

The Sunday Missive -- April 3, 2022

The Fifth Sunday in Lent

Hymn 467 Sing my soul his wondrous love

Sing, my soul, his wondrous love, who, from yon bright throne above,
Ever watchful o'er our race, still to us extends his grace.

Heaven and earth by him were made; all is by his scepter swayed;
What are we that he should show so much love to us below?

God, the merciful and good, bought us with the Savior's blood,
And, to make salvation sure, guides us by his Spirit pure.

Sing, my soul, adore his Name! Let his glory be thy theme:
Praise him till he calls thee home; trust his love for all to come.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2mkD7xQNz70>

The Collect of the Day

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people 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.*

Isaiah 43:16-21

Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

Psalm 126

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion* ***Then we were like those who dream.***

Then our mouth was filled with laughter* ***And our tongues with shouts of joy;***

Then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them"* ***The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.***

Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb* ***May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.***

Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing* ***Shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbEXnC8NyX4>

Philippians 3:4-14

I too have reason to be confident in the flesh. If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Hymn 474 When I survey the wondrous cross

When I survey the wondrous cross where the young Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, save in the cross of Christ, my God:
All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to his blood.

Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9eCUqz_x5A

John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

Put Your Hand in the Hand -- Lent 5C

Where are we on the learning curve of faith? As we approach the final days of Lent, with all the somber activities and arresting narratives that go with Holy Week, a good check-in question, benchmark, or barometer of our Lenten experience might be this: Where are we on the learning curve of faith? Because no matter how many metaphors we use the point of this exercise is to do what that poppy gospel song says: "Look at yourself so you

can look at others differently. Put your hand in the hand of the man from Galilee.” That’s what we’re supposed to be doing this time of year, looking at ourselves a bit, so we can look at others differently, i.e. with more compassion. This is not to achieve some kind of perfection, but to learn better who we are, where we are on the curve, and how we are responding to the opportunities and gifts that God is putting before us.

By next Sunday, we will be caught up in the beautiful and, let’s face it distracting dramas of Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter. The time for us to be quietly, personally accountable is just about over for this go-round, and we can soon breathe more easily if we want to, but today is the Sunday when we have a chance to have our own mini-Passion -- our own private Gethsemane if you will – a day when there is nothing else going on, narratively speaking, except our own relationship to the deity.

So what is God offering us today in terms of direction and encouragement along our road to happy destiny? Isaiah, for starters, presents a vision of how God functions for us – making the road passable, even though it may go through the very sea; even assuring us there will be plenty refreshment along the way. The struggles we have for fresh water in this part of the country are significant, but small compared with those of the Israelites, whose hope for relief lay in following God alone. They did not have the means, as do we, for discovering, purifying and conserving the water they so desperately needed; they had to rely on providence.

Nevertheless, this predicament in which the Israelites found themselves is a familiar one, not because we all know the experience of exile – although many of us do. Instead, it is because we all live with painful memories of what has gone before, and we know the many ways those shadows of loss, regret and sadness can stay with us and obscure our sight, keeping us from perceiving anything beyond their shade. Unexpected mortality, friendships and loves that end, poor choices, our own cruelty and negligence and that of other people; these all stay around in our consciousness and make it harder to envision a better future, much less take steps to achieve it . And they bring up for us big questions about God; they make us wonder whether the assurances we have from Christ Jesus -- God’s forgiveness and reconciliation leading to our rebirth -- are reliable.

In the face of these powerful forces, the words of Isaiah are a shaft of sunlight that dispels the night and its terrors. Isaiah reminds us, no less than the Israelites, that the God who held back the waters so the Hebrew people could escape their enslavement way down in Egypt land will also

come to our aid when we attempt to become free to make the most of our lives.

So, if we cannot be held responsible for the whole picture, then what? The professors would say, “response-ability,” the ability to respond to God. We are not personally accountable for how the World will ultimately turn out; that is God’s bailiwick. But we are required to examine and develop and enjoy our relationship with The Good. We are accountable for our part in the drama of life; that is our business. The psalmist gives us the beautiful analogy of how this relationship must affect us: As in a dream, our mouths are filled with laughter, and our tongues with joy. We rejoice and are like streams once dry that have filled up with water. We start out crying but end up shouting for joy. All of these were in the psalm we just read together. What do they remind us of? Love songs, nothing but love songs. That is our responsibility: to pursue a relationship of loving response to God; the recompense for which is a life free – completely free – of condemnation for all our failures to be perfect. God was trying to offer us this way back in the time of Isaiah. God continues to offer us this same bargain – and I mean it’s a bargain – today, in the divine humanity of the Body of Christ.

What was Jesus doing on the cross? Why did he die? We use the word sacrifice, but we tend to use it quite differently than the people who first wrote down these stories. We emphasize the death of something, the forfeiture of life: destruction as the price of an escape from disaster. It’s like a devil’s bargain: Give us your friend Jesus and we won’t condemn you all. What kind of god would make such a demand? The ancients understood that we all die. Everything physically alive dies. If Jesus was human, that is the reason Jesus died, period. When the ancients performed a sacrifice, it was a way of releasing life, so that many might benefit. When Jesus says “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit,” what he is talking about is not a price for destruction, but a means to life. The poor are always with us, and we will never not have to care for them. But unless we contemplate and nurture and celebrate – wholeheartedly and extravagantly – our relationship with God, the way Mary does by anointing Jesus, we won’t be able to care for ourselves, let alone the poor.

So the question of why Jesus dies is moot. He dies because he is human – that’s part of the deal. What we’re talking about is how Jesus dies. How does his death reflect his identity? Where is Jesus the human on the faith learning curve? What clues are we being given about how we should die?

And about how we should live? These are some of the questions that we can spend this last Sunday of Lent examining if we will: What do we know that's worth dying for? As always we hold in our hearts the loved ones and friends and neighbors who have gone off to war or stayed home in service and died or been hurt in the line of duty. Even as we love and honor their memory, none of us wants, or wants our children to join them. So for most of us, the job is to demonstrate that for which we would die by refining that for which we live. We prove what we would die for by demonstrating what we live for. Our relationship to God, the measure of our faith identity, our place on the faith curve, if you will, is determined by the choices we make along the road. We have been given, written on our hearts, the causes, the means, the methods of living for those things for which we would die if we had to. And though we would rather not beg the question, we are willing to do that if we have to. Our hope lies in the promise of God to stay with us, no matter how well we succeed or how far short we fall.

A dear friend once had a dog named Ozzie. One day she brought home a toy for Ozzie, a stuffed camel of some kind. Ozzie took to that camel immediately. When the time came for dinner, Ozzie came downstairs and began eating in his kitchen corner, but suddenly stopped. He left the room. He went upstairs. A few minutes later, Ozzie came back with Mr. Camel in his mouth, put him down by the dog bowl, and then finished his dinner. Ozzie just wanted his new friend with him all the time. That dog knew what we all too frequently forget: God longs to stay with us and fulfill us, even – or especially -- when our choices are questionable – sketchy – and our performances lacklustre or just plain poor. All we really have to do for sure is keep the knowledge of our never-failing, ever new companion close at hand. Know this: I am with you always, even unto the end of the age. When Jesus departed from his friends, that's when they had to begin the kind of lives we have, lives of faith. Yes, God is with us, even to the ends of our ages, keeping us constant company as we make our way through the desert, and slaking our thirst, but not so that we won't have to think about it. On the contrary, so that we can think about it, for we must.

Hymn 686 Come, thou fount of every blessing

Come, thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace!
Streams of mercy never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet, sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount! O fix me on it, mount of God's unchanging love.

Here I find my greatest treasure; hither by thy help, I've come;
And I hope, by thy good pleasure, safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger, interposed his precious blood.

Oh, to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee;
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, oh, take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Z3pjXmNq2g>

The Pulley (1633)

by George Herbert

When God at first made man,
Having a glass of blessings standing by;
Let us (said he) pour on him all we can;
Let the world's riches, which dispersed lie,
Contract into a span.

So strength first made a way;
Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour, pleasure:
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that alone of all his treasure
Rest in the bottom lay.

For if I should (said he)
Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
He would adore my gifts instead of me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;
So both should losers be.

Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness:
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to my breast

submitted by jeff wheelwright

Holy Week Schedule

Saturday, April 9 – **Vespers 5pm**

Sunday, April 10 – Palm Sunday – **Holy Eucharist 10am**

Thursday, April 14 – Maundy Thursday – **Film *Mission:Joy***

A visit with Archbishop Desmond Tutu and
His Holiness The Dalai Lama **5pm**

Followed by **Maundy Thursday service
with washing of feet – 6:30pm**

Followed by all-night **Vigil** in our sanctuary – **7:30pm – 6:30am**
Sign up for a one- or two- hour time slot in the Narthex

Friday, April 15 – **Good Friday Service and
Stations of the Cross 12 Noon**

Saturday, April 16 – **Vespers 5pm**

Sunday, April 17 – **Easter Sunday Festival Eucharist 10am**