

The Sunday Missive – January 31, 2021



The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Greetings, one and all, and welcome home to St. Peter's by the Sea. Nancy Castle, Janis Johnson, 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, January 31. 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 govern all things both in heaven and on earth: we give thanks that you mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and we beg in our time to grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Gracious God, you have sent the Holy Spirit to work in us forever: Bless, we pray, with grace and presence, all who assemble in your name here at St. Peter's by the Sea this day, that your Church, being preserved in true faith and godly discipline, may manifest the mind of the one who loved us and gave himself for us, Jesus, who is Christ our Savior and who, in the unity of the Holy Spirit lives and reigns with you, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Hymn 569 – God the Omnipotent Vss. 1, 2 & 3

God the Omnipotent! King who ordainest
Thunder thy clarion, the lightning thy sword;
Show forth thy pity on high where thou reignest:
Give to us peace in our time, O Lord.

God the All-merciful! Earth hath forsaken
Thy ways all holy, and slighted thy word;
Bid not thy wrath in its terrors awaken:
Give to us peace in our time, O Lord.

God, the All-righteous One! Earth hath defied thee;
Yet to eternity standeth thy word,
Falsehood and wrong shall not tarry beside thee:
Give to us peace in our time, O Lord.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHA9HGDmN5E>

A Reading from the Book of Deuteronomy – Chapter 18

Moses said, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: 'If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die.' Then the Lord replied to me: 'They are right in what they have said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything I command. Anyone who does not heed the words the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. And any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded, that prophet shall die.'" This is the Word of the Lord.

Psalm 111

Praise the Lord! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart* In the company of the upright, in the congregation.

Great are the works of the Lord* Studied by all who delight in them.

Full of honor and majesty is God's work* Whose righteousness endures forever.

The Lord provides food for those who are righteous* And is ever mindful of their covenant.

The works of God's hands are faithful and just* All God's precepts are trustworthy.

They are established forever and ever* To be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.

God sent redemption to the people* And has established their covenant forever.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom* All those who practice it have a good understanding.

A Reading from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians -- Chapter 8

We know that all of us possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; but anyone who loves God is known by him.

Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that no idol in the world really exists, and that there is no God but one. Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—yet for us there is one God, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. Food will not bring us close to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if others see you, who

possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food is a cause of anyone's falling, I will never again eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall. This is the Word of the Lord.

Hymn 593 – Lord Make Us Servants of Your Peace

Lord, make us servants of your peace: where there is hate, may we sow love;
Where there is hurt, may we forgive; where there is strife, may we make one.

Where all is doubt, may we sow faith; where all is gloom, may we sow hope;
Where all is night, may we sow light; where all is tears, may we sow joy.

Jesus, our Lord, may we not seek to be consoled, but to console,
Nor look to understanding hearts, but look for hearts to understand.

May we not look for love's return, but seek to love unselfishly,
For in our giving we receive, and in forgiving are forgiven.

Dying, we live, and are reborn through death's dark night to endless day;
Lord, make us servants of your peace, to wake at last in heaven's light.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFePl5ioYQo>

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

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 the spirit, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, the unclean spirit 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. This is the Gospel of the Lord.

As Charles Dickens wrote, the wisdom of the ancestors is in the simile. Throughout Mark's Gospel, Jesus feeds us God's wisdom in similes, in hopes that we will hear and heed. The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed... The Kingdom of God is like a vineyard owner... Again and again, Jesus gives us these extended and often paradoxical similes that we know as parables, in an effort to fill our hearts with the transforming energy of God's wisdom, and remind us of her mystery. For we are an argumentative, self-involved, forgetful and argumentative species, a stiff-necked people!

But this wisdom has little to do with what we know as religion, and everything to do with relationship. The trappings and powers and structures of religion are important – if they align with God's Word as spoken by the prophets – but they are not the foundation of God's relationship with humankind. That foundation is surely the Word itself: spoken, interpreted, debated, agreed upon in covenant. None of these words of wisdom we heard today were delivered by people claiming to be part of any established institution. Moses and the people he led were hoping for the promised land, but they weren't in it yet. The Psalmist is thought to have been writing when Israel was in exile, far from any temple. Paul is writing and preaching to a neonatal church, fragile in the extreme and frequently in danger from the powers that had taken Jesus to Calvary. Today we are on the extreme other end, historically, of the Church's great influence. There is no longer an overwhelming societal expectation of piety. The Church does not control what goes on among governments. We are fragmented by both outright disputes and also denominational differences. So much ill has been promulgated in the name of God, that he has been exiled from the hearts and minds of many, many people, especially the young. A dire consequence of this is that empathy, curiosity, self-awareness and humility are no longer prerequisites for our leadership.

But none of this loss has any effect on the Word of God's self, as spoken by the prophets and as we are meant to hear and act upon it in this world. None of these developments has anything to do with the Word of God made flesh in Jesus. None of this can separate from the love of God in Christ those who accept and embrace it.

Like everybody, I had two grandfathers. Like the luckiest among you, I got to know both of mine pretty well. They were both wise men, business and civic leaders, who rose from modest beginnings. From one, I got my first two names. He was a storyteller and builder; he constructed the first home he and my grandmother shared -- out of rocks. His motto: "No deal is a

good deal unless it's good for both parties." That sounds like the Golden Rule, St. Louis style.

The other grandfather gave me my last name. He became a business and government executive, an honest politician and statesman, a head of companies and departments. He ran things. One of his favorite pieces of advice about working in groups was to always ask the questions: "Who do I report to? What do I do? Who reports to me?" That would be Mosaic Law, American style.

We have to accept and embrace the awareness that answers to these three questions will enable success, not just in business and bureaucracy, but also in a godly life for ourselves and for the Church. At least that is what Moses and the Psalmist and Paul are trying to tell us. We, like the prophets report only to God. The prophets are to tell the truth and we are to listen to what they say and behave accordingly. But who reports to us? None other than God's very self – accountable until the ages of ages – who will bestow grace and peace upon the people who believe.

"But, but, but," we argue – "we want credit!" Listen to the Psalmist: Fear God. (Fear is a little misleading here, 'revere' might be a better word. In the modern sense, what we are to fear is not so much God as God-lessness.) So, get wise, revere God and give God all the credit, that's who you report to. What you do is sing praise in the assembly of the faithful, glorify, full-fill. Simple. But who reports to us? Are not the covenants of God the promises of God, the presence of Jesus report enough for us? "Keep singing until it is enough for you," says the Psalmist.

And Saint Paul, what is his business formula for a life in Christ? The Corinthians are so smart and educated and sophisticated, that they have talked themselves right past the first question: To whom do we report? Well, "God, of course," say the ancestors. But these Corinthians are reporting to themselves and each other instead, and ignoring the effects of their behavior on those who would be led by them. Paul insists that the industry God demands is mutual care. If instead we count on writing our own ticket, based on our own knowledge and desires alone, we are no longer reporting to God and will inevitably neglect the neighbors (and the planet) we are bidden to serve. What we're to do is care for one another. We report to God by caring for one another, and God reports to us through others' care for us. That's the business plan.

Jesus was human, and yet God worked holy miracles of healing through him. Once and for all, through Jesus, God gave us the formula for our own lives. We are no longer to wait for anointed prophets. Each of us has the power of prophecy. Each of us has the power of healing, if only we can feel Christ's love flowing through us, and perceive God's embrace within and beyond those whom we serve. Like a fire hydrant: the water comes from the river, flows through us, and everyone on the block gets to play in it.

Here is Martin Luther's expression of the paradox: "A Christian is a perfectly free Lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."

Says Moses: "The ones who speak falsely (and they're hard to spot) in the name of other gods, and the ones who speak ungodly words in YHWH's name (they're even harder to spot), they will all surely die."

But we believe the ones who speak in the name of Christ --with authority! -- and by them, ohhh the demons that will be cast out and flee, shouting, "What have you to do with us, you holy ones of God?!?!" And then they will be silent.

The wisdom of the ancestors is indeed in the similes. Let us go forth and make like the Kingdom of God.

Prayers

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move in every human heart, and among the people of this land, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that being healed of our divisions we may live in justice, peace and charity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Almighty God, you proclaim your truth in every age by many voices: Direct, in our time, we pray, those who speak where many listen and write what many read; that they may do their part in making the heart of this people wise, its mind sound, and its will righteous; to the honor of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

We pray for our world, in the midst of a terrifying pandemic, for those who have died, especially Larry Henderson – are there others? -- for those who are ill and their loved ones, especially John, Karen, Sharon and Jane, Anna, Caroline and Tony; 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.**

Loving God, you fill all things with a fullness and hope that we can never comprehend. Thank you for leading us into a time where more of reality is being unveiled for us all to see. We pray that you will take away our natural temptation for cynicism, denial, fear and despair. Help us have the courage to awaken to greater truth, greater humility, and greater care for one another. May we place our hope in what matters and what lasts, trusting in your eternal presence and love. Listen to our hearts' longings for the healing of our suffering world. Please add your own intentions, silently or aloud. Knowing that you are hearing us better than we are speaking, we offer these prayers in all your holy names O gracious God. **Amen.**

Hymn 530 – Spread O Spread Thou Mighty Word Vss. 1, 3 & 5

Spread, O spread, thou mighty word, spread the kingdom of the Lord,
That to earth's remotest bound men may heed the joyful sound;

Word of how the Saviour's love Earth's sore burden doth remove;
How for ever, in its need, through his death the world is freed;

Word of life, most pure and strong, word for which the nations long,
Spread abroad, until from night all the world awakes to light.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ApnNI-BVaQ8>

Jazz Vespers Version – Wow!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEnc_cOAws0

And now, may the Lord go before you with heavenly light, always and everywhere, that you may perceive with clear sight, act with pure intention and revere one another with true affection. And now, this day and forevermore may the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier remain with you and those whom you hold in your heart. **Amen.**