

The Sunday Missive – August 29, 2021
The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 372 Praise to the living God! Vv. 1, 3 & 4

Praise to the living God! All praised be his Name
Who was, and is, and is to be, for aye the same.
The one eternal God ere aught that now appears:
The first, the last, beyond all thought his timeless years!

His Spirit floweth free, high surging where it will:
In prophet's word he spake of old: he speaketh still.
Established is his law, and changeless it shall stand,
Deep writ upon the human heart, on sea, on land.

Eternal life hath he implanted in the soul;
His love shall be our strength and stay while ages roll.
Praise to the living God! All praised be his Name
Who was, and is, and is to be, for aye the same.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IjvNFygfxq4> or
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qhUeJU55VQ>

The Collect of the Day

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things:
Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion;
nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good
works; 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 Book of Deuteronomy – Chapter 4

So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am
teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the
land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. You must

neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God with which I am charging you. You have seen for yourselves what the Lord did with regard to the Baal of Peor—how the Lord your God destroyed from among you everyone who followed the Baal of Peor, while those of you who held fast to the Lord your God are all alive today. See, just as the Lord my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!” For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is whenever we call to him? And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today? But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children’s children.

Psalm 45

My heart overflows with a goodly theme* My tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe.

Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever* Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity;

You love righteousness and hate wickedness* From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad;

The people will seek your favor with gifts* The riches of the people will be yours.

With joy and gladness they enter the palace of the king* They will gather in the places of celebration.

Your name will be celebrated in all generations* And the peoples will praise you forever and ever.

A Reading from the Letter of James – Chapter 1

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing. If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Hymn 660 O Master, let me walk with thee

O Master, let me walk with thee in lowly paths of service free;
Tell me thy secret; help me bear the strain of toil, the fret of care.

Help me the slow of heart to move by some clear, winning word of love;
Teach me the wayward feet to stay, and guide them in the homeward way.

Teach me thy patience; still with thee in closer, dearer company,
In work that keeps faith sweet and strong,
In trust that triumphs over wrong,

In hope that sends a shining ray far down the future's broadening way,
In peace that only thou canst give, with thee, O Master, let me live.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUkaK6ceJmY&t=53s>

The Holy Gospel According to Mark – Chapter 4

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” He said to them, “Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,

This people honors me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me;
in vain do they worship me,
teaching human precepts as doctrines.
You abandon the commandment of God
And hold to human tradition.”

Then he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition! For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.’ But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, ‘Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban’ (that is, an offering to God)— then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many things like this.”

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.”

When he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. He said to them, “Then do you also fail to

understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, "It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Seeing Ourselves – Pent+14B

The Russian composer Igor Stravinsky once said something about creativity that can help us all. In his *Poetics of Music* he wrote: "My freedom will be so much the greater and more meaningful the more narrowly I limit my field of action and the more I surround myself with obstacles." In other words, having rules can give us more freedom.

The Letter of James makes the bold assertion "Follow this rule: the law of liberty. Help people in need, speak and act lovingly and wisely, listen more than you speak, clean the greed and fear from your hearts and minds, and don't let anger control your actions." The Letter suggests doing all this by "welcoming with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls."

James is encouraging us to lead lives of godly activity, through habitual reliance on godly influence. Imagine an archer, with a bow and quiver of arrows. Each day, she goes forth looking for targets: for sport or practice, for food to feed the family, or for enemies who threaten the people. Whenever the archer encounters one of these three, feelings arise: the desire for fun, the hope of securing sustenance or the determination to protect one's home. But before anything can be accomplished, the archer must reach back into her quiver, pull out a suitable arrow, notch and draw it according to her ability and training. Only then, with calm breath and open eyes can her best shot be taken.

In our gospel story Jesus makes it clear that sin is not necessarily defined as breaking the rules, but rather as anything we do when we let our own pride and greed direct our actions, whether or not any rules were broken. The Pharisees that started the discussion with

Jesus have an undeserved bad reputation. They were good, sincere people who were trying to do the right thing. Jesus just showed them that doing the right thing involved more than following the rules. He did not say the rules were bad, only that they were part of the picture, but not the whole picture

Every one of us feels these feelings: desire, industry and destruction, regularly – hopefully not too much of the latter. We all want happiness and entertainment; we all want to provide for ourselves and those we love; we all have situations we would change, forces we would arrest in ourselves and the world. Our sets of rules comprise the parameters we set; what's ok to shoot at. The question is, do we select our arrows from the supply God provides, the kind that fly straight and true on wings of compassion, hope and equanimity? Or do we meet each situation with a desperate scrabble for whatever arrow is nearest to hand, battered, warped, flimsy and obsolete though they may be, and just blast away? All too often, without knowing we fire off volleys that boomerang back to lodge themselves in our own hides where and when we can least expect or tolerate them; in places where the sun shineth not.

Here, from the Wolof of Senegambia. *Yalla du rayal nit-i-bañ-am* which means: "God does not always destroy those whom one hates." In other words, my anger does not produce God's righteousness. Wait a second! You mean to say 'feelings don't bestow rights, they occasion responsibilities? That's what Jesus seems to be saying. Yes, our language can be confusing – that word responsibility sneakily implies that we have the ability to respond. But without a clear look in the mirror of God's precepts -- an acknowledgement of what we see there and how we are inclined to respond to those precepts – we have no ability; we are bound to falter; the image we see is warped. And unless this acknowledgement is followed by a sustained awareness of those inclinations, when we falter, we veer, we rationalize; we justify listless, disappointing, even downright disagreeable behavior. As our Communion prayer confesses, 'we wander far away.'

Perhaps we come away from our godly mirrors with some clarity of vision and conviction of purpose but, as Mark says, "We hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word that is sown in us." In

other words, we have feelings, and they obscure our vision. *Ojos que no ven: Corazon que no siente.* With eyes that do not see, comes a heart that does not feel. We may convince ourselves that our so-called 'gut reactions' are good indicators of what we ought to be doing, but without an open channel to the greater good of God, we are gambling with our very lives and, all too often with the well-being of those around us too. Anger here is getting a bit of a bad rap. Self-righteous anger is a luxury we cannot afford, it's true, but any emotion – even so-called good ones -- can wreak havoc if unreflected-upon, unfiltered, unchecked by prayerful consideration before propelling action.

The truth of this has not been shaken through the millennia. Time and again God has called us through them. The words of the Book of Deuteronomy, probably set down in the 6th century BCE, are attributed to Moses himself: "So now, Israel, just as God has instructed me, I teach you statutes. Observe them diligently to show your wisdom, so everyone will say, 'What a discerning people!' But take care and watch yourselves closely; don't let the things your eyes have seen slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children.

Because we are inclined to point our accusing fingers at all the circumstances, institutions and individuals that make it difficult, if not impossible for us to act self-reflectively – all the things that force us to behave "off-line" where God's Word is concerned, Jesus preempts the discussion: They asked him, "Why don't your people live according to tradition? They're eating with defiled hands!" He said to them: "Nothing has changed since Isaiah. God is still crying out, 'You people honor me with your lips, but your hearts are far from me. You're teaching human precepts as doctrines.' You abandon the commandments of God and hold to human traditions instead." In other words, this part of your religion is worthless.

"There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile." For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within. They are what defile a person."

Of course nowadays our self-reflection also includes thanking God for the gifts of scientific discovery, and also paying attention to what they continue to teach us about God's greater purpose. We know it's also an exceedingly good idea to wash our hands before eating – or doing surgery; cups and bronze kettles too. And if Jesus came today, he'd probably say, "Get vaccinated."

If we are paying attention to the mirror of God's purpose and the multitude of subtle and not-so-subtle veerings away therefrom that fragile, fearful, foolish creatures such as ourselves can undertake and undergo, if we are trying, our goal and our reward is hope. The hope that Jesus promises is the very same that James and the prophets of old have been holding up to us as the most desirable and lasting of treasures, indeed as the meaning of life. It is the hope that, because Creation is good, we might be good too. It is the hope that we are moving in the direction of goodness despite all our fragility, fearfulness and foolery. It is the hope that, little by little -- with all our missteps and false conclusions and reservations – little by little, if we pay attention to the mirror and glorify the one who made it and who graciously inclines it to our faces, we might come to recognize ourselves in its refracted light and be glad of what we find there.

The Prayers of the People

O God of heaven and earth, through Jesus Christ you promise to hear us when we pray to you in faith with thanksgiving, and so we pray for one another, for our families and friends. Thank you for all who care for us. Give us grace to serve Christ by serving our families, our neighbours and our communities; by loving others even as we are loved. (Silence)

We thank you for the unfailing love you hold out to everyone in Jesus Christ. Comfort those in sorrow, need, sickness or any other trouble, especially those we name now, silently or aloud. Sue, Karen, Katharine, the family and friends of Rhett, are there others? (Silence)

Bring healing and peace to all those we hold in our hearts this day. Give them courage and hope in their distress, and bless those who care for them. (Silence)

We remember with gratitude the bounty of your creation in the natural world and the richness of this land. Help us and people everywhere to share with justice and peace the resources of the earth. Give to those in authority among us and to all leaders of the nations more wisdom, integrity, vision and compassion May their purposes and policies be only and always in the holy name of a healthy and equitable world. (Silence)

We remember especially this day the truths of our nation's past. We open our hearts to examine, listen and understand the terrible trauma caused by human slavery and genocide in our past and pledge our strength in seeking to end the ongoing tragedies, injustices and falsehoods that keep our society so painfully and violently divided. (Silence)

We remember with thanksgiving all who have died in Christ, especially all victims of the Covid pandemic, all victims of gunfire in our land, and those we hold in our hearts, especially those we name now, silently or aloud. (Silence) We rejoice at the faithful witness of your saints in every age, praying that we may enter with them into the unending joy of your heavenly kingdom. **Amen.**

Hymn 414 God, my King, thy might confessing -- Vv. 1, 3, 5 & 6

God, my king, thy might confessing, ever will I bless thy name;
Day by day thy throne addressing, still will I thy praise proclaim.

They shall talk of all thy glory, on thy might and greatness dwell,
Speak of thy great acts the story, and thy deeds of wonder tell.

Full of kindness and compassion, slow to anger, vast in love,
God is good to all creation; all his works his goodness prove.

All thy works, O Lord, shall bless thee, thee shall all thy saints adore.
King supreme shall they confess thee, and proclaim thy sovereign pow'r.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWivE0qTuLw>

Hymn 556 Rejoice, ye pure in heart! Vv. 1, 4, 5 & 7

Rejoice, ye pure in heart! Rejoice, give thanks and sing!
Your glorious banner wave on high, the cross of Christ your King.

Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, give thanks, and sing.

Yes, on through life's long path, still chanting as ye go;
From youth to age, by night and day, in gladness and in woe.

Still lift your standard high, still march in firm array,
As warriors through the darkness toil, till dawns the golden day.

Then on, ye pure in heart! Rejoice, give thanks and sing!
Your glorious banner wave on high, the cross of Christ your King.

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

And now may the maker of all that is uphold your life; may Christ ever walk by your side, and may the Spirit give you breath to speak love and strength to act in charity. And thus the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier be with you this day and remain with you always. **Amen.**