

The Sunday Missive – February 28, 2021



The Second Sunday in Lent

Greetings, one and all, and welcome home to St. Peter's by the Sea. Nancy Castle, Mary Sue Gee, Jeff Wheelwright and I 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: [facebook.com/StPetersMorroBay](https://www.facebook.com/StPetersMorroBay) Scroll down until you see today's Sunday Missive, anytime after 11 A.M. on Sunday, February 28. 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. **Let us pray:**

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus. **Amen.**

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

LEVAS Hymn 120 – There’s a Sweet, Sweet Spirit in This Place

There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place,
And I know that it's the Spirit of the Lord;
There are sweet expressions on each face,
And I know they feel the presence of the Lord.
Sweet Holy Spirit, Sweet heavenly Dove,
Stay right here with us, filling us with Your love.
And for these blessings we lift our hearts in praise;
Without a doubt we'll know that we have been revived,
When we shall leave this place.

There are blessings you cannot receive
Till you know Him in His fullness and believe;
You're the one to profit when you say,
"I am going to walk with Jesus all the way."

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

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

A Reading from the Book of Genesis – Chapter 19

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, and I will make a covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him,

“This is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God.”

Psalm 22

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? * Why are you so far from helping me?

O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer* And by night, but find no rest.

Yet you are holy* Enthroned on the praises of Israel.

Do not be far from me* For trouble is near and there is no one to help.

Many bulls encircle me* Strong bulls surround me.

They open wide their mouths at me* Like a ravening and roaring lion.

I am poured out like water* And all my bones are out of joint.

My heart is like wax* It is melted within my breast.

My mouth is dried up like a potsherd* And my tongue sticks to my jaws.

You lay me in the dust of death * A company of evildoers encircles me.

They divide my clothes among themselves* And for my clothing they cast lots.

But you, O LORD, do not be far away* O my help, come quickly to my aid!

Save me from the mouth of the lion* From the horns of the wild oxen rescue me.

I will tell of your name to my sisters and brothers* In the midst of the congregation I will praise you.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied* May their hearts live forever!

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord* And all the families of the nations shall worship before God.

A Reading from St. Pauls' Letter to the Romans – Chapter 4

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham. It is written that his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

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

A Reading from the Gospel According to Mark – Chapter 8

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking

at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to 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, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of the Father with the holy angels.”

Last week we had a chance to hear again the story of God overdoing the anger thing -- drowning almost everybody --overdoing it so much that he had to go on the wagon – take the pledge – swear off deluging forever, for good.

Don't forget, we see ourselves as made in the image and likeness of this God, so it stands to reason that we would do well to follow God's example and take a very close look at our anger too, wherever it may be hiding, and wherever it may be directed. As the sayings go, jealousy is a green-eyed monster, and self-righteous anger is a luxury we can't afford. It's destructive, dangerous, deleterious.

Our spiritual history is full of God's anger, at us and at others. It is the explanation for natural disasters and the justification for human tyrannies. Again and again, people are threatened and destroyed “in God's anger” and we are stuck with trying to make sense of it.

We all have anger in us, from the moment of birth, when we are rudely expelled or yanked out of a perfect environment, Mom's tummy, where all our desires are fulfilled and all our needs met instantly, and anything we don't get that we might like doesn't matter because we don't know about it. Suddenly everybody starts withholding food from us and leaving us in our tangled bedclothes and messy diapers for what seems like ever. We are angry! Look at the face of a crying baby if you don't believe me. Our whole lives can seem to be an exercise in anger management.

So we do well to look closely at God's example and make of it what we can. Every parent knows that telling your kids, “Do what I say, not what I

do” is about as effective as the US telling other countries to disarm. It’s just not going to happen. We say God is angry, and that gives us leave to at least consider acting angrily ourselves. So we have to look deeply at how God develops, at what God learns, at whom God becomes, despite the anger.

Because God has a picture of a perfect world, just like we do. And when humankind develops oh so imperfectly, God gets oh so angry. In fact there is only one attribute of God that can overpower the anger, and that is the love. Love that manifests itself as benefit of the doubt, forgiveness, new beginnings, leeway. Perhaps that will have to be our formula too. Eve and Adam and Cain must live outside the garden after their sins, but they are not destroyed. Noah is a pretty unsavory fellow by any standards, boat or no boat, but God stays with him. Likewise David and Jacob and many others. These are our ancestors, in a real sense, they are us. And God sticks with them, steadily moving away from threats and acts of violent rage towards forgiveness, encouragement and loving example. Most of us look pretty good by comparison with these characters, sinwise. God will stick with us too.

Which brings us to Abraham. Some of the shenanigans he got up to are enough to curl your hair if it isn’t already, straighten it out if it is. Lying about his marriage in order to save his own skin -- twice? Taking his son up a mountain to kill because he thinks God wants him to? Frustrated with his wife’s barrenness, he impregnates her slave Hagar. Surely God could have found a more virtuous guy in Chaldea, or at least in the near suburbs, than Abraham. What could God have been thinking?

What if God wasn’t thinking? What if God picked Abraham at random? Out of a hat, so to speak? After all, this is the way we ourselves are picked. What if this whole story is about God’s experiment on God’s self-imaged creation: “What will happen if I take no action to change this fellow except give him faith, faith enough to become willing, to involve himself, flaws and all, in my agenda? It may be messy, but it may just work. And Oh, what a thing it would be to have the experiment work; because if Abraham can do it, anybody can!”

And so God started in on Abraham, gave him a load of faith to go with his many character flaws, and made him a permanent promise – gave him a covenant that continues to this day. And it was messy. It still is. Because Sarah and Abraham and Hagar are still us. And the children of Hagar and the children of Sarah are still around. All of them -- all of us -- have flaws, jealousy, anger, rationalizations, and each of us has equal access to

forgiveness. And we have the right to and the readiness for faith if only we will accept it. Each of us has the same potential for offspring more numerous than the stars – as loving acts multiply from ours – a potential just as wondrous and inexplicable as Sarah’s and Hagar’s and Abraham’s. Not a bit more. Not a bit less.

Prayers

Oh God of all comfort, we pray for those who have been, who are, and who will be, affected by all that encompasses Covid-19. The physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, and financial burdens are great. And we know that not everyone is affected equally, or justly. We pray especially for those who are risking their lives for the protection and sustenance of others. And we pray mightily with, and for, those whose voices often go unheard. We ask that You will look upon those who the world tries to look away from. May they know especially that they are heard, they are held, and they are loved. May they know Your truth in a world full of lies. May they know your protection in a world full of violence. And may they know your abundance in a world full of poverty. No one child should have to fight so hard for the inheritance that You so freely gave to all. By Your name we are beloved, we belong, and we are beautiful.

Amen.

You God, Lord and Sovereign, you God, lover and partner, you are God of all our possibilities. You preside over all our comings and goings, all our wealth and poverty, all our sickness and our health, all our despair and our hope, all our living and all our dying, and we are grateful

You are God of all our impossibilities. You have presided over the emancipations and healings of our mothers and fathers; you have presided over the wondrous transformations, joys and sorrows in our own lives. You have and will preside over those parts of our lives that we imagine to be closed, and we are grateful.

So let us know your power, enacting the things impossible for us, that we might yet be whole among the blind who see and the dead who are raised; that we may witness your will for peace, your vision for justice, your renunciation of all violence. At the outset of this day, we place our lives in your strong hands. Before the end of this day, do newness among us in the very places where we are tired in fear, exhausted in guilt and spent in anxiety. Make all things new, we pray, in the new-making name of Jesus.

Amen.

Hymn 636 – How Firm a Foundation

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in his excellent word!
What more can he say than to you he hath said,
to you that for refuge to Jesus have fled?

When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
the rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;
for I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
my grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;
the flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
that soul, though all hell shall endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrLG1hN3Kq0>

And now, may the peace of Christ which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God; and the blessing of the triune God: Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier be with you and those you love this day and always. **Amen.**