

The Sunday Missive – March 21, 2021



look -- we are wysterious again
they'll be in full bloom when we return on palm sunday

The Fifth Sunday in Lent

Greetings, one and all, and welcome home to St. Peter's by the Sea. Thelma Huchthausen, 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 21. 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 alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Hymn 439 – What Wondrous Love is This!

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss
To lay aside his crown for my soul, for my soul,
To lay aside his crown for my soul!

To God and to the Lamb I will sing, I will sing,
To God and to the Lamb I will sing.
To God and to the Lamb, who is the great I Am
While millions join the theme, I will sing, I will sing,
While millions join the theme, I will sing!

And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on,
And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on.
And when from death I'm free I'll sing and joyful be,
And through eternity I'll sing on, I'll sing on,
And through eternity I'll sing on!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsVnvN3EVxY>

A Reading from the Prophecy of Jeremiah – Chapter 31

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of humans and the seed of animals. And just as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow and destroy, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord. In those days they shall no longer say: “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge.

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the

covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. This is the Word of the Lord.

Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love* According to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity* And cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions* And my sin is ever before me.

Against you, you alone, have I sinned* And done what is evil in your sight

So that you are justified in your sentence* And blameless when you pass judgment.

You desire truth in the inward being* Therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean* Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Create in me a clean heart, O God* And put a new and right spirit within me.

Do not cast me away from your presence* And do not take your holy spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation* And sustain in me a willing spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways* And sinners will return to you.

Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation* And my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

O Lord, open my lips* And my mouth will declare your praise.

A Reading from The Letter to the Hebrews - Chapter 5

Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one

does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my son, today I have begotten you"; as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was divine, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who follow and obey him. This is the Word of the Lord.

LEVAS Hymn 87 – More Love to Thee O Christ

More love to thee, O Christ, more love to thee!
Hear thou the prayer I make on bended knee;
This is my earnest plea: more love, O Christ, to thee,
More love to thee, more love to thee!

Once earthly joy I craved, sought peace and rest;
Now thee alone I seek, give what is best;
This all my prayer shall be: more love, O Christ, to thee,
More love to thee, more love to thee!

Then shall my every breath sing out thy praise;
This be the only song my heart shall raise;
This still my prayer shall be: more love, O Christ, to thee,
More love to thee, more love to thee!

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

A Reading from The Gospel according to John – Chapter 12

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very

truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say, ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

The crowd answered him, “We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.” After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid himself from them. This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Where are we on the learning curve of faith? As we approach the final days of Lent, with all the somber and arresting narratives that go with Holy Week, a good depth-sounding measure of our Lenten experience might be this: Where are we on the learning curve of faith? Because no matter how many metaphors we use the point of this exercise is to do what that old gospel song says: “Look at yourself then you can look at others differently. (Put your hand in the hand of the man from Galilee.)” That’s what we’re supposed to be doing this time of year, looking at ourselves a bit, so we can look at others differently, i.e: with more compassion. Not to achieve some kind of perfection, but to learn better who we are, where we are on the curve, and how we are responding to the opportunities and gifts that God is putting before us.

By next Sunday, we will be caught up in the beautiful and, let’s face it distracting dramas of Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter. The special time for us to be quietly, personally accountable is just about over for this go-round, but today is the Sunday when we can have our own mini-Passion -- our own private Gethsemane if you will – a day when there is nothing else going on, narratively speaking, except our own relationship to the deity.

So what is God offering us today in terms of direction and encouragement along our road to happy destiny? Jeremiah, for starters, offers a wondrous revelation of how far God is willing to go to meet us on this road. The Hebrew Bible is full of covenants -- Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob who is Israel, Moses – but none of them is as simply powerful and sublime as this one: Stop thinking. We now know what we need to know to live according to God’s plan. God is written on our hearts. From now on, there will be no lack of assurance of God’s presence, no matter what. That’s good news. It resembles the way we work and pay to have fresh water in this country, or electricity when we want it, or our highways; God’s Word will always be with us, “even unto the end of the age.”

We are not personally accountable for how the World will turn out; that is God’s bailiwick. But we are required to examine and develop and enjoy our relationship with God. Not total responsibility, but certainly the ability to respond. And the obligation to self-investigate; that is our business. The psalmist gives us the beautiful metaphors for how this cleansing might work:

Wash me, cleanse me, teach me wisdom. Create in me a clean heart, and put a new and right spirit within me. Restore me, sustain me, deliver me, O God of my salvation and I will sing aloud of your deliverance. All of these were in the psalm we just read together. Our pursuit of a relationship of loving and accountable relationship to the Creator, indeed to all Creation results in spiritual understanding, emotional well-being and social obligation in lives free of ultimate responsibility for all our failures to be perfect. God was trying to offer us this way back in the time of Jeremiah. God offered us this some more in God’s divine humanity in Christ. God is offering us this same bargain – and I mean it’s a bargain – today.

What was Jesus doing on the cross? Why did he die? We use the word sacrifice, but we tend to use it quite differently than the people who first wrote down these stories. We emphasize the death of something, the forfeiture of life: destruction of someone as the price of escape from disaster for someone else. It’s like a hostage situation: Give us your friend Jesus and we won’t condemn you all. What kind of god would make such a demand? The ancients understood that we all die. Everything alive dies. If Jesus was human, that is the reason Jesus died, period. When the ancients performed a sacrifice, it was a way of releasing life, so that many might benefit. When Jesus says “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit,” this is what he is talking about – not a price of destruction, but a means of life. The healthy seed and its nutrition for our lives.

The question of why Jesus dies is moot. He dies because he is human – that’s part of the deal. What we’re talking about is how Jesus dies. How does his death reflect his

relationship with the deity? Where is Jesus on the faith learning curve? Are there clues about how we should die? About how we should live? These are questions we can spend this last Sunday of Lent examining if we will: What do we know that's worth dying for? As always we hold in our hearts the loved ones and friends and neighbors who have gone off to war or stayed home in service and died for their duty. Even as we love and honor their memory, none of us wants, or wants our children to join them.

For most of us, the job is to demonstrate that for which we would die by refining that for which we live. Our relationship to God, the measure of our faith, our place on the faith curve, if you will, is determined by the choices we make along the road. We have been given, written on our hearts, the causes, the means, the methods of living for those things for which we would die if we had to. Our hope does not lie in never having to beg the question. Our hope lies in the promise of God to stay with us either way, no matter how well we succeed.

A dear friend once had a dog named Ozzie. One day she brought home a toy for Ozzie, a stuffed camel of some kind. Ozzie took to that camel immediately. When the time came for dinner, Ozzie came downstairs and began chomping away at his kibble in the kitchen corner. Suddenly he stopped. He trotted out of the room and up the stairs. A few minutes later, Ozzie returned with Mr. Camel in his mouth, put him down by the dog bowl, and finished his dinner. Ozzie just wanted his new friend with him all the time. That dog knew what we all too frequently forget: If we make the effort, God will stay with us through whatever we undergo. All we really have to do for sure is keep the image of our never-failing, ever new companion close at hand. "Know this: I am with you always, even unto the end of the age."

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.**

Give us understanding, O Lord our God, to know thy ways; open our hearts to welcome you, and forgive us so that we may be redeemed. Keep us far from sorrow; satisfy our needs on the produce of your land, and gather our scattered loved ones from the four corners of the earth. Let those who go astray be judged according to your will. And wave your hand over the wicked. Let the righteous rejoice in the building of your kingdom and in the nourishment of your church. Even before we call, you answer, O God; blessed are you who hearken unto prayer. **Amen.**

Hymn 473 -- Lift High the Cross Vss. 1, 2 & 4

Lift High the cross, the love of Christ proclaim till all the world adore his sacred name.

Led on their way by this triumphant sign, the hosts of God in conquering ranks combine.

Each newborn servant of the crucified bears on the brow the seal of him who died.

So shall our song of triumph ever be: praise to the crucified for victory.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHXrvDTG_eY&t=36s

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.**

