

The Sunday Missive – March 14, 2021



faithful great pyrenees shepherd keeping watch over his flock

The Fourth Sunday in Lent

Greetings, one and all, and welcome home to St. Peter's by the Sea. Janis Johnson, Nancy Castle, Diane and Roger Ludin, Mary Sue Gee 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, March 14. 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 The Rev. Sidney Symington via: (203) 209-2339 or sssymington@gmail.com.

Let us pray:

Lord, you know what it is like to be alone and be afraid. You know what it is like to be sent where you did not want to go. And so we pray for those who are returning to their workplaces. And we pray especially for those who are returning to places which now hold memories of sickness, of trauma, of pain. Walk ahead of them and walk beside them. And especially we ask, with your loving gaze, watch over them. **Amen.**

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Hymn 448 O Love How Deep, How Broad, How High Vss. 1, 3 & 6

O love, how deep, how broad, how high, how passing thought and fantasy,
That God, the Son of God, should take our mortal form for mortals' sake!

For us he prayed; for us he taught; for us his daily works he wrought:
By words and signs and actions, thus still seeking not himself, but us.

All glory to our Lord and God for love so deep, so high, so broad;
The Trinity whom we adore forever and forevermore.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNQXxwjOp-A>

A Reading from the First Book of Samuel, Chapter Sixteen

The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither

has the Lord chosen this one." Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. This is the word of the Lord.

Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd* I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures* He leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul* He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil* For thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies* Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life* And I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

A Reading from The Letter to the Ephesians, Chapter 5

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." This is the Word of the Lord.

Anthem: The Greatest Gift Is Love Mark Hayes and Beth Rice Luttrell

Arranged by Craig Courtney – Mary Sue Gee, Soprano

Though I speak with tongues of angels, though my voice is touched with gold,
Without love -- each word is discord, clanging brass and cymbals bold.

Though I know as much as prophets, though my faith is strong and sure,
Without love -- these are as nothing, neither words nor work endure.

Though I give my goods to others, and my flesh I give to burn,
Without love -- each gift is worthless, till the gift of love I learn.

Love is always kind and patient, neither jealous, boastful, rude;
Neither selfish nor conceited, but with every grace imbued.

Love releases all resentment, takes no pleasure in the wrong,
Love finds truth delightful always, and endures what comes along.

Though not easily offended, love is eager to forgive,
Always trusting, always hoping, precious love will always live.

In a world that is imperfect, many gifts will pass away;
Faith and hope and love are endless, these and these alone will stay.

To a world where all is changing, comes this promise from above,
Faith and hope will last forever, but the greatest gift is love

Faith and hope will last forever, but the greatest gift is love.

A Reading from The Gospel according to John, Chapter Nine

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

They brought the man to the Pharisees. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. They too began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided.

So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about the man Jesus? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet." The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called his parents and asked them, "Is this your son? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the leaders of the synagogue, who had already declared that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this Jesus is a sinner." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"

Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, he asked the man, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "Who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus

said to him, "You have seen him; the one speaking with you is he." The man said, "Lord, I believe." And as he worshiped Jesus, Jesus said to him, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you acknowledged your blindness, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains. This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Homily by Nancy Castle

The last time we spoke, it was about giving birth to Yeshua. Oh, I could tell you more stories about that time, the sweetness of his smell; the awe on people's faces when they looked at him. He was a wonderful child, hardly cried, content to watch us, or an animal, or even just simply stare at the skies above. I sang the psalms to him from infancy, accompanied at first by his contented gurgles then by his grasp of words.

Joseph and I stayed in Bethlehem with his kin, as the family had work in Jerusalem and Joseph's skills were an asset to their trades. That is, until Yeshua was nearly two, when Joseph was directed by the Angel of the Lord to take us to Egypt, out of reach of the murderous Herod. We left in haste, remaining in Egypt for years in an enclave, where I joined the women working to care for our families: gathering the produce of gardens and fields, getting water, cooking the food, spinning and weaving.

Joseph was a good father, teaching Yeshua bits of scripture as soon as he could speak and of course we observed all of the customs, including keeping the Sabbath holy. While we were there, we had another child, James. Yeshua was so sweet with his little brother, sharing the bits of scripture he was learning, even though the baby was too young to understand.

When Herod died, we made our way back home, back to Nazareth. Oh, it was so good to see my family, to join our kin. The rhythm of life was satisfying, Joseph was a valued craftsman, water was plentiful from the wells and the landscape provided ample grains and vegetables to keep us fed.

Our family grew, as I gave birth every year or so. Yeshua learned Joseph's crafts, being an able help in the workshop and on local jobsites. He was still so good with the children, patiently teaching them scripture and God's ways and creating plays with them of the Bible stories. He loved attending the synagogue school, earning the praise of his teachers for his dedication.

When he was twelve, we travelled with the family to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem. Many, many of our kin were going, so we trusted there were many eyes to watch the children. Even though it was a long trip, the whole journey felt like a

festival. That is why it was so heartrending to realize Yeshua was not with us when we stopped the first night after leaving Jerusalem. The pain of the missing child reverberated through the camp as everyone felt responsible. Joseph and I left quickly to return to Jerusalem, retracing our steps, joined by several of our kinsmen.

As we walked around the Temple, we heard his voice before we saw him. His reedy, thin, high voice, speaking with such authority, juxtaposed with the deep resonance of the elders as they questioned him. I was struck deeply at that moment. Cleaved with awareness. Oh, yes, I could never forget for a moment the truth of his birth, those words of glory spoken by the visitors after it. But in the very normalcy of our life in Nazareth, I'd let the magnificence of it recede. In fact, it was my very behavior, that of a mother with a disobedient child, and his almost chilling response of "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" that the clarity of the difference of this child was again revealed to me. That he knew things that no others knew and that he would share what he knew with others. This was what I treasured in my heart.

Time passed. Joseph and I had our last child, Simon, just before Joseph died. Yeshua was a good first son, taking Joseph's place in educating his brothers and sisters. He taught his brothers the trade skills, sharing space in the workshop with them. He was grateful for the help, for he had a deep need to go off by himself for periods of time, in prayer and contemplation.

After many seasons, we began to hear about his cousin John making a name by baptizing people in the river Jordan. After another period of seclusion and prayer, Yeshua gathered our family together to tell us he was leaving to do his Father's work, turning over his family responsibilities to his eldest brother, James. Soon word came that when Yeshua had risen from the water in baptism "a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

We learned that he had a settlement in Capernaum, and that he travelled around, teaching in synagogues to high praise; healing the ill and the maimed and casting out many demons. He returned to Nazareth to be horribly misunderstood and maligned. He was routed from the synagogue, barely escaping with his life.

Not long after, I decided to go to Capernaum, taking my daughters and youngest sons, leaving James and his wife in our home in Nazareth. I longed to hear Yeshua teach and knew that I could help him with his ministry. The settlement land was provided by the kindness of a patron and we joined a vital and growing compound of Yeshua's followers.

I worked with the women preparing food for the compound and for the numerous individuals and groups who came to learn and to help. The preparation of bread was,

and still is, a constant task. And bread is the heart of the family. No wonder Yeshua identified himself as the “bread of life.”

We went into the fields to gather the grains. We liked the wheat, but barley was more plentiful, so we often made barley bread. When Yeshua fed the 5000, it was with barley bread that had come from our fires. We had sent the boys up the hillside with baskets of bread and smoked fish, but by the time they reached the disciples, only one boy had any bread and fish left. We all know what Yeshua was able to do with those physically, and know also that many were touched by the ‘bread of life’ that was inherent in his teaching.

I began to travel with Yeshua on occasion, joining the disciples and followers. At other times, I would be among those who welcomed him to Capernaum where he would stay, speaking at the synagogue, teaching, and traveling in the region.

I was with him when he found the man who had been cleansed of blindness, asking him if he believed, explaining, for his sake and the sake of the Pharisees who were nearby, that once one has seen, one cannot pretend that they have not seen. I could tell the Pharisees’ did not like that.

As the months went on, Yeshua caused many wondrous things to happen: raising Lazarus from the dead, healing the man with the withered hand, allowing the believing of the centurion to heal the slave and calling for the widow’s son to rise. Many were cured of evil spirits and many, many more events occurred, so the word of Yeshua’s power and grace travelled far and wide.

It is no wonder that the Pharisees were out to get him. His followers were becoming too numerous and his behaviors too radical. Throwing the money changers and dove sellers out of the Temple! Accepting people of all classes: prostitutes, tax collectors, lepers and poor people; even Gentiles! Jerusalem became too dangerous for him, so we sojourned to Galilee, continuing to spread the word.

Then that fateful Passover Festival. His followers, all the kin and friends of Lazarus and so many more sweeping him into Jerusalem with palm fronds. So many people that the officials couldn’t risk arresting him at that point without starting a riot.

Yet we knew, I knew, that things had changed. That the hour was come. Our Passover meal in the upper room was pivotal to the change. Yeshua teaching by doing: everyone should wash the feet if the feet need washing. His gravity, and gentleness, as he made ceremony with bread and wine.

And that bread! I’d made it myself, kneading the dough and setting aside the portion for tomorrow’s starter. Watching him, hearing him, being with him, my heart rent like

it was the bread being separated under my hands. Yeshua telling us what was going to happen, but the enormity and the horror of the coming violence crippled our ability to hear the larger message: this was God's plan for redemption of the world.

That farce of a trial, Pilate, that old rogue, trying to weasel out of making a commitment and the priestly bunch stoking the crowd, probably with paid skills salted in the throng. It still rings in my ears: "Crucify him! Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Crucified him.

Then, a mere three days later, the wonder of His resurrection, as He had promised. Mary Magdalene's testimony: "I have seen the Lord!" so moving and so relieving. The disciples saw him, too, as he appeared to groups of them in different places. I prayed secretly, selfishly, in my heart, that I would 'see' him in the flesh one more time.

All of us were gathered again in the Upper Room, sharing the evening meal when there He was, standing among us, never to be apart again. He sat with us at the table, blessing the fish and the bread, bringing Himself into every morsel, causing incandescent bursts of light in our mouths and through our beings. If any of us had mud still clinging to our eyes, it fell away now, as by amazing grace, we knew we were found. We could see that through the Son, we are truly one with God.

Prayers

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 true stewards of your creation. Show us ways to spread the gospel that will touch hearts and change minds for a better tomorrow for all humanity, the preservation of every creature, and our precious and fragile planet. ***Amen.***

Gracious Creator, giver of life and health: Comfort and relieve all who are ill and suffering this day, especially those we name now, silently in our hearts or fervently with our voices. Give your power of healing to those who minister to their needs, that all for whom our prayers are offered may be strengthened in their weakness and have confidence in your loving care. ***Amen.***

Look with mercy, O God our Father, on all whose increasing years bring them weakness, distress, or isolation. Provide for them homes of dignity and peace; give

them understanding helpers, and the willingness to accept help; and, as their strength diminishes, increase their faith and their assurance of your love. **Amen.**

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will be in the midst of them: Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. **Amen.**

Hymn 671 Amazing Grace Vss. 1, 2 & 4

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace first taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come;
'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpUAu54Jzj4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJi-uKOLLV4>

Now, may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify God and care for all Creation. And the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer be amongst you and remain with you always. **Amen.**