

Sunday Missive – August 16, 2020



sibling revelry

The Eleventh 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 sixteenth day of August; the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost in this watershed year of our Lord, 2020. The above link should take you to our facebook page, where you can join Nancy Castle, Marti Lindholm, Jeff Wheelwright, 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!**

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

Almighty God, you have given yourself to be for us an answer to all sin, and the example of a perfect life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of your redemption, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of the most holy life of Jesus, who was and is and will always be the living Christ, and; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God. *Amen.*

Almighty God, from whose love neither death nor life can separate us, with the whole company of the redeemed in heaven and on earth, we praise and magnify your glorious name. We thank you, O Lord our God, that the life we now live in Christ is part of the life eternal. And the fellowship we have in Christ unites us with the whole of Creation. *Amen*

Hymn 427 – When Morning Gilds the Skies

When morning gilds the skies, my heart, awaking, cries, “May Jesus Christ be praised!”
When evening shadows fall, thus rings my curfew call, “May Jesus Christ be praised!”

When mirth for music longs, this is my song of songs, “May Jesus Christ be praised!”
God's holy house of prayer hath none that can compare with: “Jesus Christ be praised!”

No lovelier antiphon in all high heaven is known than, “Jesus Christ be praised!”
There to the eternal Word, the eternal psalm is heard: “May Jesus Christ be praised!”

Ye nations of mankind, in this your concord find: “May Jesus Christ be praised!”
Let all the earth around ring joyous with the sound: “May Jesus Christ be praised!”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owcu9p89XfY>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLpftE_Ly6o

A Reading from the Book of Genesis – Chapter 45

“Then Joseph made himself known to his brothers. He said, ‘I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?’ But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. Then Joseph said, ‘Do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. The famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve you as a remnant on earth. So it was not you who sent me here, but God.

You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.’ And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.” Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him. And when the report was heard in Pharaoh’s house, Pharaoh and all of his household were pleased.

So the brothers went up out of Egypt and came back to their father Jacob – who was called Israel -- in the land of Canaan. And they told him, “Joseph is alive! Not only alive, but under Pharaoh he is ruler over all of Egypt.” Jacob was stunned, and could not believe them. But they told him all that Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father revived. “Enough!” he said, “I must go and see him before I die.” Here ends the reading.

Psalm 67

May God be gracious to us and **bless us*** May the face of God shine **upon us**.

That your ways may be known upon **earth*** Your saving power among all **nations**.

Let the peoples praise you, O **God*** Let all the peoples **praise you**.

Let the nations be glad and sing for **joy*** For you judge the peoples with **equity**.

Let the peoples praise you, O **God*** Let all the peoples **praise you**.

The earth has yielded its **increase*** God, our God, has **blessed us**.

May God's blessings rain upon us* May all the peoples revere the **Lord**.

Let the peoples praise you, O **God*** Let all the peoples **praise you**.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0R4Q4PTHi3Q>

A Reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 11

“I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin, Joseph's brother. God has not rejected his people, and has promised that a remnant will always remain. So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

For if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not lord it over the broken branches. Remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. So, do not become proud, but stand in awe. All those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in. For if you Gentiles have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will natural branches be grafted back into their own trees.

And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, ‘Out of Zion will come the Deliverer, who will banish ungodliness from the people. And this is my covenant with them.’ As regards the gospel they may still be enemies of God in your eyes, but they are beloved; for the sake of their ancestors, and for the sake of their children. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable and universal. Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy, so they have been disobedient in order that they may now receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.” Here ends the reading.

Hymn 558 – Faith of Our Ancestors! Living Still

Faith of our fathers living still, in spite of dungeon, fire, and sword:
O how our hearts beat high with joy, whene'er we hear that glorious word:

Faith of our fathers, holy faith! We will be true to thee till death.

Faith of our mothers, faith and prayer shall win all nations unto thee.
And through the truth that comes from God, humankind shall indeed be free.

Faith of our mothers, holy faith! We will be true to thee till death.

Faith of our ancestors, we will love both friend and foe in all our strife:
And preach thee, too, as love knows how, by kindly deeds and virtuous life.

Faith of our ancestors, holy faith! We will be true to thee till death.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rD5MEh_4pY

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vJbTq_a0q0

A Reading from the Gospel According to Matthew – Chapter Fifteen

“Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, ‘Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person’s soul, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.’ The disciples said to him, ‘You know the Pharisees take offense when they hear what you have to say?’ He answered, ‘Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit.’ But Peter said to him, ‘Rabbi, explain this parable to us.’ Then Jesus said, ‘Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions of every kind. These are what defile a person.’

The legend of Joseph being sold by his brothers into slavery, then forgiving them and saving them from starvation, gives us an explanation for the Hebrews’ presence in Egypt. Later, in the Book of Exodus, of course, we will see the people flee that place under the leadership of Moses. But if you weren’t enslaved in the first place, you wouldn’t have to escape. (Notice Paul’s admonition to the Romans: “God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that God may be merciful to all.”) The histories in the Hebrew Bible are complex indeed, not to say convoluted, but this one clearly serves to place the Jews in a bondage which can only be escaped with God’s assistance.

The most challenging and lingering difficulty of our attempts to understand, or at least reconcile ourselves with our bittersweet experience as human beings has been to acknowledge our ongoing subjection to evil without its becoming complete: without our giving up on goodness. Today's newspapers berycry this exact problem: The hard truth is that there is no sure defense against the horrible acts of people filled with resentment and fired up by lethal propaganda at home and abroad, but we must continue to strive against them. But why, oh why, we want to know, would a benevolent Creator -- who might prevent bad things from happening -- not just do so? Today's story includes Joseph telling his brothers, whom he is about to rescue from starvation along with their families, "God sent me here to preserve life." In other words, God made them sell him into slavery in Egypt, just so he could be there to save them at this moment. Why didn't God just fix things without letting anybody suffer?

Moreover, Joseph goes on to say that his family, the sons of his father Jacob, Joseph's eleven brothers, the sons of the man now named Israel along with their wives and children will be perhaps the only ones left of the people called Israel to survive the lengthy famine: "God sent me before you so that I might preserve you for a remnant here on Earth, to keep you alive: the survivors."

In an older legend, Noah's family formed the nexus of all humanity after the great flood re-booted the entirety of Creation. This later story of the 12 sons of Israel developed when it was no longer possible for the Hebrew people to kid themselves that they were the only people on Earth. So instead, the plot revolves around the rebooting of a specific culture. Although one legend has it that all humanity stemmed from Eve and Adam, and another says we started over with the sons of Noah, and yet another tells us we're descended from either Hagar or Sarah and Abraham, the singularity of Israel got its start with Jacob and Co., by way of Joseph's being sold down the river by his brothers and then later preserving them.

From that point on, Israel is a true cabal, a people whose origins are unique, mysterious and mystical. Everything that takes place from this point forward in biblical history stems from this moment when, for reasons that seem unfathomable, God propels these 12 brothers through the worst that life can inflict: betrayal, enslavement, the agony of human evil. And they become the twelve tribes of Israel. Surely this is not because they deserve pain, nor are they inherently evil, any more than demagogues or terrorists or white supremacists are born evil. Surely God's whole revelation is meant to convince us that, although evil and suffering have always existed, they will never have the last word. Pain, betrayal and enslavement are a matter of fact, not of deserving, and nobody is born evil. We learn hate from others who have gone before and failed to escape its horrible grip. The history of the Hebrew people is one long effort by God to convince them that nobody deserves these failures, and everybody can surmount them, with God's help. But gee, are we slow learners.

Of course, human life entails suffering. Without ready relief we all tend towards anger and violence in our reaction to pain and indignity. Beginning with the outrage of expulsion from the womb, followed by the wrenching agonies of adolescence (expulsion from childhood) through fights, war, childbearing, poverty, crime, and disasters both natural and un-, to the heartbreak of loss, disease and death, we hurt a lot. It is the nature of our earthly existence to undergo physical suffering. Variables like brain chemistry, political environment, education and parental nurture contribute to varying degrees of emotional and physical discomfort or disaster, but we all have hurt.

But because pain comes willy-nilly to all of us, we cannot conclude that anyone deserves it. What Joseph embodies is the way God – that is, the way life can engender the rebirth and reconciliation of nations and individuals, despite their pain, despite the disasters of nature and the horrors of evil people. That engendering is the remnant of life to which these stories refer; that is the surpassing of death that Jesus demonstrated and continues to embody; that is the Glory of God we gather to worship – it can happen to anybody.

That some will hurt far more than others, and obviously through no fault of their own, is clear proof that the degree of human pain is not what God makes decisions about. God doesn't decide which kid will drive into a bridge abutment, any more than who will win the lottery. When we consider that God's most complex creation is human consciousness, we can begin to see that her decision about human pain has been made once and for all. If nobody deserves more or less pain than anybody else, then nobody deserves any at all; it's just part of life's reality. Our job is to lessen it for one another as best we can, and to teach our children to lessen it for themselves.

What God is so eagerly longing to have us know is that, although we all will experience pain, whether we be racists or peacemakers, decisions about what to do with our pain is ours and ours alone. It is up to us, who call ourselves peacemakers to summon the greater resources available to those who love, thus to live out (and into) the greater truth. We are unable to avoid all pain, but it seems we can bear most anything if only we turn from despair and hatred to hope and charity.

When Joseph decides to forgive his brothers for what they have done to him, he realizes that he is now doing the will of God. That's why he says God sent him there. That's why he declares his family to be the remnant of the old people who become the nexus of the new: because they have taken undeserved pain and turned it into peace. Does this mean no more pain for the Israelites? Heck no. They've got 400 years of slavery ahead of them once a new Pharaoh comes in who couldn't give a rat's patoot for mystical, cabbalistic, Yahweh-following forgiveness foolishness. No, they've got plenty of pain ahead of them, as do we all. But for Jacob's offspring -- that is for Israel -- as indeed for each of us, relief comes when we embrace our identification with those who whisper of the utter

undeservedness of suffering, who sing of the longing of God to hold our hearts in hope. Peace comes when we indeed shout these songs from the highest hills, and reach out our hands in love to all the suffering people our voices can reach.

Prayers

Most gracious Creator, you know us through and through, and you are with us in every part of our lives: in sadness, anger and fear, and in gratefulness and joy. As Jesus the Christ, on the day of your resurrection you came to your frightened disciples and breathed the Holy Spirit into them. Breathe into us, 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 we breathe in, may we breathe in your courage and strength. As we breathe out, may we breathe out your loving-kindness and compassion. Help us to remember that you are with us always and that every day you invite us to bear witness to your healing love. Thank you for the people you have given us to love and for the tasks you have given us to do here in our Deanery of San Luis Obispo. Give us the guts, audacity, imagination and resolve to stand up in the midst of a great catastrophe and to do what is ours to do.

Speak in our hearts and grant us the peace that passes understanding, so that we may know in our deepest selves that whether we live or die, we are yours, and you will never leave us.

LEVAS Hymn 64 - I Love to Tell the Story

I love to tell the story of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and his glory; of Jesus and his love.
I love to tell the story because I know 'tis true;
It satisfies my longings as nothing else would do.

I love to tell the story; 'twill be my theme in glory.
To tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love.

I love to tell the story, for those who know it best
Seem hungering and thirsting to hear it, like the rest.
And when, in scenes of glory, I sing the new, new song,
'Twill be the old, old story that I have loved so long.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrCpKa_xOCE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CuScM_P0VUY

As we take our own walks through grief these days, whether for loved ones lost or lives forever changed, it is interesting and also wonderful to realize that the same path we

walk is earth to one person and heaven to another? And it is startling to notice that it is we who change it, from earth into heaven, or the contrary. This better change comes not by study, nor anything else, but only by adopting a gospel point of view.

And now, may God bless you and keep you; may God's face shine upon you; may God's countenance be lifted up unto you and grant you peace.

May your days and your ways be filled with love and new awareness of the unity of Creation. May your nights forever hold the promise of a peaceful, purposeful dawn.



an affectionate hereford mother... with a monumental waistline!