

The Sunday Missive – February 21, 2021



The First Sunday in Lent

Greetings, one and all, and welcome home to St. Peter's by the Sea. Janis Johnson, 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 21. 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:**

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness. **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**

Hymn 757 – Will You Come and Follow Me?

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown -- will you let my name be known,
Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Christ, your summons echoes true when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
In your company I'll go -- where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

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

A Reading from the Book of Genesis, Chapter 9

Then God said to Noah and to his sons, "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth." This is the Word of the Lord.

Psalm 25

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul* O my God, in you I trust.

Do not let me be put to shame* Do not let my enemies exult over me.

Guide me in your truth, O Lord* Teach me your ways.

For you are the God of my salvation* For you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord* And your steadfast love from of old.

Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions* According to your steadfast love remember me, for goodness' sake, O Lord!

Good and upright is the Lord* Who instructs sinners in the way.

Who leads the humble in what is right* And teaches the humble to live.

All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness* For those who keep God's covenant and decrees.

A Reading from the First Letter of Peter, Chapter 3

Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

Yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. This is the Word of the Lord.

Anthem -- Behold the Lamb of God
Music by Clement W. Barker-- Poem by William Aubert Luce

And it came to pass that John, looking upon Jesus as he walked, saith;
Behold the Lamb of God.

And lo, the Spirit of God, descending like a dove, lighted upon him.

Behold the Lamb of God! Behold the circling dove,
The blessing of immortal life descending from above.
Behold the Lamb of God! Behold the man of grace.
The loveliness of love divine is shining in his tranquil, his peaceful face.

O sinner, would you leave your sad and starless night?
Forgiveness will anoint your head.
Condemn your sins to nothingness; your punishment will cease.
The night of sin will end, and you will be at peace.

Behold the man of light, behold his glory fair,
The image of eternal truth forever in God's care.
Behold the Lamb of God, behold the man of grace.
The beauty of the Father's love is shining in his tranquil, his peaceful face.

A Reading from the Gospel According to Mark, Chapter 1

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." This is the Gospel of the Lord.

"Guide me in your truth," says the psalmist, "teach me your ways." Begging God to put us in a position of right thinking and its consequent right behavior is a running theme in the psalms; a habit of the well-lived life. It reflects our desire to be and do good. As we move and grow through this holy season of Lent, it can be an especially vivid orientation . Because

most of us really want to be good, but the clouds get in the way. Whether these clouds are obvious enemies -- barbarians at our gates -- or treacherous so-called allies, or the parts of ourselves that lead us into thoughts, words and deeds that hurt, doesn't matter very much. With the psalmist we pray for the influence, the inspiration and the power to become different and thus bring about different outcomes. Because insanity is doing the same thing over and over while expecting different results, we learn pray for the means and the motivation to do things differently. The only way we can be healed and be restored to sanity is to look, listen, and learn to change.

Stories about water and its power to obliterate life are deep within the human experience. Humankind has always known deep, dark water to be a threat to our existence. We can physically drown, if our lungs fill with water, but, by analogy, we can psychologically drown when we are without the spirit of wisdom and truth. Perhaps there is a drought in the land, when everything is parched and dying of thirst; or perhaps there is a spiritual; drought, where everyone is quietly desperate, and dying in a famine of hope. Water makes for metaphors we can all understand; it is no coincidence that respire, inspire and spirit have the same root, or that we talk about drowning in despair – for lack of spirit.

Because this is such a basic fear of ours, and a fundamental image in our self-expression, we must pay close attention to these old water stories to see what they can teach us. In Lent, perhaps more than any other time of year, we make a point of listening to, learning from and waiting for the transformation that God will make in us if we are willing to let it be. God's story includes the primordial Creation battle to separate waters from waters so that the World might have a place to thrive. Our legend has it that God made humanity to shepherd and steward and supervise the rest of Creation, but we could not be content and obedient; we wandered far away.

We like to say God exiled us from Eden, after one tiny little transgression – something to do with an apple, but more truthfully, humanity is continuously testing the limits of decency. The devil is just another part of ourselves. What we call the 'real world,' where there is pain and death, simply exists. But evil is something we bring to the party.

What a risk God took by putting us in charge of things, with our consciousness, our cleverness, our fears and failings. Could we, tested by the trials and terrors of a broken world, rise to the challenge, and look to God alone for the strength and serenity necessary to establish peace on

Earth? By the time of the flood, God had all but given up on us; we seemed like a failed experiment. Today seems little better.

The story is canonized in Genesis, but theologically it belongs right before the birth of Jesus, because it is in the wake of this solemn promise that God gets to thinking, “Well, if I can’t use violence, I’ll kill ‘em with kindness. Now what’s the most loving thing I can do for the folks,” and does it, by revealing God’s own self.

Can we learn from God’s generous experience? Can we become the kind of people who emerge from the waters of baptism free of the need to own guns, to employ selfish hatred, violence, isolation and self-destructive dependencies in our efforts to breathe free? And when we do have thoughts of these things, or fall back on actions we know are hurtful to ourselves and others, can we spend our days with the psalmist, yearning for more of the teaching and wisdom and truth that can transform us? Now is the time to ask: to look at ourselves, listen to our hearts, and try to learn how to truly love. And take to heart what the poet Rumi said: “Our task is not to seek love, but to seek and find the barriers within ourselves that we have built against it.”

Prayers

We pray for those who have died; for those who are ill and their loved ones, especially Yadira, John and Karen; for all who have died from COVID-19. We pray for those who care for the sick, and those who work in science and medicine. 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 share truth and abjure falsity; help us live and love in ways that touch hearts and change minds for a better tomorrow for all humanity, the preservation of every creature, and the sustainability of your precious creation, Earth. We ask it all in the name of your beloved child. ***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 all 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 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 be your true self, 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 608 – Eternal Father, Strong to Save

Eternal Father, strong to save, whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep its own appointed limits keep:
O hear us when we cry to thee for those in peril on the sea.

O Christ, whose voice the waters heard and hushed their raging at thy word,
Who walkedst on the foaming deep, and calm amid the storm didst sleep:
O hear us when we cry to thee for those in peril on the sea.

Most Holy Spirit, who didst brood upon the chaos dark and rude,
And bid its angry tumult cease, and give, for wild confusion, peace:
O hear us when we cry to thee for those in peril on the sea.

O Trinity of love and power, thy children shield in danger's hour;
From rock and tempest, fire and foe, protect them wheresoe'er they go;
Thus evermore shall rise to thee glad hymns of praise from land and sea.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZk1n9C070s>