

The Sunday Missive – August 30, 2020



The Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Greetings, one and all, and welcome to St. Peter's by the Sea. Marti Lindholm, Nancy Castle, and I are joined this morning by Thelma Knight Huchthausen and Diane and Roger Ludin to bring you this service of prayer, scripture and song with love. If you go to our facebook page, you can watch and participate from home. Just go to: [facebook.com/StPetersMorroBay](https://www.facebook.com/StPetersMorroBay) and scroll down until you see today's Sunday Missive, anytime after 11 A.M. on Sunday, August 30. No facebook account is needed! Please direct any questions or comments to your rector via: (203) 209-2339 or sssymington@gmail.com.

“You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but fellow citizens with the saints and true members of the household of God.”

Grace to you and peace from The Lord our Creator, and The Christ our Redeemer who, through the power of the Holy Spirit live as one God, now and forever. *Amen.*

Dearlly beloved, we have come together in the presence of Almighty God, to lift our praises, to hear God's holy Word, and to ask, for ourselves and on behalf of others, those things that are necessary for our life and our salvation. And so that we may prepare ourselves in heart and mind to worship, let us pause in silence, and with penitent and obedient hearts confess our sins, that we may obtain forgiveness by God's infinite goodness and mercy.

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. *Amen.*

Hymn 372 -- Praise to the Living God

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

Formless, all lovely forms declare his loveliness;
Holy, no holiness of earth can his express.
Lo, he is Lord of all. Creation speaks his praise,
And everywhere above, below, his will obeys.

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.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5DtLXwuDMA>

A Reading from the Book of Exodus -- Chapter 3

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush. Moses looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, he called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." The Lord said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM, and thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.' The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations." This is the Word of the Lord.

Hymn 648 – Go Down, Moses

When Israel was in Egypt's land (let my people go);
Oppressed so hard they could not stand (let my people go).

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land;
Tell old Pharaoh: "Let my people go."

The Lord told Moses what to do: "Let my people go"
To lead the children of Israel through, "Let my people go."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8JNCS27rtQ8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0CRAavN4EI>

A Reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans -- Chapter 12

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

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>

A Reading from the Gospel According to Matthew -- Chapter 16

Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. Peter took him aside and rebuked him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Then Jesus told them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." This is the Gospel of the Lord.

We are deeply blessed to live here in beautiful Morro Bay. There is a great big world out there, full of loving, interesting, diverse personalities; every one with joys and troubles of their own, so the human experience can be fully had and deeply explored anywhere you go. Weddings and funerals happen in Washington, D.C. just like they do in Washington State. Dear friends grow old and frail and pass away in

New York just like they do in Los Osos. But thus far, we have been spared the worst of COVID-19, raging wildfires and horrific storms, not because we deserve a better life, but because we are more fortunate than many. Our only godly response must be gratitude and charity. Meanwhile, each day's news brings word of people around the globe who are in the grip of stunningly tragic events that can make our difficulties seem minute by comparison. The closer they are to us, the more dramatic they seem. 31 people losing their lives in our county can seem more tragic than 3100 in South America only because it is here.

In the face of these truths, if we are paying attention to sublime richness of Creation, our hearts must be moved on two levels simultaneously: to an undeniable empathic connection with all of humanity, and to a more powerful and wondrous devotion to those whose lives are lived in immediate involvement with ours. These twin forces are all the more active in today's environment, where things that happen to far flung others around the planet, especially bad things that happen, are known to us right away and in often excruciating detail. This means that we cannot pretend not to know what's going on. And, on the other hand, with the pace and complexity of our culture, opportunities to express affection for, and take good care of our nearest and dearest seem more important – even urgent – than ever.

If we are paying attention to what life is offering us, we cannot and will not seek to distance ourselves from the struggles and pain of people in places far away; we will offer them whatever help we can through prayer and political involvement and peacegiving charity. And we will cultivate a heightened awareness of the home folks, the people closest to us, listening to their desires and joys and life stories, sharing ours with them, caring for them, and letting them care for us. We will know that we are just another outpost of humanity, no more or less significant than any other. And we will know that this is where we must begin and concentrate our participation and passion for living. They say 'home is where the heart is.' So we might add, 'home is where the work starts.' Whatever else we may do, across town, or on the global stage, our first project is a domestic one. Not only is it good to be home; it's home to be good.

In our story today, we encounter Moses, as he exercises this very truth, taking care of his father-in-law Jethro's flock. It's not by accident that countless comedy routines and colorful stories from Shakespeare to Sheky Green feature interaction – challenging interaction – between young people and their inlaws. In the Yiddish language, which developed as a mechanism for facilitating the difficult lives of Jews in Eastern Europe, lots of words have double, or ironic meanings. There is the descriptive, practical function of words, but also the underlying commentary suggested by their origins and other meanings in the Hebrew, Polish, Russian and German languages which are the roots of Yiddish. So, for instance, the Yiddish word for father-in-law is *Schwere*. The German word *schwere* means 'heavy.' In a tightly-knit culture, the heaviest figure is apt to be your father-in-law. If you can't get along with him, not much else matters. He can make you or break you or run you out of town. In fact, you need his permission to even be who you are, his daughter- or son-in-law. Notice the reborrowing into English: in the movies, made by studios once run to a great extent by first- and second-generation Jewish immigrants, "the heavy" is the tough guy.

So when the story starts out with Moses tending his father-in-law's flock, the stakes are up. Flock of course does not just mean vine creatures capable of providing milk, meat and wool. Flock means those in one's immediate care, your nearest and dearest, the folks at home. So Moses is doing 'Job 1,' and he'd better be good, or else. Under these circumstances, who could blame Moses for doing some praying, some meditating, some earnest contemplation of nature (in his case the mountains and their bushes), maybe a little daydreaming and, hot as it is, even the occasional hallucination. And from these activities, undertaken in the earnest desire to do good for his homefolk, the Schwere's flock, Moses encounters the source of all goodness; he hears the voice of God.

For Moses to come back, however earnestly, with the story that he's seen a burning bush and been talking with the Lord, means he's bound to encounter a certain amount of skepticism. But he knows what he saw, and he knows it happened in the context of his desire to seek the will of God for himself and his homefolk. Like us, he longs to be good to them and good for them. Moses formulates a plan, based on the current political and economic situation of his people. He

formulates this plan in a context of humility, prayerfulness and selflessness. These are the conditions under which he attempts to be a good leader, a good shepherd, a good son-in-law. Having established this context for his leadership, his heart fills with certain knowledge. We read this as a conversation between Moses and God, but, at least as far as the rest of us are concerned, it might be more useful to see it as Moses maintaining an attitude and outlook and spiritual discipline that make him open to the voice of God working and speaking within his own heart.

When those around him see Moses caring for his homefolks with righteousness and courage and compassion, they will surely overlook the nutty parts: burning bushes, etc. That's when we come to the best part of this story. Moses contemplates: "What is this force of nature that has led me to my conviction to do and be good? Who are you, God?" And his heart resounds with the spirit of truth, the spirit that is equally available to each and every one of us. Moses surely and swiftly comes to know all he needs to know about the who, why and wherefore of the existence of God: "I am who I am." Go on and tell the Israelites, 'I am has sent you. The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob is what you have looked for and found.' This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations." In other words, 'I am reality.' That force, that power, that inexplicable yet undeniable existence is all Moses gets by way of answer to his question: "Who are you?" And it is all he needs.

From then on, he knows that, in seeking God's help, he is assured himself of it. Nothing would or could convince him otherwise. Whatever it was he had to do from then on, he would be supported and upheld. From that moment, his intentions would be mediated by his desire to please God. And his greatest desire, to be a good shepherd of the homefolks, would be supported by the greatest power in the universe.

When Jesus describes the suffering he must undergo, and Peter tries to explain it away, Jesus responds with a vehemence born of that same kind of heart-knowledge. He knows his desire to be a good shepherd will be upheld forever, no matter what happens on the physical plane. Anyone who questions this is talking Satan talk; they are a stumbling block. It is not our earthly lives we must preserve in

order to be good shepherds of each other; our earthly lives will come and go. What we must cultivate and preserve and rejoice in is our unearthly desire to serve God's goodness by caring for one another. For what will it profit us if we gain the whole world but forfeit our true lives? Those who want to save their lives will lose them, but those who lose their lives for goodness' sake, for the folks at home and wherever their hearts may roam, will live forever.

Prayers

We give thanks this day for the lives of Jan and Bob Swanson who, within the fortnight, both have birthdays. Together, their ages add up to 160! *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Let us pray for ourselves, our families, our beloved communities, our troubled nation, and the entire family of humankind. For we know that when anyone in our midst is troubled, oppressed, mistreated or disenfranchised, we all suffer the wasting ugliness and horrors of tyranny.

To all that is chaotic in you, let there come silence. Let there be a calming of the clamoring, a stilling of the voices that have laid their claim on you, that have made their home in you, that go with you even to the holy places and will not let you rest; that will not let you hear your life with wholeness or feel the grace which fashioned you.

Let what distracts you cease. Let what divides you cease. Let there come an end to what diminishes and demeans, and let depart all that keeps you in its cage.

Let there be an opening into the quiet that lies beneath the chaos, where you find the peace you did not think possible and see what shimmers within the storm. *Amen.*

Hymn 544 – Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

To him shall endless prayer be made,
And praises throng to crown his head;
His Name like sweet perfume shall rise with every morning sacrifice.

Blessings abound where'er he reigns:
The prisoners leap to lose their chains,
The weary find eternal rest, and all who suffer want are blest.

Let every creature rise and bring peculiar honors to our King;
Angels descend with songs again, and earth repeat the loud amen!

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

Now, may the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord's face shine upon you; may the grace of God be lifted up unto you and grant you peace. *Amen.*



The hospital ship "Chateau Thierry" brought home safely both Ted Wiedenkeller and Tim Symington from the Pacific Theater in 1945.