

The Sunday Missive – February 20, 2022
The Seventh Sunday after The Epiphany

Hymn 657 Love divine all loves excelling

Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven, to earth come down,
Fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love thou art;
Visit us with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver, let us all thy life receive;
Suddenly return, and never, nevermore thy temples leave.
Thee we would be alway blessing, serve thee as thy hosts above,
Pray, and praise thee without ceasing, glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee:
Changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6oM1NZ9YSnw>

The Collect of the Day

O Lord, you have taught us that without love whatever we do is worth nothing; Send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts your greatest gift, which is love, the true bond of peace and of all virtue, without which whoever lives has no life before you. Grant this for the sake of your only Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Genesis 45:3-15

Joseph said to his brothers, "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 to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For 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 for you

a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. 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.

Psalm 37

Do not fret because of the wicked* ***Do not be envious of wrongdoers,***

For they will soon fade like the grass* ***And wither like the green herb.***

Trust in the Lord, and do good* ***So you may live in the land, and enjoy security.***

Take delight in the Lord* ***Who will give you the desires of your heart.***

The Lord will make your vindication shine like the daylight* ***And the justice of your cause like the noonday.***

Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently* ***Do not fret over those who prosper in their evil ways.***

Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath* ***Do not fret—it leads only to evil.***

For the wicked shall be cut off* ***But those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.***

Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more* ***Though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there.***

But the meek shall inherit the land* ***And delight themselves in abundant prosperity.***

The wicked plot against the righteous* ***And gnash their teeth at them;***

But the Lord laughs at their wickedness* ***And God sees that the end of their days is coming.***

1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body...

... So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Hymn 811 You shall cross the barren desert

You shall cross the barren desert but you shall not die of thirst
You shall wander far in safety though you do not know the way
You shall speak your words to foreign men and they will understand
You shall see the face of God and live.

Be not afraid, I go before you always
Come, follow me and I will give you rest.

If you pass through raging waters in the sea you shall not drown
If you walk amid the burning flames you shall not be harmed
If you stand before the power of hell and death is at your side
Know that I am with you through it all.

And blessed are your poor for the kingdom shall be theirs
Blest are you that weep and mourn for one day you shall laugh
And if wicked men insult and hate you all because of me
Blessed, blessed are you.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBH-Eh9Bjg>

Luke 6:27-38

“But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

How Then Shall We Live? Epiphany 7C

His brothers left him for dead when they threw him into the (presumably unclimb-able) pit where the traders found (good news) and enslaved (bad news) him. Our story today finds little Joseph all grown up and expressing the belief that it has all been for the good. Certainly, if those siblings of his had ever faced charges of kidnapping or attempted

murder, they wouldn't have needed Perry Mason to get them off. Because, not only did Joseph have dreams in which he lorded it over them -- with his father's approval -- Joe felt the need to rub it in their faces and repeat the dreams, as if his brothers might learn from them. He was his father's unabashed favorite, and the rest of them boiled with anger when they saw the beautiful coat Joe wore, while their father Jacob expected them to be content with their accustomed drabbery. Envy, the green-eyed monster meets conceit and effrontery.

After pushing him into the ditch, the other eleven brothers cooked up a story to tell father Jacob about Joseph's being attacked and killed by a wild beast: "Here's all that's left, Dad, his bloodstained shirt," they lied. And Jacob bought the story, even though the blood smelled suspiciously of lamb chops. Remember that Jacob himself had tricked and lied his way into his inheritance from Daddy Isaac -- stole it from his big brother Esau back in the day. Which proves that occasionally, you can kid a kidder. The brothers figured Joe probably did get eaten, so there was a kind of truth-ness in their story. We can relate to that here today in the old USA; it's true: somebody has been actively trying to interfere with free and fair elections.

What the brothers weren't aware of, however was that their victim had been uncovered, discovered and recovered by some slave traders, who sold him when they got way down in Egypt land, where Joe was purchased by a big shot army officer named Potiphar, was subsequently falsely accused of assaulting Potiphar's wife and was thrown in jail (another pit) from which he emerged better than ever to serve Pharaoh himself as head dream-interpreter, Secretary of Agriculture and general factotum.

So twice in his young life, Joseph was thrown into a dark hole -- the dark night of despair. It is easy for most of us to identify with a time when we have been down, if not all the way out. Maybe we feel like we've been thrown into a hole by people, places and things beyond our control; maybe we blame ourselves, but there we are, nevertheless. Part of the deeper truth of Joseph's story is that his dark nights are brought on, at least partially by his own actions and attitudes.

This is not to imply that any time there's trouble, it's at least partially the victim's fault. Every page of history is replete with innocent victims. No, the Joseph story's universality stems from its inescapability. No matter how far down the scale we have gone or how we got there, no matter what the circumstances or causes of our dark nights, we are all like Joseph and, like him we can see how our experience can benefit others.

Nietzsche said, *“Was mich nicht umbringt macht mich stärker.”* “What does not kill me makes me stronger.” With acceptance of our darkest situations and the honest attempt to “make life” out of them, as Joseph characterizes his response to his trials, we can co-opt this idea, expressing it as *“Was mir nicht umbringt, macht mir mehr mitfühlend,”* *Mitfühlend*, as in with feeling. In surviving our trials, we can become ever more compassionate. The irony is excruciating and real, as Germany is today lauded and emulated as a world leader in human rights.

The portion of the Joseph saga we heard today takes place years later, when the brothers venture down to Egypt looking for a way to feed their own people during a drought-caused famine. It also serves as the foundational legend of how the Israelites got stuck down in Egypt in the first place, whence they would have to flee with Moses some 400 years later, as the story goes. When his brothers arrive, looking for food, Joseph knows exactly who they were, but with his beautiful clothes and lofty position he is unrecognizable to them. And at first he messes with them a little. Who could blame him? He pretends to think they are spies and thieves, but his emotions are so poignant at the reunion that he breaks down and has to leave the room to avoid discovery.

Finally he can't stand it any longer and does the 'big reveal.' There is a tearful reunion and abject apologies from the brothers, followed by an invitation from Joe to come share the wealth and comfort he has attained. And in case the lesson is lost on us, we need only remind ourselves that Joe's invitation leads, not to incense and peppermints, but to 400 years of subjugation for the Hebrews in Egypt. The story is not primarily one of Israel being saved from famine; it is a story of personal transformation; Joseph emerges from his own flaws and the violence of the world to become a better person, a suitable patriarch in his own right. He is someone we would like to emulate. And we can still wear many-colored coats whenever we like, just as long as we don't try to lord it over anybody.

Again, this is not to say that we should look for trouble and wallow in it. Trouble will find us. It is to say that, although there is always more trouble coming, our attention must always be on co-operating with God in making new life from every trial. As Joseph lives again and forgives, and all thrive thereby, so Jesus lives again and forgives and all with ears to hear benefit. We must look to each day, to make it one of transformative goodness if we can.

Frederick Buechner wrote: "Joseph's answer to his brothers rings out like a bell. 'Don't be scared, of course you're pardoned. Do you think I am God to grovel before me like that?' In the old days, of course, God was just who he'd rather suspected he was, and the dreams in which his brothers groveled were his all-time personal favorites." But now he knows what God is: the potential for good within himself. God is the potential for good within each of us. As Shaw's Eliza Doolittle realizes when others' actions seem to control her life, "I have my own soul. My own spark of divine fire." That fire is what makes Joseph capable of taking spiritual action, the bold action of forgiveness and reconciliation. He can engage with others in their dark nights and walk through with them. He can challenge whatever evils come his way and work for peace. As John Milton put it, 'I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercized and unbreathed, who never sallies out and sees her adversaries.' Joseph's adversaries are shame, guilt and vengefulness; he conquers them.

Here, in the climax of the Joseph saga, he tells his brothers, do not regret what you did; I came here for life. Does he just mean for his whole lifetime, or does he mean for the purpose of giving life, to live into his fullest potential, so that others may also? The answer is both. Perhaps thanking God for answers to the decisions we all face is not so important as glorifying God for the questions. After all, no matter how you cut it, God has given us the capacity for thuggery and evil along with our better natures; both the capacity and the choice. We thank God when we succeed, if only in believing.

But if, beyond thanking, we concentrate on glorifying God for creating the universe, the place where created things and beings affect one another and humankind must decide how to behave, we can share in that which empowers us, not only to survival, but to joy and permanent fulfillment, if only we believe. There really are rights and wrongs; there really is truth. For each of us, the question remains, "How will I respond to my growing awareness that I can freely choose the kind of life I'd like to lead?"

Hymn 304 I come with joy to meet my Lord

I come with joy to meet my Lord, forgiven, loved, and free,
In awe and wonder to recall, his life laid down for me.

I come with Christians far and near to find, as all are fed,
The new community of love in Christ's communion bread.

As Christ breaks bread, and bids us share, each proud division ends.
The love that made us, makes us one, and strangers now are friends.

And thus with joy we meet our Lord. His presence, always near,
Is in such friendship better known, we see and praise him here.

Together met, together bound, we'll go our different ways
And as his people in the world, we'll live and speak his praise.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aD7FQT5VGJ0>

Trees at Night

Slim Sentinels
Stretching lacy arms
About a slumbrous moon;
Black quivering
Silhouettes,
Tremulous,
Stencilled on the petal
Of a bluebell;
Ink sputtered
On a robin's breast;
The jagged rent
Of mountains
Reflected in a
Stilly sleeping lake;
Fragile pinnacles
Of fairy castles;
Torn webs of shadows;
And
Printed 'gainst the sky—
The trembling beauty
Of an urgent pine.

Helene Johnson