

Sunday Missive – The Second Sunday of Easter



April 19, 2020

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-a6KzBLE40>

“Celtic Woman” performing *Amazing Grace* live from the Mansion House,
Dublin

Hymn 671

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace first taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!

The Lord has promised good to me, his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.

Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come;
'tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand years bright shining as the sun,
we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun.

Grace and peace to you from God our Creator, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, who was and is and is to come. It seems not all that long ago that we were met in happy company, surrounded by flowers at our home on Shasta Avenue. And yet, there is a sense that another era has dawned, and the old one is strangely distant. All of us who are struggling with this worldwide illness will think of our lives in at least two segments: before and after now. For most of us, our struggles are inner ones: how to use our time and energy responsibly and creatively; how to care for ourselves gently and for others compassionately; how to stay safe.

Meanwhile, there is a still-growing number of people for whom this is the most difficult experience of their lives, as medical and organizational challenges exceed our preparations and threaten to overwhelm our resources. Those brave ones persist and labor on, in the face of the virulence of disease and also against what can be an even more daunting foe, the stubborn ignorance and stunning arrogance of other people – the naysayers and deniers, the self-centered and stupidly defiant; opportunists.

And there are dismaying numbers of people for whom this will be the last struggle of all. The ripples of grief grow ever wider amongst those who have loved them, in mourning for lives cut short, and amongst all of us for the loss of a time we knew: before this happened.

Each of our efforts to slow and stop the spread of the virus are important, however small. By cooperating with the suggestions of those who study the problem scientifically, and by filtering out, setting aside and denouncing the harangues and examples of the ignorant and ill-intentioned – however strident or tempting they may be – we make ourselves part of the solution. Perhaps the most important thing we can do is by way of attitude and outlook. If we continue to orient our thoughts towards what is good, our faith will persevere. If we incline our hearts towards ways of love, justice will prevail. If we allow our minds to remain curious, with a hunger for what can be learned from mistakes, great and small, hope will flourish among us. When we do gather again in person, it will be, not as victims merely, nor even as proud survivors, but as pilgrims, whose paths have crossed a desert on the way home.

The Collects of the day... Almighty God, you gave your only Child to die for our sins and to rise for our justification: Give us grace so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness, that we may always serve you in pureness of living and truth; through the same Jesus, Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

and... Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established a new covenant of reconciliation: grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

A Reading from the Acts of the Apostles – Chapter Two

Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried; his tomb is with us to this day. He was a prophet. He knew that God had promised to put one of his descendants on his throne. Thus David spoke of the resurrection, saying, ‘He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.’ This is Jesus, whom God has raised up. Of that all of us standing here are witnesses.

Psalm 16

Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

I say to the Lord, “You are my Lord. My happiness lies in you alone.”

Those who choose other gods increase their sorrows.

I will not take part in their offerings. Nor will I take their names upon my lips.

O Lord, it is you who are my portion and cup; you yourself who secure my lot.

I will bless the Lord who gives me counsel, who even in sleep directs my heart.

And so, my heart rejoices, my soul is glad; even my flesh shall rest in hope.

For you will show me the path of life: the fullness of joy in your presence,

At your right hand, there is bliss forevermore.

A Reading from the First Letter of Peter – Chapter One

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whose great mercy we have a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us all. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you must suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith — being more precious than gold — may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Here is an excerpt from Richard Rohr's commentary this week: "Sooner or later, the heart of everybody's spiritual problem is 'What we do with our pain? Why is there evil? Why is there suffering?' Job begs God for an answer to this mystery, and he can't get one. He only begins to trust when he no longer feels ignored, when he knows that God is taking him seriously and that he is 'part of the conversation' (see Job 42). When Jesus later *becomes* the answer in his own passion, death, and resurrection, he discovers what Job finally experienced: in the midst of suffering, God can be trusted. The world is still safe, coherent, and even blessed.

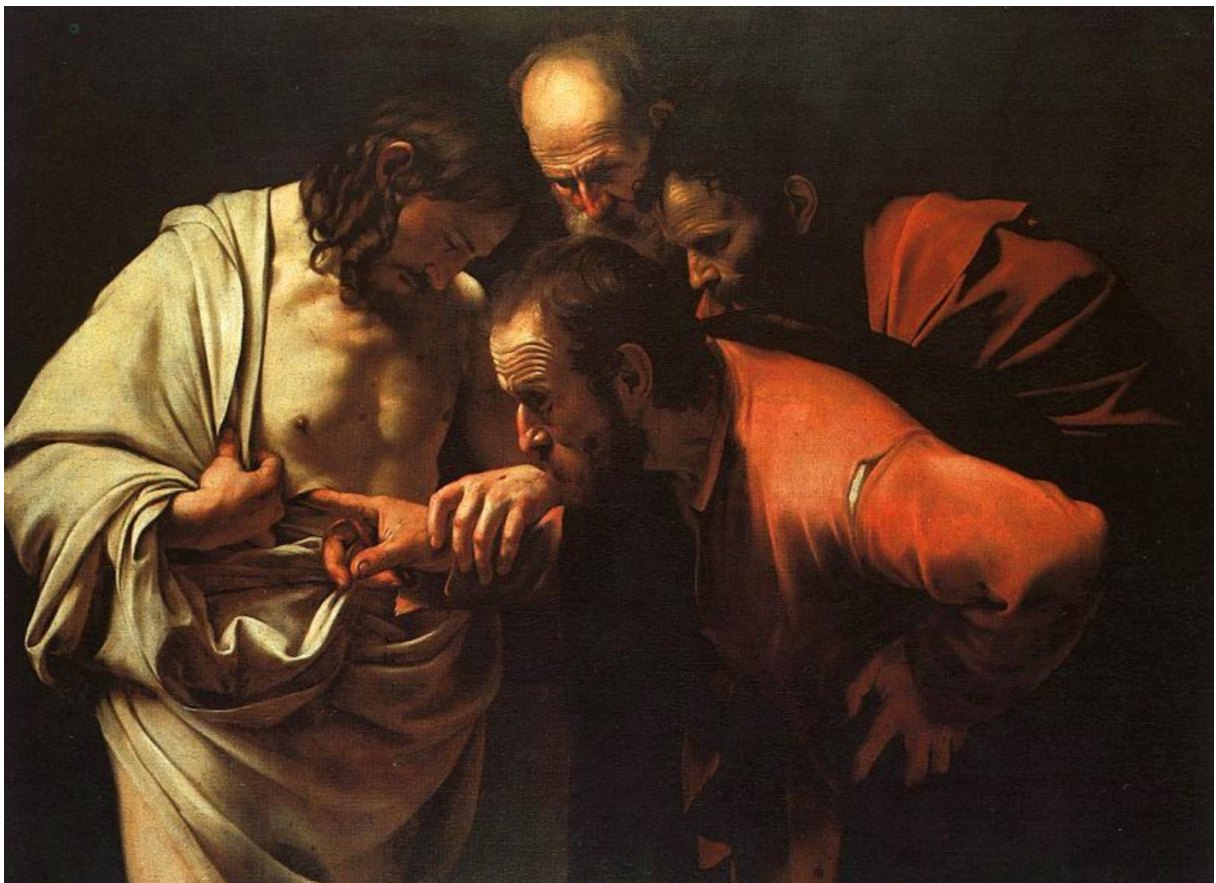
"The genius of Jesus' teaching is that he reveals how God uses tragedy, suffering, pain, betrayal, and death itself, not to wound or punish us, but to bring us to a Larger Identity: 'Unless the single grain of wheat loses its shell, it remains just a single grain' (see John 12:24). The shell must first crack for the expanded growth to happen. In such a divine economy, everything can be transmuted, everything can be used, and nothing is wasted."

The Gospel of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ according to John

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the crowds, Jesus suddenly appeared among them and said, "Peace be with you." The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord, and Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas was not with them on that day when Jesus came. When the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord," he

said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in his side, I will not believe.”

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and this time Thomas was with them. Although all the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” He said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you too may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.



Caravaggio – *Incredulita di San Tommaso* c. 1602. Muzeum Sanssouci, Potsdam

A Prayer for Our Times

Jesus, you are my friend and Savior. You know me through and through, and you are with me in every part of my life: in my sadness, anger and fear, and in my gratefulness and joy.

Gracious Jesus, on the day of your resurrection you came to your frightened disciples and breathed the Holy Spirit into them. Breathe into me, as you breathed into them, the same creative wind and energy that moved across the face of the deep at the very beginning of creation.

As I breathe in, may I breathe in your courage and strength. As I breathe out, may I breathe out your loving-kindness and compassion.

Help me to remember that you are with me always and that every day you invite me to bear witness to your healing love. Thank you for the people you have given me to love and for the tasks you have given me to do. Give me the guts, audacity and resolve to stand up in the midst of a great catastrophe and to do what is mine to do.

Speak in my heart and grant me the peace that passes understanding, so that I may know in my deepest core that whether I live or die, I am yours, and you will never leave me.

Hymn 811

You shall cross the barren desert, but you shall not die of thirst.
You shall wander far in safety, though you do not know the way.
You shall speak your words in foreign lands, and all will understand;
You shall see the face of God and live.

Be not afraid; I go before you always; come follow me, and I will give you rest

If you pass through raging waters, in the sea you shall not drown.
If you walk amid the burning flames, you shall not be harmed.
If you stand before the powers of hell, and death is at your side
Know that I am with you through it all.

Be not afraid; I go before you always; come follow me, and I will give you rest.

Let us shelter in the peace of God and pray for those in danger.

Dearly Beloved friends, these are indeed strange and disturbing times. Our worship community thrives on togetherness, so this experience of separation is frustrating and uncomfortable. I have inserted below some links to worship services that will be televised via the internet. Please follow one of those if you would like to watch or participate in an online service. Or perhaps you will find another one and write to tell the rest of us of your experience. If you write to me at sssymington@gmail.com, your story will appear in Tuesday's *Pebble*. But know that, whether or not you do "virtual" church, the real Church is alive and well in the hearts and prayers of us all, even when we are deprived of each other's physical company. We too are alive and faithful and connected by the original and fundamental inter-web, known as the Holy Spirit of God.

St. Barnabas, Arroyo Grande

Will live-stream Sunday 10:00am worship services on the St. Barnabas' Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/StBarnabasAG/> You do not need to have a Facebook account. A recording will be posted afterwards at <https://saintbarnabas-ag.org/> The service bulletin is also available for download on that same St. Barnabas website.

Church of the Incarnation, Dallas

<https://incarnation.org/digital-worship/>

All Saints Church, Pasadena

<https://allsaints-pas.org/live-stream/>

Trinity, Wall Street

<https://www.trinitywallstreet.org/blogs/watching-trinity-live-streamed-worship-services>

The National Cathedral

<https://cathedral.org/online/>