

The Sunday Missive – July 4, 2021
The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

LEVAS Hymn 189 – Great is thy faithfulness Vss. 1 & 2

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with thee;
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not,
As thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed thy hand hath provided,
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness,
To thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

The Collect of the Day

O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

A reading from the prophecy of Ezekiel, Chapter 2, verses 1-7

He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, "Thus says the Lord God." Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.

And you, O mortal, do not be afraid of them, and do not be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns surround you and you live among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words, and do not be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. You shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear; for they are a rebellious house.

Psalm 48

Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised* Upon God's holy mountain,

Beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth* Mount Zion, the city of the great King.

As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts* In the city of our God,

which is established forever.

We ponder your steadfast love, O God, in the midst of your temple* Your name reaches to the

ends of the earth. Your right hand is filled with victory.

Let Mount Zion be glad* Let the towns of Judah rejoice because of your judgments.

Walk about Zion, go all around it, count its towers* Consider well its ramparts; go through its

citadels.

That you may tell the next generation* This is our God forever and ever. He will be our guide

forever.

A reading from Paul's 2nd Letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 12, verses 2-10

I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows— was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of

my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

Hymn 292 -- O Jesus, crowned with all renown

O Jesus, crowned with all renown, since thou the earth hast trod,
Thou reignest and by thee come down henceforth the gifts of God.
Thine is the health and thine the wealth that in our halls abound,
And thine the beauty and the joy with which the years are crowned.

Lord, in their change, let frost and heat, and winds and dews be given;
All fostering power, all influence sweet breathe from the bounteous heaven.
Attemper fair with gentle air the sunshine and the rain,
That kindly earth with timely birth may yield her fruits again:

That we may feed the poor aright, and, gathering round thy throne,
Here, in the holy angel's sight, repay thee of thine own:
That we may praise thee all our days, and with the Father's Name,
And with the Holy Spirit's gifts, the Savior's love proclaim.

The Holy Gospel according to Mark, Chapter 6, verses 1-13

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Who Are We? Independence Day 2021

The Independence Day celebration of our nation is mirrored in countries around the World on days of their own. It is a day for enjoying the good kind of pride: allegiance with our fellow citizens, forbears, traditions and the institutions that make up our identity as a society. It is a day when we remind ourselves of who we claim to be, and celebrate the ideas and events that made us this way. This kind of pride seems to be in woefully short supply these days; there is plenty of the other kind – the kind that makes for division.

Perhaps more than on any other day of the year, it would be good to look at what it is we're celebrating today, the 245th anniversary of our nation's founding, to try and see how the American Enterprise compares with what we value and claim to desire as followers of Jesus and members of the mystical body and blood of Christ.

Hopefully, there will be some kind of correlation between the identity we celebrate as Americans, and the identity we celebrate as Christians. Nobody would willingly want, or admit, let alone claim to be a different person on Sundays than during the rest of the week, so we ought to be able to draw some parallels, we ought to be able to, if not directly bind, at least identify some mutual validities between the two descriptions of ourselves, Americans and Christians.

If we reserve the right to, and enjoy the sensations of self-identifying as both Christians and Americans, on the Fourth of July and any other time of the year, it stands to reason that those two identities must be, at the very least compatible, if not entirely interrelated and mutually supportive. Life is complicated enough without having to take on a new identity every time the calendar, or the mood, or the exigencies of the moment, or Monday morning's duties dictate an advantage to either Christianity or Americanism as the case may be. And of course we understand that all Americans aren't Christians, any more than all Christians are Americans. But today, here, our job is to clean our house, remove the cobwebs and dust bunnies of selfish ideologies, sweep away the tendency we all have: to get excited about what feels good in any given moment, mop down the floors of ugly history and past pain with the cleansers of honest confession, and so clean our house that the grace of God – the mercy of God as today's psalmist so beautifully entreats – may come into us and heal us and allow us a dog's chance of being the kind of folks we would like to be. If we would have any ambition of being healers or leaders on the world stage, through our actions or by our example, in matters of environmental sustainability, human justice or useful technology, our unity must be a fundamental virtue, even as our diversity is our greatest strength. From those to whom much is given, much is expected by God.

Any non-Christians out there who might overhear us here this morning cogitating about how to jibe our Christianity with our patriotism would no doubt be

delighted to know that we were having this conversation. Hopefully they are doing something similar in the context of their spiritual frame of reference. What a back-flipping joy it would be to get to the end of our day, with our Hindu and Muslim and Jewish, etc. sisters and brothers and learn they all admit to having the same questions and conflicts and inconsistencies and frustrations and moral quandaries as do we. We pray that a day will come when we can all gently and freely acknowledge this to one another in the interest of lasting peace, without which we are doomed.

The American Experiment is indeed a prophetic one, however uncertainly, clumsily, hypocritically and poorly realized it may at times seem and it may at times have been. The ideas that everyone is equal, that we all have the same inalienable rights, and that power belongs to the people are truly cherishable ones, because they are charitable ones, as per Jesus' instructions about how to live. We have declared our intention to extend these rights to one another, without prejudice, as an extension of our faith and hope. That declaration stems from the faith that mutual goodness is a behavior that is supported and inspired by a loving God, as lived out in the life of Jesus. There is the hope that, despite all too much evidence to the contrary, things can and will get better if we hang in there, and this faith and hope lead to the charitable ends of treating everybody else the way we would like to be treated – not just in theory, but in the very real practice of a governed, legislated, adjudicated nation.

So say our Declaration and our Constitution. When we fall short of this practice, as we all too often do, we hold up these ideals as goals and try to do better. What we can take from Ezekiel's story today, from the psalmist, from Saint Paul and from our Gospel lesson is the courage of our convictions. Specifically, the moderation that comes from true courage. In each of these passages, the discomfort, the frustration, the fear of failure is acknowledged. But in each case the hero of the story learns from God to persist in the face of disappointment, pain, rejection and falling short. The self-evident truths are enough: prophetic vision, mercy, healing love. If these values are not welcomed and accepted, so be it, they have no less validity.

Our integrity resides in the principles we espouse and the practices we pursue, not in the results of the moment. "Are we really who we say we are?" is the question to ask, not, "Did we succeed in convincing and transforming others today?" This dynamic, diverse and democratic experiment of ours, these United States have a big enough, a tough enough, an important and godly and glorious enough task in being who we claim and want to be, without demanding that others emulate us when and how we say. Because we offer ourselves as a living example, we have to take every pain, make every change, strive continuously for the moderation and humility that go along with that 'all people are created equal' conviction here at home, with all the justice and mercy and charity those words evoke.

We have God's assurance that this is a beautiful and wondrous way to live – in equality. But God knows, and we would do well to remember, that no show is better than its rehearsals, and the best way to celebrate our Declaration of Independence amongst the nations of the world is to live ourselves as we would have others live. Whether or not we call ourselves Christians is not the point; whether we live Christ-ian lives is. More than ever before, the most important quality for nations to have is the same as that for individuals – the awareness that everyone else has a point of view, a frame of reference, a set of convictions of their own. Unless they are based on violence, their validity is equal to ours. What sets us apart, as Christians, and as Americans will always have to be the joyful seriousness with which we intend and attempt to be who it is we say we are. God will take care of the rest.

Hymn 718 -- God of our fathers Vss. 1, 2 & 4

God of our fathers, whose almighty hand
Leads forth in beauty all the starry band
Of shining worlds in splendor through the skies,
Our grateful songs before thy throne arise.

Thy love divine hath led us in the past,
In this free land by thee our lot is cast;
Be thou our ruler, guardian, guide, and stay,
Thy word our law, thy paths our chosen way.

Refresh thy people on their toilsome way,
Lead us from night to never-ending day;
Fill all our lives with love and grace divine,
And glory, laud, and praise be ever thine.

The Prayers of the People

O God of heaven and earth, through Jesus Christ you promise to hear us when we pray to you in faith with thanksgiving, and so we pray for one another, for our families and friends. Thank you for all who care for us. Give us grace to serve Christ by serving our families, our neighbours and our communities; by loving others even as we are loved.

(Silence)

We thank you for the unfailing love you hold out to everyone in Jesus Christ. Comfort those in sorrow, need, sickness or any other trouble, especially Sue, Katherine, Karen, the family and friends of Mitch Gearhart, the family and friends

of Tammie Henderson, are there others? (Silence) Bring healing and peace to all those we hold in our hearts this day. Give them courage and hope in their distress, and bless those who care for them.

(Silence)

We remember with gratitude the bounty of your creation in the natural world and the richness of this land. Help us and people everywhere to share with justice and peace the resources of the earth. Give to those in authority among us and to all leaders of the nations more wisdom, integrity, vision and compassion May their purposes and policies be only and always in the holy name of a healthy and equitable world.

(Silence)

We remember with thanksgiving all who have died in Christ, especially all victims of the Covid pandemic, all victims of gunfire in our land, and those we hold in our hearts, especially Mitch and Tammie. Are there others? (Silence) We rejoice at the faithful witness of your saints in every age, praying that we may enter with them into the unending joy of your heavenly kingdom. **Amen.**

Almighty God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage: We humbly beseech thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of thy favor and glad to do thy will. Bless our land with honorable industry, sound learning, and pure manners. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom in thy name we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in thee to fail. **Amen.**

Hymn 397 – Now thank we all our God

Now thank we all our God, with heart, and hands, and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done, in whom his world rejoices;
Who from our mother's arms hath blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us!
With ever-joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in his grace, and guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given,
The Son, and him who reigns with them in highest heaven,
Eternal, Triune God, whom earth and heaven adore;
For thus it was, is now, and shall be, evermore.

Hymn 455 - O love of God, how strong and true

O love of God, how strong and true, eternal and yet ever new;
Uncomprehended and unbought, beyond all knowledge and all thought.

O wide-embracing, wondrous Love, we read thee in the sky above;
We read thee in the earth below, in seas that swell and streams that flow.

We read thee best in him who came to bear for us the cross of shame,
Sent by the Father from on high, our life to live, our death to die.

We read thy power to bless and save, e'en in the darkness of the grave;
Still more in resurrection light we read the fullness of thy might.

Now may the great and gracious God, who brings together what is scattered and mends what is broken, unite us with the scattered peoples of the earth that we may know we are one family with all Creation. May all our wounds may be bound up and our spirits made strong, that we might be healers in a suffering world. And may the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer be with you and those you love this day and remain with you always. **Amen.**