

The Sunday Missive – February 7, 2021



The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Greetings, one and all, and welcome home to St. Peter's by the Sea. Nancy Castle, Mary Sue Gee, Thelma Huchthausen, Diane and Roger Ludin 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 7. 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:**

Truth-telling, wind-blowing, life-giving spirit – we present ourselves now for our instruction and guidance; breathe your truth among us, breathe your truth of deep Friday loss, your truth of awesome Sunday joy. Breathe your story of death and life that our story may be submitted to your will for life. We pray in the name of Jesus crucified – and Jesus risen to new life.

Amen

Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins, and give us the liberty of that abundant life which you have made known to us in your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. ***Amen.***

Hymn 423 – Immortal, Invisible God Only Wise

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
Nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above
Thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life thou givest, to both great and small;
In all life thou livest, the true life of all;
We blossom and flourish, like leaves on the tree,
Then wither and perish; but nought changeth thee.

Thou reignest in glory, thou rulest in light,
Thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
All laud we would render: O help us to see
'Tis only the splendor of light hideth thee.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zd0FyrzVUCM>

A Reading from the prophecy of Isaiah, Chapter 40

Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name. And because he is great in strength and mighty in power, not one is missing.

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God”? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of

the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even the young will faint and be weary, they will fall exhausted. But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. This is the Word of the Lord.

Psalm 147

Alleluia! Praise the Lord who is good and loving* To God all our praises are due.

Who heals the broken-hearted* And binds up all their wounds.

Who fixes the number of the stars* And calls each one by name.

Our Lord is great and mighty* With wisdom that can never be measured.

The Lord raises up the lowly* And humbles the wicked to the dust.

O sing to the Lord giving thanks* Sing psalms to our God with the harp.

Who covers the heavens with clouds* And prepares the rain for the earth.

Who makes the mountains sprout with grass* With plants to feed humankind.

God's delight is not in wealth and power* God takes no pleasure in warriors' strength.

The Lord delights in those who revere truth* And those who live by the rule of love.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVaaigt4uQs>

A Reading from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 9

If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but it is not of my own will, I have been entrusted with a commission. What then is my reward?

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that all may share in its blessings. This is the Word of the Lord.

Hymn 529 – In Christ There Is No East Nor West

In Christ there is no East nor West, in him no South or North,
But one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth.

Join hands, disciples of the faith, whate'er your race may be!
Who serves my Father as his child is surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both East and West, in him meet South and North,
All Christly souls are one in him, throughout the whole wide earth.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24CsRD1BMhM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAsE-89wNWQ>

A Reading from the Gospel according to Mark, Chapter 1

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. This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Have you not known? Have you not heard? It is God who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when God blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

By the time the prophet known as Second Isaiah is writing, during the Israelites' exile in Babylon it's no longer Adam who named all the animals – too much responsibility. It's God who names them. The biblical narrative evolved as the ancients realized just how far humanity was capable of straying from peaceful progress. The narrative is still evolving to this day, in its interpretation, like it or not. And we're still straying.

God, or Adam, named, for example, the ostrich. Actually the dictionary says it's from the Ancient Greek *strouthos megale*, big sparrow, which seems awfully understated. I bring up the ostrich for two reasons: One is the array of fascinating characteristics possessed by this, the largest of birds, also the fastest two-legged animal there is. With their acute eyesight and hearing, ostriches can sense predators such as lions from very far away. When being pursued, they have been known to reach speeds in excess of 43 miles an hour; and they can maintain a steady speed of 31 miles an hour over many miles. They also lay the biggest eggs of any living creature. When threatened, ostriches generally run away, but they can also cause serious injury or death with forward kicks from their powerful, sharp clawed legs. Each year, several ostrich ranchers in South Africa are killed by their livestock. Nuff said.

The other reason I'm interested in ostriches today is because of the myth we human beings have made up about them to make it seem like we're not the most blithely ignorant, reality denying species on the planet. This myth likely began with Pliny the Elder, the Roman leader and naturalist who wrote that ostriches, "imagine, when they have thrust their head and neck into the dirt, that the whole of their body is concealed." Ostriches do not bury their heads in sand to avoid danger. That would not have resulted in their still being around. They do however nose around for sand and pebbles to swallow to help grind up their food; you and I might do that too if we had no teeth, and no blenders. Also, when hiding from predators, they lay their heads and necks flat on the ground, so that from a distance, they look like

mounds of earth in the hazy heat of the savannah. But everyone in our culture thinks they know what an “ostrich mentality” is: patent denial and/or blithe ignorance of potentially useful, not to say vital information. The twin habit to this is of course making up things that we want to be true and declaring them to be useful or vital, so as to manipulate each other for economic, political or emotional gain. We have several words for this: including campaign promises, advertising claims, and public relations. We avoid, we resist, we manage the truth or depart from it entirely in an effort to expand our importance and control over life. But it is to no avail. Have you not known? Have you not heard? To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One.

These questions are ironic; they are ‘unquestions.’ Isaiah knows the answers. The prophet is telling us with these non-questions what we already deeply know: we are, like the grasses, gone. We are not here to imitate God. Our hope and our purpose can never be greatness. Our hope and purpose lie in self awareness, self examination, humility, moderation, peacemaking, healing, comforting, visiting, holding each other close, feeding, clothing, sheltering, forgiving, depicting, relating, entertaining, welcoming, and on and on. God’s reality has given us plenty to occupy ourselves without making stuff up.

Let God fight the star wars, make the big bangs, move the continental plates. When and if we’ve done all we can do to care for this planet and its inhabitants, when all of nature and humanity is nurtured and justly treated and reasonably happy; when our numbers are no longer wildly out of control and we’re no longer obliterating other, inconvenient species, then we can all get together at a big potlatch to ask God what else we ought to be looking into, projectwise. But we have a long way to go and lots to do before that day dawneth.

The concept of patriotism has a different meaning for each of us. Some might veer toward the idea of ‘Number One,’ and even toss around the phrase, ‘the greatest country in the world.’ Others might think ‘the greatest country in the world’ is a dumb thing to boast: the writing on the wall, the pride before the fall. God’s truth is it’s more patriotic to want us to be healthy, realistic and responsible. It’s more patriotic to be concerned about the ways in which we are among the least great, and be passionate about changing them, things like immoderate consumption, mass incarceration, income inequality, the unavailability of medical care and our catastrophic environmental recklessness.

When we get up to heaven, let's say some angel is at the pearly gates checking folks in as the legend has it. When we belly up to the desk there, and the angel asks, "Where ya from, son?" We'd probably better think twice before saying, "I'm from the greatest country in the world," just on the off chance they were serious about all that 'last shall be first' business. We might end up in the remedial learning class, or worse. The wiser goal is to have the presence of mind – and the track record – to say, "I'm from God's country... Ma'am."

**Hymn 810 You Who Dwell in the Shelter of the Lord (Psalm 91)
Mary Sue Gee, Soloist, Arranged by Alan Boehmer**

You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord, who abide in His shadow for life
Say to the Lord, "My refuge, my rock in whom I trust!"

And He will raise you up on eagles' wings, bear you on the breath of dawn;
Make you to shine like the sun and hold you in the palm of His hand.

The snare of the fowler will never capture you and famine will bring you no fear;
Under his wings your refuge, his faithfulness your shield.

You need not fear the terror of the night nor the arrow that flies by day;
Though thousands fall about you, near you it shall not come.

For to His angels He's given a command to guard you in all of your ways;
Upon their hands they will bear you up lest you dash your foot against a stone.

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

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. 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 child should

have to fight for the inheritance that You so freely gave to all. By Your name we are beloved, we belong, and we are beautiful. *Amen.*

We pray for those who have died, especially Larry Henderson – are there others? -- for those who are ill and their loved ones, especially Yadira, Grażyna, John, Karen, Sharon and Jane; are there others? We pray for those who care for the sick, and those who work in science and medicine, especially Betsey, Lynn, John; are there others? Bless their hands and hearts and let them know we are grateful. *Amen.*

Bountiful God, source of the greatest good for all of us: Guide us in the right direction towards a better future for your creation. Help us to overcome our own limitations during this pandemic, and grant us steadfast love to look after each other. Give us humbleness of heart to accept that without you we cannot be real stewards of your creation. Show us ways to spread the gospel that will touch hearts and change minds for a better tomorrow for all humanity, the preservation of every creature, and the planet. We ask it all in the name of your beloved child. *Amen.*

LEVAS Hymn 72 – Just a Closer Walk with Thee

I am weak but thou art strong; Jesus, keep me from all wrong;
I'll be satisfied as long as I walk, let me walk close to thee.

Just a closer walk with thee, grant it, Jesus, is my plea,
Daily walking close to thee, let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

When my feeble life is o'er, time for me will be no more;
Guide me gently, safely o'er to thy kingdom shore, to thy shore.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00KaircCiGI>

and this, beyond description:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5krFNUMQHI>

And now, may the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you; may the Lord's countenance be lifted up unto you and grant you peace. And may the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer remain with you and those whom you hold in your heart, this day and forever. *Amen.*