

The Sunday Missive August 9, 2020



redwood path, santa cruz mountains - photo by dorothy tomilson

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

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Greetings, one and all, and welcome back to St. Peter's by the Sea on this Sunday morning, the ninth day of August; the tenth Sunday after Pentecost in this extraordinarily challenging year of our Lord, 2020. The above link should take you to our facebook page, where you can join Nancy Castle, Marti Lindholm, Diane and Roger Ludin, and The Rev. Sid Symington **any time after 11 A.M.** for a service of word, prayer, song and love as presented in this *Missive*. If you have any prayer requests, and difficulties in tuning in to facebook, or other questions, concerns or suggestions, please contact Padre Sid via telephone (203) 209-2339 or email: sssymington@gmail.com. **You do not need a facebook account to join us!** And so we begin...

Blessed by God, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier. *And blessed be God's Kingdom, now and forever.* Let us pray:

Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot thrive without your grace, may be enabled to live according to your good will; through Jesus, who is Christ our Lord, and who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit: one God, forever and ever. *Amen.*

O God, enlighten our minds with truth, inflame our hearts with love, inspire our will with courage, enrich our lives with service, pardon what we have been, sanctify what we are, order what we shall be. For yours shall be the glory and ours the salvation to ages of ages. *Amen*

Hymn 637 How Firm a Foundation, Ye Saints of the Lord

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in his excellent word!
What more can he say than to you he hath said, to you that for refuge to Jesus have fled?

When through the deep waters I call thee to go, the rivers of woe shall not thee overflow
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless, and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie-my grace all sufficient shall be thy supply
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose, I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
that soul, though all hell shall endeavor to shake, I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xtFX8Hr5gc>

or..

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R805RyGRmx8>

Wow!

A Reading from the Book of Genesis, Chapter 37

Jacob, who was called Israel, settled in the land of Canaan. His youngest son Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all of them, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

Once Joseph had a dream, and said to them, "Listen to this dream that I dreamed. There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf." His brothers said to him, "So you are indeed to reign and have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more. He related another of his dreams, saying, "I dreamed the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were all bowing down to me." But his father

rebuked him, and said, "What kind of dream is this? Shall we indeed come, your mother and your brothers and I, and bow before you?" So his brothers were jealous, but his father kept all these matters in mind.

Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flocks near Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock; and bring word back to me." So he came to Shechem, and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" "I am seeking my brothers," The man said, "I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. They saw him from a distance, and said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." But when Reuben heard it, he argued against them, saying, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him" —that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father.

So his brothers stripped Joseph of his robe with the long sleeves; and threw him into an empty pit. When they had sat down to eat, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way down to Egypt. Judah said to his brothers, "What does it profit us if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and tell our father we found him killed by wild beasts." And his brothers agreed. They drew Joseph up out of the pit, and for twenty pieces of silver, sold him to the Ishmaelites, who bound Joseph and took him to sell in Egypt. Here ends the reading.

Psalm 85

Restore us again, O God of **salvation*** Put away your righteous indignation.

Will you be angry with us **forever**?* Will your anger last to all **generations**?

Show us your steadfast love, O **Lord*** And grant us your **salvation**.

Let me hear what the Lord will **speak*** For God will speak peace to the **faithful**.

Surely there is salvation for those who **fear him*** That his glory may dwell in our **land**.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will **meet*** Righteousness and peace will kiss one **another**.

Faithfulness will spring up from the **ground*** And righteousness will look down from the **sky**.

The Lord will send what is **good*** And all the people will be **healed**.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9E2_4RDIYQc

A Reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 10

Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them." But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart." If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame."

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" Here ends the reading.

Hymn 707 Take My Life and Let It Be

Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of thy love;
take my heart, it is thine own; it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King;
Take my intellect, and use every power as thou shalt choose.
Take my will and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine.
Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDegoFFX7H4>

or...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAYWpFaHEV8>

A Reading from the Gospel According to Matthew, Chapter 14

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side. He dismissed the crowds, and went up on the mountain by himself to pray. By evening the boat was far from the land, and battered by the waves, for the wind was against them. Early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking upon the water, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But Jesus spoke to them saying, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." Here ends the reading.

Today's readings draw our attention to the phenomenon of faith. Since human beings have existed, among our defining features has been an appetite and a longing for connection with something greater than ourselves. All of humanity is engaged in the same quest: belief in something that will never fail us. We want to know that in the dark of despair, someone will be right there; someone who is with us always.

In this place, we teach about the Christian way: Christ who lived and died and rose again, as the foundation and source of energy of the faith we would develop. When we take all our burdens to Jesus, we are on the universal human quest for blessed assurance; we are trying to establish our place at 'the feet of the One,' to see the 'Great and Terrible,' 'Immortal, invisible God only wise.' We want to feel connected. The word 'religion' itself simply derives from Latin 'to bind again.' Think of ligaments binding the body together, or the ligatures surgeons employ. 'Bind us again, O God to our origins, to our true selves, to permanence.'

Jesus is said to have proven his supernatural powers by, among other things, walking on the surface of the Sea of Galilee. Today he gets Peter to do it too, purely as a demonstration of the vital nature of faith. The point is clear: Without faith, we will drown – either literally, like a man overboard, or figuratively; we will drown in sorrow; we will drown in riches; we will drown in worry and intrigue and the engulfing ocean of the self. With faith however, anything is possible: moving mountains, de-stinging death, even walking on water.

We know that there are many who look for permanence through their own force of will; by the manipulation of power and wealth, domination of others and deployment of intellect and personal or organizational strength. It's a funny word, success, especially here in our nation. We use it to indicate worldly wealth and tangible accomplishment: A successful businessperson is one who turns a

profit, a successful athlete is one who wins, a successful film or book or piece of music is so because it makes money: it's a hit. To say someone is a great success has very clear connotations for us.

Paul is today challenging this mindset of ours through the Letter to the Romans that barrels through two thousand years of human history to get in our business. We've heard it said that "The business of America is business." We're hearing it a lot today. How dare you tell us we can't do business, or have parties? Of course, nobody is directly quoting Calvin Coolidge; whose declaration was the precursor to the Great Depression. But the tenor of our times sings loudly of salvation through getting back to business and building wealth as the primary aim of a strong and successful people. Deft, bold, tenacious manipulation of the laws of humankind – regardless of who gets hurt -- will lead to the only kind of gratification that really matters: success in the worldly realm. Those who die with the most toys, win.

In preaching the Gospel of Jesus, Paul flips the 'most toys' notion on its head. "The person who does those things will live by them." 'Live by the sword; die by the sword,' live by the ledger, die clutching it in our hands; live by the waving of nuclear warheads, die... guess how. But one who believes in the heart is justified, and one confesses with the mouth is saved. The scripture says, "No one who believes will be put to shame." Any attempt to set aside worldly concerns and bind ourselves again to the greater cosmic good will bear fruit, and in abundance.

"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" Just imagine a day when the meaning of success has been transformed into a spiritual one, beyond ordinary metrics. How would it be if success meant the development of faith that works under all conditions. Imagine a successful nation as one who takes good care of the least fortunate, the most challenged, the weakest links and latest arrivals. A successful nation would be one who never wins a war – or loses one – because its leaders leave no stone unturned in preserving peace.

These and only these are the success stories that can resound through eternity, declares Paul. Such a success is Jesus. As with all the significant truths about our human condition, there is a paradoxical element to faith. It is akin to the truth of love: the only way to keep it is to give it away. Which is to say that, although we are justified by our faith (not by our adherence to the law), the only way to actively pursue faith is by ever-deeper working of the law: Moses' Ten Commandments as summarized by Jesus: love God by loving neighbour -- as if our life depended on it. That is our recipe for true success.

We need hardly look further than the story of Joseph to see how this works. Under attack throughout his life by a cast of characters – including himself -- who embody the seven deadly sins: Pride, Anger, Greed, Gluttony, Lust, Envy and Sloth, Joseph nevertheless keeps his eyes on the prize of greater good and his

heart on the deeper success. As we will see in coming weeks, in so doing, he ends up saving his people from certain destruction, and without violence.

If we would be successful, we must have faith. We must step out of the boat and let ourselves be upheld. There is too much violence in the world; too many whose lives consist of cycling through the list of vices for us to simply observe and avoid them. We who have the great gift of heart-knowledge that all will be well if we pursue wellness, have the obligation to do so. Faith will come in abundance, as the reward for our pursuits, that parabolic faith that demands continued pursuit: you can't keep it unless you give it away. Merely setting our minds, our imagination and our hands on such good works and truth-telling makes us successful people, but we must do it. In Matthew's gospel, we hear from the mouth of Jesus, "Let your light so shine, that all may see your good works, and give the glory to God." Or as Kamau Bell has put it, "A lot of us are like a bunch of Clark Kents out there, pretending not to be Superman. It's time for us to cape up, get out there and save the world."

Hymn L141 Shall We Gather at the River

Shall we gather at the river, where bright angel feet have trod;
With its crystal tide forever flowing by the throne of God?

Refrain:

Yes, we'll gather at the river, the beautiful, the beautiful river;
Gather with the saints at the river that flows by the throne of God.

Ere we reach the shining river, lay we ev'ry burden down;
Grace our spirits will deliver, and provide a robe and crown. [Refrain]

Soon we'll reach the shining river; soon our pilgrimage will cease,
Soon our happy hearts will quiver with the melody of peace. [Refrain]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmQJpAETX4g>

or...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pn_BB9e2dg

Prayer

You Still Dream – by Nikki Grimes – “Here, poem meets prayer...”

Gracious and Holy One, we are exceedingly comfortable
With posturing and self defense that masquerade as apology.
But what’s needed in this moment is unmixed confession
Of our nation’s sin, deep and indefensible.
“Now I lay me down to sleep” must make way for
Something more muscular: sack cloth and ashes,
Prayer and fasting, naked prostration.
Daniel understood radical repentance begins
With this unvarnished profession: You are righteous, and we are not.
Please heal our nation. Cleanse our stubborn hearts.
Show each of us what part to play. Broken as Judah and Jerusalem,
We cry and come bending our will toward the good you dream for us still,
No matter our sin, no matter what skin we’re in.

In the words of the prophet Isaiah, “Fear not, for God has redeemed you, and called you by name. When you pass through the waters, God will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. + For the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior will always be with you, even unto the end of the age. **Amen.**



big game feeding in san luis obispo – photo by bob swanson