

The Sunday Missive -- June 27, 2021
The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Opening Hymn 559 Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us, for we have no help but thee,
Yet possessing every blessing, if our God our Father be.

Savior, breathe forgiveness o'er us; all our weakness thou dost know;
Thou didst tread this earth before us; thou didst feel its keenest woe;
Yet unfearing, persevering, to thy passion thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending, fill our hearts with heavenly joy;
Love with every passion blending pleasure that can never cloy;
Thus provided, pardoned, guided, nothing can our peace destroy.

The Collect of the Day

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the
apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone:
Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we
may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our
Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever
and ever. *Amen.*

First Lesson -- 2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27

After the death of Saul, when David had returned from defeating the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag. On the third day, a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. When he came to David, he fell to the ground and did obeisance. David said to him, "Where have you come from?" He said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel." David said to him, "How did things go? Tell me!" He answered, "The army fled from the battle, but also many of the army fell and died; and Saul and his son Jonathan also died." Then David asked the young man who was reporting to him, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan died?" The young man reporting to him said, "I happened to be on Mount Gilboa; and there was Saul leaning on his spear, while the chariots and the horsemen drew close to him. When he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. I answered, 'Here sir.' And he said to me, 'Who are you?' I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite.' He said to me, 'Come, stand

over me and kill me; for convulsions have seized me, and yet my life still lingers.' So I stood over him, and killed him, for I knew that he could not live after he had fallen. I took the crown that was on his head and the armlet that was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord."

Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them; and all the men who were with him did the same. They mourned and wept, and fasted until evening for Saul and for his son Jonathan, and for the army of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. David said to the young man who had reported to him, "Where do you come from?" He answered, "I am the son of a resident alien, an Amalekite." David said to him, "Were you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" Then David called one of the young men and said, "Come here and strike him down." So he struck him down and he died. David said to him, "Your blood be on your head; for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the Lord's anointed.'"

David intoned this lamentation over Saul and his son Jonathan. (He ordered that The Song of the Bow be taught to the people of Judah; it is written in the Book of Jashar.) He said: Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places! How the mighty have fallen! Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon; or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice, the daughters of the uncircumcised will exult. You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor bounteous fields! For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, anointed with oil no more. From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, nor the sword of Saul return empty. Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you with crimson, in luxury, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel. How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain upon your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

Psalm 30

I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up* And did not let my foes rejoice over me.

O Lord my God, I cried to you for help* And you have healed me.

O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol* Restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.

Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones* And give thanks to his holy name.

For his anger is but for a moment* His favor is for a lifetime.

Weeping may linger for the night* But joy comes with the morning.

By your favor, O Lord, you had established me as a strong mountain* You hid your face; I was dismayed.

To you, O Lord, I cried* And to the Lord I made supplication:

Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me* O Lord, be my helper!"

You have turned my mourning into dancing* You have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,

So that my soul may praise you and not be silent* O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

Second Lesson -- 2 Corinthians 8:7-15

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints— and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you.

Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking. I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for

your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something— now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.”

Hymn 707 Take my life and let it be

Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee;
Take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of thy love;
Take my heart, it is thine own; it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King;
Take my intellect, and use every power as thou shalt choose.
Take my will and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine.
Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.

The Holy Gospel -- Mark 5:21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.”

So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was

healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Take Some and Pass It

Today's readings give us a highly-focused snapshot of biblical storytelling. We hear how lessons are learned from events, historical or legendary, and how that meaning-making developed as our scriptures were formed over time. The pervasive violence that characterizes so many of our texts cannot be brushed aside as metaphorical or stylistic. In order to make sense of our foundational narratives, we must struggle with a basic truth: interpersonal violence is at the core of the human experience. Life is understood as struggle. Throughout history, there are the do-ers and the done-to. Breaking free of this paradigm is the fundamental enterprise of any spiritual life and any sustainable society.

One human strategy for dealing with pain is to pass it along. Growing up, we even practice our technique. Perhaps you might recall the schoolyard game of "pass it," wherein a punch on the upper arm – also known as a noogie – or a clamp on the leg just above the knee (charleyhorse) is almost

worth enduring because then you get to find someone to pass it along to. This was not my favorite game. I tried to avoid it. The only people who really enjoyed it were the ones who were big, and who gave much better – or worse -- than they got; causing pain in outsized proportion to that which they received.

A permutation of this phenomenon of “pass it” occurs in our emotional lives too. What begins as schoolyard *shadenfreude* – pleasure derived from another’s pain (in the bicep or the thigh muscle) -- devolves into the proclivity the poet Louise Gluck observes: “Sometimes a man forces his despair on another person.” Finding outlets for one’s emotional pain becomes habitual, and can afford a bitter form of pleasure. But it is fleeting, this pleasure, fruitless and sad, a “gift that keeps on taking,” like those subscriptions for something or other a month, somethings that we didn’t need in the first place and never seem to satisfy us. A vicious cycle develops: the fear of losing out, the anticipation of gratification and disappointment when things fall short. It becomes an addiction to pain from which it is difficult indeed to break free.

Like it or not, all of human society has been experiencing extraordinary levels of discomfort, sorrow and despair these days. Quite apart from the march of history, which contains plenty of developments, both encouraging and awful for us to consider, and whose narratives are today so immediately available via satellite that we are forced to process them immediately, the Covid pandemic has brought about a heavy global case of the blues. And true to Ms. Gluck’s observation one way lots of us have been dealing with this pain is by trying to deflect it onto others. Our worldwide depression has been accompanied by rampant and widespread actings-out.

In our cities and in the countryside, various forms of violence have been seen in frighteningly greater numbers than ever before. Hate crimes and explosions of homicidal brutality dominate the news. Violence is how human beings react to grief, frustration and the pressures of problems we can’t even address, let alone solve.

This week, the novelist Francine Prose tells of a trip to the grocery store where she lives and having a stranger threaten to beat up her and her husband in the checkout area for some perceived slight. Her husband, en route to return an unwanted item, had brushed past him. “The man announced that he was going outside to wait for us and – screaming, snarling, raising his fists – stared at us through the window. Was I surprised that a muscular guy in his 30s was threatening to punch out two

grandparents? The woman behind the checkout counter wasn't. She said, 'Stuff like this happens every few days.' In fact, not long before, in another supermarket, another city, an elderly man raged and shouted at me, claiming that I was standing too close, and the cashier said, 'He comes in here and does this all the time.'"

"One wonders," Prose asks, "where all this free-floating fury is coming from, exactly. In our hurry to return to life as we knew it before 2020, some of us have begun to behave as if nothing unusual or disturbing had occurred. On Saturday nights, in bars and restaurants, the massive collective traumas that our nation has just experienced –the pandemic and the 6 January Capitol insurrection – might almost seem like figments of our collective imagination.

I'm not saying we want to relive the grief and isolation of lockdown; I'm not suggesting we live in fear of the next big bad thing. But forgotten trauma is the equivalent of an untreated wound – that's Psychology 101. The ICU wards are quieter, for which we can be grateful. But at moments it seems as if we, as a nation, are suffering a societal nervous breakdown, a mass episode of amnesia.

Let's be clear: something terrible and destabilizing happened to us, and something like it, or something else, might well happen again. For millions of Americans, there has been little or no recovery, and for them the new normal is an ongoing state of panic. No matter what the charts show, people are still unemployed or fending off the creditors unleashed by the wreckage of their businesses.

Thinking about it that way," Prose concludes, "I'm slightly less astonished that the neighborhood supermarket, the place where we go to find the necessities for our families and our future, an ordinarily pleasant place where ordinary humans gather, should have become, in this new normal, the new arena for combat."

But those of us on the receiving end of others' deflected despair can – with heartbreaking exceptions -- choose our responses. We can avoid and even sometimes escape, both by declining to engage, and by steadfastly refusing to deflect our own hurts onto others. We can adopt habitual responses of our own to others' attempts at making us feel their hurts. We can develop alchemies of love that transform despair just as fast as it comes, into hope.

Our spiritual ancestor David is so powerful in the narrative tradition because he embodies the breadth of human response. He is us, making

mistakes in truly balanced proportion to his successes. His mistakes include the passing along of his pain and despair, of which today's story is a glowing, not to say blinding example.

So the man comes with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. Regarding Saul and Jonathan, he's on the same page as David, grief-wise. And yet, David exercises his own pain – passes it along -- by having the man killed. By the way, David hadn't been all that nice to Saul to begin with. So it wasn't just sorrow, but a poisonous blend of sorrow and guilt, with soupcons of self-doubt and fear of the future that set David's head in a homicidal whirl. Don't forget this is the same David whose instincts, run rampant, already have balked at the investigation of his treatment of Bathsheba's husband Uriah who, as you know, ended up in a heap.

So why isn't David consigned to the rogues' gallery of biblical history for all his sins? It is because he becomes aware of this proclivity for forcing despair on others, for scapegoating the weak, for taking emotional as well as physical hostages to absorb his pain. He becomes aware of it and tries to change it. David is a hero to us, not for his great deeds of war alone, but for his desire to change his toxic reactions. Witnessing David's struggle to break the cycle of "pass the pain; give it to the powerless," a struggle that we ourselves share, gives us hope for our own liberation.

Eventually David comes to realize that passing along pain does not work. Not only are the scapegoats we choose able to deflect our despair by cultivating hope of their own, when we afflict the innocent, we get no satisfaction from it. Our pain comes back to us, sooner or later, in one form or another and usually worse than before. David's violent treatment of the Amalekite messenger condemns, not the Amalekite, but David himself. It's not what you do when you're flying high that matters, but how you behave when you're down. Those who are happy and healthy have no need of a physician but those who are sick.

As we approach our nation's anniversary, we can use King David's treatment of the Amalekite to reflect on our own world. We can try to develop the habit of holding a glass to our own relationships and taking responsibility for our own fears. And we can consider our society in the same light, in how we think, how we talk, and how we vote, ever seeking to bring an end to the scapegoating, stereotyping, marginalization and cowardice that place the burdens of our struggles and failures on those who are least responsible for them. The kind of cowardice that leads to those pointless, ineffective but all too real attacks we have been reading about.

Indeed, these acts, however horrifying, are but pointless, ineffective moments in the ongoing struggle for civility, a struggle we believe will be successful someday. Being part of the life of the community means opening our doors with the words "All are welcome" and opening our arms with the words, "You are welcome." It means working to address issues of injustice and poverty with tools of service and love. Being part of the life of the community for a Christian means continually meeting the poisonous spirit, the violent acts and the ungodly language of hatred and passed-along pain with neighbor love, with the peace that passes mere understanding, with the spirit of truth, and with language of justice, mercy and humility; meeting them with acts of selfless kindness instead.

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, 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 especially this day the truths of our nation's past. We open our hearts to examine, listen and understand the terrible trauma caused by human slavery and genocide in our past and to end the ongoing tragedies,

injustices and falsehoods that keep our society so shamefully and violently divided. (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. 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.

Hymn 525 -- The Church's one foundation

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is his new creation by water and the word:
From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride;
With his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.

Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war
She waits the consummation of peace for evermore;
Till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blessed,
And the great Church victorious shall be the Church at rest.

Yet she on earth hath union with God, the Three in One,
And mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won.

O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we
Like them, the meek and lowly, on high may dwell with thee.

And now may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. And may God give you peace in your going out and in your coming in, in your lying down and in your rising up, in your labor and in your leisure, in your laughter and in your tears. And thus, the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer be with you this day and remain with you forever. ***Amen.***

