up skeletons that reassemble themselves, sprout flesh and come to life? It's an awfully far-fetched and disturbing illustration, also arresting and memorably entertaining. Modern day practitioners of the genre include Tim Burton and Looney Tunes. But the underlying reality at work is the same as in the Flood and the Parting of the Waters stories: death will have no dominion when it comes to the power and intention of God. Although the over-the-top spookiness of his story might even be said to complicate his simple message, Ezekiel wants us to understand that God means for God's people to live and prosper no matter how they have dwindled or failed, how far down they have sunk or been beaten.

Then there is the psalmist: "Here I am Lord, I've hit rock bottom; I've been beaten down and feel like I deserve it. If you were keeping score, you would most certainly condemn me. But if you held all of us accountable for our thoughts and actions, there is no one who would come out squeaky clean. So give me your steadfast love anyway. Yours is the power to redeem; we have the wondrous assurance that you mean for us to regain life and prosperity no matter how far down we have sunk. As with the prophet, for the psalmist, death -- whether physical or spiritual -- is subservient to the power and intention of God.

St. Paul plays us the same song, but in a minor key. He wields the metaphor with passion in his letter to the Romans. "There is no condemnation for those in Christ. The Spirit of Christ has set you free from sin and death." It is not that one will never sin. Nor is Paul claiming the absence of physical death. He is proclaiming the ready availability of

permanent spiritual vigor and precious hope to any of us who desire it, no matter how far down we have dwindled or been beaten. The flesh is bound to fail us, but the spirit has the choice of lasting vitality. So, whatever happens to the body, if Christ is in you, you will remain alive in the Spirit forever. Your times of waiting will be times of hope, even when they are also times of distress, mourning and pain. This metaphor is more strident and demanding than the one we heard from old Ezekiel, who's on about death being physically reversed. We have moved on from the spooky, bone-rattling ghost story that shows us God's indifference to death. Now we are being forced to admit that our cooperation is required in the determination of our fate. God's eagerness to help us, no matter how far down we are, and God's complete dominance over death don't mean a thing if we remain aloof, self interested and self reliant.

See how John blends the two ideas, not only reviving Lazarus' flesh at will, unwrapping the corpse like dry bones walking, demonstrating that neither physical nor spiritual death has dominion over God, but also making it plain that Lazarus' physical revival is a fleeting resurrection. Unlike Jesus' tears, Lazarus physical revival is temporary, much like Israel's return to the temple in Jerusalem. What is permanent is the spiritual foundation and companionship of God with all those who want it, wherever they may be.

Many who opposed Jesus came to believe, not just because of the temporary miracle of making dead people walk, but because of his tears. They were aware of encountering a power outside the dominion of death, who desired their welfare, regardless of who they were.

As we move through our own Passiontide – we can expand our awareness of God's most demonstrative and complete participation in human experience – we can encounter Jesus more thoughtfully in response. God not only weeps when we weep and dies when we die; God demonstrates in real time that we need not remain beholden to death and in fear of it. We too can find new freedom to defy our ever-drying bones, to set aside our outrageous betrayals, to live beyond our mortifying disappointments and give ourselves to our greater mission, which is the nurture of Creation in all its forms and personalities.

Lazarus will die again physically, but he and all of us who want to live for love, are part of an existence that knows no end. Like Israel's re-enfleshment in Ezekiel as the spiritual children of God, the promise of life to those who follow the ways of love and peace is a permanent one.

And now, from the poet Pablo Neruda, here is another angle on this question of death's dominion,

A Callarse
(Keeping Quiet.)

Now we will count to twelve and we will all keep still.

For once on the face of the earth, let's not speak in any language; let's stop for one second and not move our arms so much. It would be an exotic moment without rush, without engines; we would all be together in a sudden strangeness.

Fishermen in the cold sea would not harm whales and the man gathering salt would look at his hurt hands.

Those who prepare green wars, wars with gas, wars with fire, victories with no survivors, would put on clean clothes and walk about with their brothers in the shade, doing nothing.

What I want should not be confused with total inactivity. Life is what it is about; I want no truck with death.

If we were not so single-minded about keeping our lives moving, and for once could do nothing, perhaps a huge silence might interrupt this sadness of never understanding ourselves and of threatening ourselves with death. Perhaps the earth can teach us as when everything seems dead and later proves to be alive.

Hymn 7

Christ, whose glory fills the skies,
Christ, the true, the only Light,
Sun of Righteousness, arise!
Triumph over shades of night;
Dayspring from on high, be near;
Day-star, in my heart appear!

Dark and cheerless is the morn
unaccompanied by thee;
joyless is the day's return

till thy mercy's beams I see;
as they inward light impart,
glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine!
Pierce the gloom of sin and grief!
Fill me, radiancy divine;
scatter all my unbelief;
more and more thyself display,
shining to the perfect day.

Let us pray,

Loving God, all seems adrift.

Is this what it takes to let us know we are One?
Is this what it takes to make us live as One?
Is this the high price of love and solidarity?

We long to regather in our churches and theaters and marketplaces,
With You and all our suffering world in such love.

May we hold one another till then.

May You hold us.

Let it be so.
Let it be so.

Precautions

All available evidence indicates that COVID-19 virus is transmitted during close contact through respiratory droplets such as coughing and sneezing. The virus can spread directly from person to person when a COVID-19 case coughs or exhales producing droplets that reach the nose, mouth, or eyes of another person. Alternatively, as the droplets are too heavy to be airborne, they land on objects and surfaces surrounding the person. Other people become infected with COVID-19 by touching these contaminated objects or surfaces, then touching their own eyes, nose, or mouth.

As such, The World Health Organization continues to recommend that everyone perform hand hygiene frequently, follow respiratory etiquette recommendations and regularly clean and disinfect surfaces. WHO also continues to recommend the importance of maintaining physical distance with everyone and especially avoiding people with fever or any respiratory symptoms. These preventive measures will limit viral transmission. Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards said New Orleans would be out of ventilators and out of bed space this week "if we don't flatten the infection curve. "It's not conjecture, it's not some flimsy theory," Edwards told a press conference. "This is what is going to happen."

Why the Pandemic Leads to Panic Buying

What are the psychological factors behind the empty shelves in grocery stores?

Many of us have faced empty shelves—especially in the toilet paper aisle—as we and millions of fellow citizens prepare for life in the age of COVID-19. Professor Nathan Novemsky, an expert in the psychology of judgment and decision-making at the Yale School of Organization and Management, gives his thoughts on how consumers are behaving during the pandemic and how they're likely to view companies' actions in the aftermath.

"I think we are seeing a perfect storm of psychological forces. One is scarcity; stores seem to be running out of certain items. We know scarcity makes everything seem more valuable, diamonds being the best example of scarcity driving demand. Another factor is control; consumers feel out of control about many aspects of the pandemic, but they do have control when they choose to stock up on things, so they exercise that control to feel better about the situation. There is tremendous uncertainty, and people worry about regretting not buying something, so this anticipation of possible regret leads them to buy, as regretting buying too much is not something they are too concerned about, compared to the regret of buying too little. Providing stuff can be used to express concern or caring for themselves and their family, so they buy items to show they are trying to keep their family safe. And there are various other factors. Perhaps the best way to reduce this cycle of panic buying is for people to feel like there are downsides to buying too much, such as keeping that stuff from others who need it more. This provides a reason for moderation, which is less likely to come to mind spontaneously as consumers are thinking less about the additive effects of everyone hoarding than they are about the immediate effects of having more stuff for their own family."

Arts and Ideas for the Duration

“We have no idea what’s going to happen, and it’s pretty scary, but we are a creative, ingenious people; problem solvers who love thinking outside the box. We have the technology to do these things. We will adapt; we will figure out how to keep going.” Young Jean Lee, playwriting student

Lauren Gunderson, the most produced playwright in the country is offering free playwriting seminars online. This could be the time to create or re-create the stories of your life and imagination, with performance in mind. We will be together again, and when we are, we will have stories to tell.

“It’s a bad time for pretty much everything, except for finding ways to be creative.” Lauren Gunderson

Workshop info: <https://www.playbill.com/article/for-playwrights-virtual-workshops-prompts-and-more-to-get-you-writing-through-covid-19>

L. A. Times article:

https://enewspaper.latimes.com/infinity/article_share.aspx?guid=2bca316c-1bc7-4b79-bc5d-032079fde7d4

Prefer to watch?

[National Theatre at Home](#)

Join us right here every Thursday for some of the best British theatre, free to stream for a week. Starting from 2 April with the online premiere of *One Man Two Guvnors*:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUDq1XzCY0NIOYVJvEMQjqw>

Or listen?

Famed actor Sir Patrick Stewart writes: “I was delighted by the response to my posting of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 116. It has led me to undertake what follows. When I was a child in the 1940s, my mother would cut up slices of fruit for me (there wasn’t much) and as she put it in front of me she would say: “An apple a day keeps the doctor away.” How about, “A sonnet a day keeps the doctor away?” <https://www.instagram.com/sirpatstew/>

Or just read a book?

There is the Internet Archive's opening of the [National Emergency Library](#), "a collection of books that supports emergency remote teaching, research activities, independent scholarship, and intellectual stimulation while universities, schools, training centers, and libraries are closed. ""Not to be sneezed at is the sheer pleasure of browsing through the titles," [writes *The New Yorker's* Jill Lepore](#)

In case you missed it,

Sally Young shares this astonishing performance by music students from the University of Illinois together online performing Burt Bachrach's anthemic *What the World Needs Now*: <https://youtu.be/QagzdvzzHBQ>

Sunday services at St. Barnabas, Arroyo Grande

You do not need to have a Facebook account to watch Sunday 10:00am worship on the St. Barnabas' Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/StBarnabasAG/>

A recording will be posted on the website (<https://saintbarnabas-ag.org/>)
The order of service is also available there now.

Church of the Incarnation, Dallas, Texas - Note times are CST

Join us on our **Facebook page*** this Sunday to worship live with Contemporary service at 9 am or Traditional Service at 11:15 am.

**Incarnation on
Facebook**

We will have a link in your daily Text to Pray on Sunday to remind you to join us online for worship. We will push out Sunday School lessons as well on Facebook, and as always, **the recordings will be on the website** if you cannot join us live.

**Digital Worship
on Website**

There is no need to log in, therefore a Facebook account is not required, in order to view the live worship services. **Learn more »*

And finally, this from Sue Putney:

Subject: A LETTER FROM F. SCOTT FITZGERALD, QUARANTINED IN 1920 IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE DURING THE “SPANISH FLU.”

Dearest Rosemary,

It was a limpid dreary day, hung as in a basket from a single dull star. I thank you for your letter. Outside, I perceive what may be a collection of fallen leaves tussling against a trash can. It rings like jazz to my ears. The streets are that empty. It seems as though the bulk of the city has retreated to their quarters, rightfully so. At this time, it seems very poignant to avoid all public spaces. Even the bars, as I told Hemingway, but to that he punched me in the stomach, to which I asked if he had washed his hands. He hadn't. He is much the denier, that one. Why, he considers the virus to be just influenza. I'm curious of his sources..."

Faithfully yours,
Scott

Fitzgerald goes on to make the argument that the only thing to do while in isolation is drink. His advice is as bad as his writing is wonderful.

May God bless and keep you during these days of worry and wonder. Stay safe and stay connected. Pray for all those in harm's way: those who are ill and those who would care for them. Call if you need anything or just want to talk. (203) 209-2339

Love,
Sid+