

Sunday Missive -- July 26, 2020



The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Greetings, One and All, and welcome back to St. Peter's by the Sea, here in beautiful Morro Bay. Today, my friends Marti Lindholm and Nancy Castle and I, along with Diane and Roger Ludin offer you a service of prayer, word and song with love. This Sunday Missive will be available on Facebook at 11:00 A.M. on Sunday, July 26, and anytime after that. Click on the link below, or cut and paste into your browser bar and you should be able to watch. If you keep this Missive document open too, you will have the hymn lyrics ready to sing. If you are unable to watch, please let Padre Sid know and we will try to get you up and running for next time: sssymington@gmail.com or (203) 209-2339. If you have a Facebook account, or would like to make one for the purpose of watching, be sure to go to "St. Peter's By The Sea, Morro Bay" using that exact spelling. There are a few other pages that are either inactive – and we can't take them down -- or another group entirely. But you do not need a facebook account to watch!

KKBDjC7zKd1Kvws0elUTfHmPTVaREXk2ty7B1JsL3bJxW"
<https://www.facebook.com/StPetersMorroBay>

Grace to you and peace, from God our Creator, from Christ our Redeemer, who with the Holy Spirit sanctifies and nourishes us.

Let us pray: Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts with the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may more perfectly love, and more worthily magnify your holy Name. *Amen.*

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Hymn 7 Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies

Christ, whose glory fills the skies, Christ, the true, the only Light,
Sun of Righteousness, arise, triumph over shades of night.
Dayspring from on high, be near; day-star, in my heart appear!

Dark and cheerless is the morn unaccompanied by thee.
Joyless is the day's return till thy mercy's beams I see.
As they inward light impart, glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine! Pierce the gloom of sin and grief!
Fill me, radiancy divine; scatter all my unbelief.
More and more thyself display, shining to the perfect day.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPU7OwmKjyo>

A Reading from The First Book of Kings – Chapter Three

The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and said, “Ask what I should give you.” And Solomon said, “O Lord my God, you have made me, your servant, king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And I am in the midst of a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted: the people whom you have chosen. Give me therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, the ability to discern between good and evil.” God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for long life or riches, or for the lives of your enemies, but for understanding and discernment, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has ever been before and no one like you shall ever arise again. This is the Word of the Lord

Psalm 119

O Lord, you are my hiding place, my **shield*** Uphold me by your promises and I shall **live**.

Bear me up and I shall be **saved*** Henceforth I will ever muse on your **decrees**.

O Lord, guarantee the well-being of your **servant*** Let not the proud and wicked **oppress me**.

My eyes grow weary as I watch for your **salvation*** And watch for your promised **justice**.

O Lord, treat your servant with merciful **love*** I am your servant; give me **understanding**.

Your decrees are wonderful **indeed*** Therefore my soul will ever **obey them**.

O Lord let my steps be guided by your **promises*** Redeem me from oppression, that I may keep your **precepts**.

It is time for you to act, for your laws have been **broken*** My eyes shed streams of tears, for those who have not kept your **law**.

A Reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter Eight

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes, with sighs too deep for words. The Spirit intercedes for all the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not also give us everything we desire? Who can substantiate any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus who indeed intercedes for us. Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword do so? It is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are counted as sheep to the slaughter." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ, Jesus our Lord. Here ends the reading.

LEVAS Hymn 109 What a Friend We Have in Jesus

What a friend we have in Jesus; all our sins and griefs to bear;
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear;
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations, is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged: take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful, who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden, cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior still our refuge; take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer
God's embrace will take and shield thee; thou wilt find a solace there.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9rrtgwRsfk>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwi_qKVI8IQ

A Reading from the Gospel According to Matthew – Chapter 13

Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he went and sold all that he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. “Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” Here ends the reading.

Elected by Whom? -- Proper 12A

“For those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.”

What is this business of election we hear about in the Bible, this designation of chosenness that some people or peoples acquire and others don't? How can it be that a just and loving God, the creator and ultimate judge of humanity and all there is to judge, would single out some for peace and others for violence, some for gratification and others for frustration, some to have and others to have not?

Last week we read the story of Jacob's dream, and considered the compelling argument that any higher power worth aligning oneself with, let alone worshipping, will have put the potential for grace in every soul, the spark of divine fire within every heart, a diamond on every brow. Each of us has equal access to God's love, if only we will avail ourselves of it. The chosen choose themselves, and their process of self-choosing must be an ongoing one. Nobody is preordained or elected.

Here in America, we have elections; we're a democracy – so far. What it supposedly takes to get elected is to have our desire to occupy and fulfill a certain office endorsed by more people than favor anybody else. Still a few bugs in the system, but that is the intention. So the idea of pre-election seems not only unfair; to us it is unfamiliar and foreign. We are uncomfortable with stories about promised lands, partially because our own history contains some pretty damning truths. Many of us shudder to think of what took place right here in the name of 'manifest destiny' in the realm of political and economic affairs, so to apply such a designation in spiritual matters seems utterly wrong.

In one of our country's pivotal historical moments, President Kennedy observed, *"There is always inequity in life. Some men are killed in a war and some men are wounded, and some men never leave the country; some men are stationed in the Antarctic and some are stationed in San Francisco. It's very hard to assure complete equality. Life is unfair."* And most of us would agree with him. The physical life is unfair. But the spiritual realm -- God -- is supposed to be fair.

Yet through the years many have taken the portion we just heard of Paul's letter to the Romans, along with other remarks he makes along the same lines, to mean that God is not fair, that only certain individuals are chosen -- ahead of time -- for salvation. Pretty hard to reconcile that with the Love Commandment. It is not only more sensible, but also more useful to bear in mind that God's goodness is offered to all of humankind.

Does this mean that Paul is just plain wrong, as far as this issue of election is concerned? Or are we dealing with yet another of those sneaky paradoxes like the ones Jesus so often uses to get under our skin, to get inside our hearts and transform us into the Body of the risen Christ? Perhaps Paul addresses himself to his Roman audience of outlaw believers using the pronoun 'we,' with confidence that whoever hears him will self-identify as the chosen ones of whom he speaks. His knows his confidence will engender its own justification, and his will be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Paul knows his audience -- living under heavy Roman persecution -- will see themselves as very much the elect, spiritually, even as they are anything but favoured in society.

All those whose lives have been changed by encountering the passion of God's incarnate self in the world are attracted to and moved by this same kind of confidence and passion. All of us who consider ourselves part of the eternally interconnected creation known as the Body of the risen Christ have the paradoxical feeling that we are singularly chosen... but so is everyone else. Followers of Jesus' way ask, with Paul, "What can we say? If God is for us, who is against us?"

Paul knows, as do we, that everyone who is chosen, (or called, however you want to put it), doesn't magically become sin-free and flawlessly, permanently virtuous in a twinkling. What we do become is possessed, of a deeper awareness of grace and glory than ever seemed possible to us. What we come to realize is that this connection with the rest of Creation, and the obligations and accountability that go along with such a connection are not at all a matter of our saying -- or thinking -- 'my life is holier than thy life.' The connection we share is offered freely to all, and nobody has any idea why some people can accept and nurture and bear witness to it, while others struggle to maintain a small measure of awareness, let alone consistency, and still others thumb their noses and keep on lying, cheating, stealing and killing. What we 'christ-ians' feel is not so much elect, as e-lucked, to coin a word; we are the lucky ones.

Actually, there is already an obsolete English word, 'eluctation.' According to Webster, it means, "A bursting or struggling forth from some difficulty." Whatever imagery we favor from our narrative traditions: Noah and his spectacularly dysfunctional family surviving a worldwide flood, or the people of Israel escaping 400 years of Egyptian slavery; King Solomon resisting the obvious temptations, to pray instead for wisdom and discernment, or Jesus' emptying himself of divine power so that we all might glimpse a life without sin, all of these stories show human beings grappling with challenging circumstances. They are all about eluctation; a choice being made to facilitate the eager longing of God in welcoming our emerging selves as we burst our bonds.

The same is true for every life that chooses to turn from fears (however well founded) and the self-centered shortsightedness they engender, and moves instead in the direction of equanimity, reconciliation and hope: taking the longer view. It is a choice that is open to all of humankind. Maybe God knows already who will make this choice. So be it. One thing is clear, however, we ourselves can't possibly know what our choice will be until we make it. Then it becomes our treasure in the field, our pearl of great price. We will bear witness to the change in us, by bringing out what is old and what is new to share with all we meet. We will become, not the "Elect," but the "Eluct." And when we do, despite hardship, distress, persecution, nakedness, peril, or sword, we shall be more than conquerors through love. Thus and thenceforth, we shall be persuaded [that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God.](#)

Prayers

Jesus, you are our friend and Savior. You know us through and through, and you are with us in every part of our lives: in our weakness, anger and fear, and in our strength, gratefulness and joy.

Gracious One, on the day of your resurrection you came to Mary Magdalene and the rest of your disciples and breathed the Holy Spirit into them. Breathe into us this day, as you breathed into them, that very creative wind and energy that has moved across the face of the deep from the very beginnings of creation.

As we breathe in, may we breathe in your courage and strength. As we breathe out, may we breathe out your loving-kindness and compassion. Help us to remember that you are with us always and that every day you invite us to feel and bear witness to your healing love. Thank you for giving us each other to love and for the tasks you have given us to do, even those that keep us still and apart from what we enjoy. Give us the courage, audacity and resolve to stand up in the midst of this great catastrophe, say what is ours to say and do what is ours to do. Help us never to be daunted or led astray by the cowardice, hatreds, abuses

of power, naïve ignorance and deliberate falsehoods that rage through our culture. Let our vision be clear, our opinions well-informed and our intentions based in your Word.

Speak in our hearts and grant us the peace that passes understanding, so that we may know in our deepest selves that whether we live or die, we are yours, and you will never leave us.

Hymn 470 There's a Wideness in God's Mercy

There's a wideness in God's mercy like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in his justice, which is more than liberty.
There is welcome for the sinner, and more graces for the good;
There is mercy with the Savior; there is healing in his blood.

There is no place where earth's sorrows are more felt than up in heaven;
There is no place where earth's failings have such kindly judgment given.
There is plentiful redemption in the blood that has been shed;
There is joy for all the members in the sorrows of the Head.

For the love of God is broader than the measure of the mind;
And the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.
If our love were but more faithful, we should take God at his word;
And our life would be thanksgiving for the goodness of the Lord.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ti_3-cSqdPc

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7D-TMl1bdSE>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zy_-12RDEVM

Now, let us bid farewell for now to set out on the good roads that lie before us. Let us continually ask how the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts compare with God's Love Commandment. May we accept God's blessing and may that gift be evident in our every action, this day and always. **Amen.**