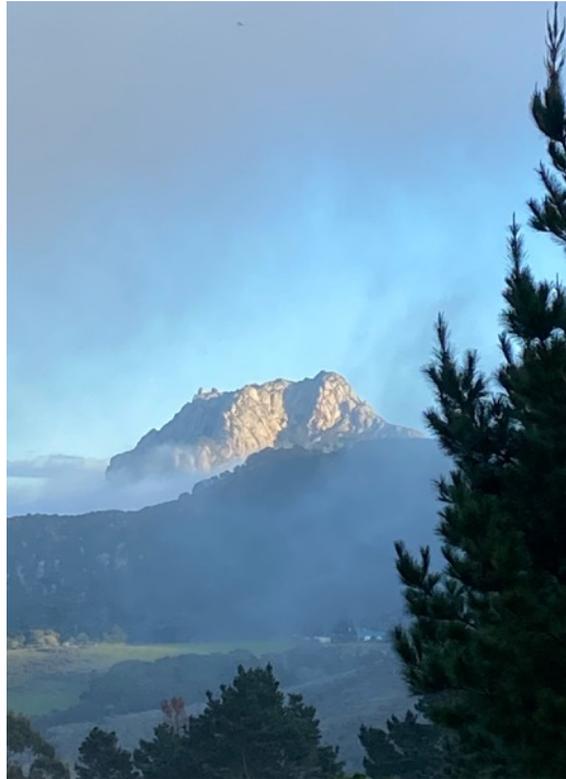


The Sunday Missive – December 6, 2020



The Second Sunday of Advent

Greetings, one and all, and welcome home to St. Peter's by the Sea. Janis Johnson, Nancy Castle, Jeff Wheelwright and I bring you this service of prayer, scripture and song with love. We are especially thankful today for the technology that enables us to put this service on the internet for all to see, since our outdoor services have been suspended due to the latest COVID wave. If you go to our facebook page, you can watch and participate from home: [facebook.com/StPetersMorroBay](https://www.facebook.com/StPetersMorroBay) Scroll down until you see today's Sunday Missive, anytime after 11 A.M. on Sunday, December 6. No facebook account is needed! The links that follow each hymn will take you to youtube videos of a wide range of people around the world singing those hymns – enjoy them! Please direct any questions or comments to your rector, The Rev. Sidney Symington via: (203) 209-2339 or: sssymington@gmail.com. **And so we begin:**

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Creator and from the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

O God of love, you are the true sun of the world, evermore rising and never going down. We pray you to shine in our hearts, that the darkness of sin and the mist of error being driven away, we may this day, and all our life long, walk without stumbling in the way you have prepared for us, which is Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God in glory everlasting. Amen

Gracious God, we praise you for your child Jesus Christ, who is Emmanuel, the hope of the peoples, the wisdom that teaches and guides us, the Savior of every nation. Let your blessing come upon us as we light this wreath. May it be a sign of Christ's promise to bring us salvation.

Your kingdom is at hand, O God of justice and peace; you made John the Baptist its herald to announce the coming of your Christ, who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Give us a spirit of repentance to make us worthy of the kingdom. Let complacency yield to conviction, that in our day justice will flourish and conflict give way to the peace you bestow in Christ.

We ask this through him whose coming is certain, whose day draws near: your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

Hymn 542 – Christ is the World's True Light

Christ is the world's true light, its Captain of salvation,
The day-star clear and bright of every one and nation;
New life, new hope awakes, where'er men own his sway;
Freedom her bondage breaks, and night is turned to day.

One Lord, in one great name unite us all who own thee;
Cast out our pride and shame that hinder to enthrone thee;
The world has waited long, has travailed long in pain;
To heal its ancient wrong, come, Prince of Peace, and reign.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8angDbA1AM8>

A Reading from the prophecy of Isaiah -- Chapter 40

“Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.

“A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’ A voice says, ‘Cry out!’ And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’ All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

“Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, ‘Here is your God!’ See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.” This is the Word of the Lord.

Psalm 85

O Lord, you have favoured your land* You forgave the guilt of your people.

You averted all your rage* And turned back the heat of your anger.

Let us see, O Lord, your mercy* Grant us your salvation.

I will hear what the Lord God speaks* Who speaks of peace for all people.

Merciful love and faithfulness have met* Justice and peace have kissed.

Faithfulness shall spring from the earth* And justice look down from heaven.

Then the Lord will bestow great bounty* And the earth shall yield its increase. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryGpFVezxfU>

A Reading from the Second Letter of Peter – Chapter 3

“But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.

“The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

“Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.” This is the Word of the Lord.

Hymn 59 – Hark! A Thrilling Voice is Sounding

Hark! a thrilling voice is sounding. "Christ is nigh," it seems to say;
"Cast away the works of darkness, O ye children of the day."

Wakened by the solemn warning, from earth's bondage let us rise;
Christ, our sun, all sloth dispelling, shines upon the morning skies.

Lo! the Lamb, so long expected,
Comes with pardon down from heaven;
Let us haste, with tears of sorrow, one and all to be forgiven.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsAbz3Je1gc>

A Reading from the Gospel According to Mark -- Chapter 1

“The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah: ‘Behold I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’

“John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, ‘The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he indeed will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’ Mark 1.9-45

“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’ And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’ As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people.’ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

“They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, ‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.’ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.’ At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

“As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, ‘Everyone is searching for you.’ He answered, ‘Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.’ And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

“A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, ‘If you choose, you can make me clean.’ Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I do choose. Be made clean!’ Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, ‘See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.’ But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but

stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.” This is the Gospel of The Lord.

Sometimes the best thing we can do for ourselves and each other is to listen, just listen to the old stories, and try to let their truth work on us anew. We can take in Mark’s sublime narrative about the beginnings of Jesus’ career as a healer and preacher and just let his story be our story; offer ourselves to the transformation God promises to all who pay attention to the Word.

As for getting onto that straight highway, where the rough places are plain, there is one, seemingly simple criterion for making the good come about in our own lives, for letting the stories work on us: As the Psalmist declares, ‘Surely salvation is at hand for those who fear God, that God’s glory may dwell in our land. Then, and only then can steadfast love and faithfulness meet; then and only then can righteousness and peace kiss one another.’ Fear of God is of course just another word for accountability. Accountability for selfish intentions, for bad decisions, for lies, for crummy behavior, for uninformed voting, for manipulation, for pettiness and hatefulness and abandonment.

We must admit we are a malnourished and wandering society. We have not been listening to the stories of healing lately; instead, frightmongers have held our attention all too completely. We are very much in a wilderness, and in exile from a sense of purpose that includes justice, equality and peace. After what we have allowed to happen, are we able to bring about change? Nöone can be sure. But we have the responsibility to try.

Getting ready for the coming of Christmas is an endeavor to become more accountable. It is the eye-widening discipline of accepting this truth: salvation, that is heaven, means pursuit of love. We prepare, not by parroting the unexamined words of others, and not by adjusting our beliefs and behaviors to keep others from disliking us and not doing business with us. Pursuit of love means taking to heart the truth in the Gospels: the only salvation lies in lives lived outwards, in service and engagement, with people, with polar bears, with the planet.

To prepare, we stop, whatever it is we’re doing. Just stop. And acknowledge that we have not lived up to our best view of ourselves.

And we invite whatever power there is in the Universe to transform us, and to make us part of a new Creation. We must ask for, and rely on God's mercy, and give our full attention to the source of good that lies within all Creation, waiting to be heard.

Prayers

Gracious God, we acknowledge that we have much to be judged on when you come, slums and battlefields and insane asylums. We admit these are the symptoms of our illnesses, and the result of our failures in love. In the evening of life we shall be judged on love, and not one of us is going to come off very well. And were it not for our faith in the loving forgiveness of you, our Lord we could not call on you to come. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. We implore you, that, as in your mercy you have given us to drink-in with delight the words of your knowledge, so of your lovingkindness you will also grant us one day to come to you, the fountain of all wisdom, and to stand forever before your face.

Blessed are you, Lord our God. How sweet are your words to the taste, sweeter than honey to the mouth. How precious are your commands for our life, more than the finest gold in our hands. How marvellous is your will for the world, unending is your love for the nations. Our voices shall sing of your promises and our lips declare your praise forever and ever.

The word of God is living and active. It judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart. All is open and laid bare before the eyes of the one to whom we give account. We confess our sins in penitence and faith.

Your word convicts us: all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Lord, have mercy.

Your word commands us: repent, and believe the Good News. Christ, have mercy.

Your word assures us: Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Lord, have mercy.

May the God of all healing and forgiveness draw us to himself,

and cleanse us from all our sins.

We pray for those who are far off and those who are near, especially those we name now – silently or aloud -- beloved of this community who are sick, injured, undergoing medical treatment or in recovery. Pray for all who are in any need or trouble this day. ***Amen***

Hymn 67 – Comfort, Comfort Ye My People

Comfort, comfort ye my people, speak ye peace thus saith our God;
Comfort those who sit in darkness
Mourning 'neath their sorrow's load.
Speak ye to Jerusalem of the peace that waits for them;
Tell her that her sins I cover, and her warfare now is over.

Hark, the voice of one that crieth in the desert far and near,
Calling us to new repentance since the kingdom now is here.
Oh, that warning cry obey! Now prepare for God a way;
Let the valleys rise to meet him,
And the hills bow down to greet him.

Make ye straight what long was crooked,
Make the rougher places plain:
Let your hearts be true and humble, as befits his holy reign.
For the glory of the Lord now o'er earth is shed abroad;
And all flesh shall see the token that the Word is never broken.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTOeAl-Ph8I>

May the One who loved the world enough to send the first and only child to live among us in great humility, open your eyes to look for the day when that child comes again. And thus the blessing of God Almighty: Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer be with you and yours this day and remain with you always. ***Amen.***