

Trinity Sunday, May 30, 2021

Hymn 362 -- Holy, holy, holy

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee:
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy Name, in earth, and sky, and sea;
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

Almighty and everlasting God, you have given to us your servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of your divine Majesty to worship the Unity: Keep us steadfast in this faith and worship, and bring us at last to see you in your one and eternal glory, O Father; who with the Son and the Holy Spirit live and reign, one God, forever and ever. *Amen.*

First Lesson: Isaiah 6:1-8 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

And he said, "Go and say to this people: 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.' Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed." Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate; until the Lord sends everyone far away, and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land. Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump.

Psalm 29 Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings* Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory of God's name* Worship the Lord in holy splendor.

The voice of the Lord is over the waters* The God of glory thunders over mighty waters.

The voice of the Lord is powerful* The voice of the Lord is full of majesty.

The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars* The Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

Who makes Lebanon skip like a calf* And Sirion like a young wild ox.

The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness* The Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare* And in God's temple all say, "Glory!"

The Lord sits enthroned over the flood* The Lord sits enthroned as ruler forever.

May the Lord give strength to the people* May the Lord bless the people with peace!

Second Lesson: Romans 8:12-25 So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into

fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Hymn 812 -- I, the Lord of sea and sky

I, the Lord of sea and sky; I have heard my people cry
All who dwell in dark and sin my hand will save.
I who made the stars of night; I will make their darkness bright;
Who will bear my light to them; whom shall I send?

Here I am, Lord; is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night
I will go, Lord if You lead me; I will hold your people in my heart

I, the Lord of wind and flame; I will tend the poor and lame
I will set a feast for them; my hand will save
Finest bread I will provide, ‘til their hearts be satisfied
I will give my life to them; whom shall I send?

The Holy Gospel: John 3:1-17 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one

can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

We have trouble defining God. We can't seem to do it directly; we tell stories and think up metaphors that help us communicate with one another about what God means to our lives: God is the spirit of our lives, the source of our being. Like life itself, God is our greatest joy and our greatest fear. God both creates and judges. Life both begins and ends. It's impossible to describe directly; we gotta go through the door of metaphor. Unfortunately, this business of synthesizing God through metaphor also brings out the rebellious and self-destructive parts of our nature too. Isaiah's prophecy shows God allowing humankind to 'listen, but not comprehend, and look, but not understand. We are dull, our ears are stopped, and eyes shut, so that we may not comprehend and turn and be healed.' There is abundant evidence before us of what must be done to save and nurture our people, our cities and our land, but we cannot bring ourselves to admit the evidence and take appropriate healing, restorative action. We keep our pride, our guns, our violent behaviour towards each other and our planet, then we throw up our hands and demand to know, "How long, O Lord?"

Do we really want to wait 'until our cities lie in waste without inhabitants, and the land is utterly desolate; until the Lord sends everyone far away, and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land? Are all of us really counting on being the last minute remnant? The scripture readings today contain a

number of amazing metaphors. The hem of God's robe fills the entire temple, with angels surrounding God's presence, each one with six wings. God's power to make us new is so miraculous that we can have our mouths touched by a live coal and be, not burned but healed. But will we ever say yes to it?

The voice of God takes on a human personality in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, and the metaphor merges with reality. An actual man becomes a metaphor and vice versa. The story becomes a reality, and then turns back into a story, it's a story that we tell each other over and over and which never loses its power: For God so loved the World that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

According to this story line, life and God are no longer by turns fearsome and fascinating, they are both potentially good and joyful. The violent metaphors are set aside, perhaps because God can see they tend to make us, not humble and compassionate, but rather fiercely intent on winning everything, in the physical plane. But as St. Paul insists, we have no future unless we become determined to set our minds on treasures of the spirit. If we insist on staying literal, we will always remain limited, and miserable. But if we become spiritual, renouncing our desire to dominate others, anything and everything becomes possible. We all know we all die. But if death does not get the final say, then joy can push out our fear and we become able to love freely; we can be "all in," as poker players say in the movies, but without risk. Because we're working for the house.

One reason it's hard to be a spiritual person is that although every deep truth about God is best expressed metaphorically, every deep metaphor is not about God. That's why the first commandment is the first commandment. If you saw even one episode of Mad Men on television, you know what I mean. The story takes place in a time when people selling products discovered just how powerful and manipulative deep metaphors can be in getting people to buy things, whether they can afford them (financially or nutritionally) or not. Our media are now filled with strangely captivating advertisements – aimed scientifically at each of us personally -- that have us sentimental and happy and excited without knowing why. Why is because they are bursting with barely concealed imitations of God metaphors, tailored to our individual story lines – our conceptions of good.

Take one of the most amazing examples: the selling of sodapop – soft drink is the euphemism, that all too many folks in America will not go without. In

1963 we were extolled to “Come alive! (because we were) in the Pepsi Generation.” In other words, we could become part of that less-than-a-tenth who survive Isaiah’s prophesied destruction; part of the new generation, simply by drinking Pepsi!

By 1971, the World’s most successful beverage company by far was – in song -- claiming the same powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men – the same goals as God’s very self:

I’d like to buy the world a home, and furnish it with love
Grow apple trees and honey bees and snow white turtle doves.

I’d like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony
I’d like to buy the world a Coke and keep it company
That’s the real thing. What the world wants today is the real thing.

Now that’s chutzpah. Also idolatry. Only God is the real thing. The rest of us exist in brief windows of time. We fill the time up with our stories, our metaphors, our justifications and rationalizations for selfish, unjust and violent behaviors -- personally, corporately, nationally -- and then demand to know of God: “How long, until we are happy and free?”

Here from 1974 we have what rivals John’s Gospel for paradoxical wonder and theological complexity:

“It’s the nothing that makes us something; it’s what we miss that hits the mark. It’s what left out that leaves us in; it’s the light shining over the dark. Un for all; all for Un. 7up, the Uncola.”

This may not be evil, but it is pretty tricky. They had to get tricky with words, because fooling around with chemicals was increasingly frowned upon. We all know they took the cocaine out of Coca Cola way back in 1909. What I didn’t know, until I started looking things up for today, is that they didn’t take the Lithium out of 7up until 1950!

Today, in honor of Memorial Day, we remember those who have died defending our country. The hymn *America the Beautiful* is not a boastful song of praise and triumph merely, it is a cry for help, an earnest plea from a people who really haven’t yet figured out what to do with what we have been given. It is a prayer, not a paean.

We sing of heroes who proved they loved mercy more than life and who dreamed that someday our cities might gleam undimmed by human tears. We sing, not because we want more of these heroes, but because we want peace. We beg that our every flaw be mended; we beg for the self-control that alone can save our soul; we beg for the true liberty that comes from equal justice under law – it's all there in the song. May God shed grace on us and grant us the sister- and brotherhood that alone constitute a crown worth wearing.

Just as we must pay attention to what we drink and eat to nurture our bodies, we must pay the closest attention to the stories we hear and how they are working on us if we would walk in ways of godliness. And we must mind, ever so carefully the metaphors we ourselves use. Because, as we talked about last week with the thousand tongues, each of us encounters God differently; the whole Bible is a chronicle of our attempts to convey and control those encounters with vivid and resonant metaphors. Here again, vivid is a sight metaphor and resonant is one for hearing. Keep trying, keep exploring, keep telling, keep listening. One woman's God is another man's Dr. Pepper, and nobody ever gets it just right. Life really is much more fun when you're refreshed, but what refreshes you best is not Coke, but faithful compassion. For that we must incline our hearts to Godliness and make peace.

The Prayers of the People

Loving God, we pray to you for those who died in the gun violence in the San Jose Valley Transportation Authority station. Grant to the departed your peace; let light perpetual shine upon them. We pray for those who mourn and suffer from grief and loss. Give them faith and courage to face the days ahead with steadfastness and patience knowing that you hold all your creation in a loving embrace. We ask that those who mourn and we who keep vigil may cast our care on you, knowing the consolation of your eternal love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn 419 -- *O beautiful, for spacious skies*

O beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain;
For purple mountains' majesty above the fruited plain!

America! America! God shed His grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea!

O beautiful for heroes proved in liberating strife,
Who more than self their country loved, and mercy more than life!
America! America! God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control, thy liberty in law.

O beautiful for patriot dream that sees beyond the years
Thine alabaster cities gleam, undimmed by human tears!
America! America! God shed his grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea!

And now, may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his son our Savior Jesus Christ. And the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer be with you this day and remain with you forever. ***Amen.***

The New Colossus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glowes world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Emma Lazarus

