

**The Sunday Missive – October 10, 2021  
The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Hymn 680 O God, our help in ages past**

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home:

Before the hills in order stood, or earth received her frame,  
From everlasting thou art God, to endless years the same.

A thousand ages in thy sight are like an evening gone;  
Short as the watch that ends the night before the rising sun.

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,  
Be thou our guide while life shall last, and our eternal home.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRwA-bc9GEs>

***All: Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth. Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Author of all that is, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of God, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Creator. Amen.***

**The Collect of the Day**

Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, that we may continually be given to good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. ***Amen.***

## **Job 23:1-17**

Then Job answered: "Today also my complaint is bitter; his hand is heavy despite my groaning. Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his dwelling! I would lay my case before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would learn what he would answer me, and understand what he would say to me. Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; but he would give heed to me. There an upright person could reason with him, and I should be acquitted forever by my judge.

"If I go forward, he is not there; or backward, I cannot perceive him; on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him; I turn to the right, but I cannot see him. But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I shall come out like gold. My foot has held fast to his steps; I have kept his way and have not turned aside. I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured in my bosom the words of his mouth.

But he stands alone and who can dissuade him? What he desires, that he does. For he will complete what he appoints for me; and many such things are in his mind. Therefore I am terrified at his presence; when I consider, I am in dread of him. God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me; If only I could vanish in darkness, and thick darkness would cover my face!

## **Psalm 139**

O LORD, you search me and you know me\* You know my resting and my rising; you discern my purpose from afar.

You mark when I walk or when I lie down\* All my ways lie open to you.

Before ever a word is on my tongue, you know it, O LORD, through and through\* Behind and before, you besiege me, your hand ever laid upon me.

O where can I go from your spirit, or where can I flee from your face\* If I climb the heavens, you are there; if I lie in the grave, you are there.

If I take the wings of the dawn to dwell at the sea's furthest end\* Even there your hand would lead me; your right hand would hold me fast.

To me how precious your thoughts, O God; how great is the sum of them\* If I count them, they are more than the sand; to finish, I must be eternal, like you.

O search me, God, and know my heart\* O test me, and know my thoughts.

See that I follow not the paths of the wicked\* But lead me in the way of life everlasting.

### **Hebrews 4:12-16**

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account. Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

## **Hymn 601 O day of God, draw nigh**

O day of God, draw nigh in beauty and in power;  
Come with thy timeless judgment now to match our present hour.

Bring to our troubled minds, uncertain and afraid,  
The quiet of a steadfast faith, calm of a call obeyed.

Bring justice to our land, that all may dwell secure,  
And finely build for days to come foundations that endure.

Bring to our world of strife thy sovereign word of peace,  
That war may haunt the earth no more, and desolation cease.

O day of God, draw nigh as at creation's birth;  
Let there be light again, and set thy judgments on the earth.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQ9KHGqtO54>

### **Mark 10:17-31**

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"

And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

### **Fire it Overboard -- Pent+20B**

“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Sell all you own, give the money to the poor, and follow me.” That is the Cliff’s Notes version of this tale from Mark’s relentlessly insightful and relentlessly challenging story. But Oh! how we can be misled and even grow cynical if we turn the page and go about our business without listening more deeply to what Mark has to convey. With apologies to Mr. Cliff and his Notes for whatever degree of false witness I am about to bear unto him, that ain’t the half of it.

Jesus has just finished reminding whomever has ears to hear that the means to a godly life, the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, the formula for obtaining eternal life is to strip away sophistication, accomplishment and learning and approach the Throne as a child. “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Verily I say unto you that, whosoever receiveth not the Kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

So when the wealthy fellow approaches Jesus and kneels at his feet in a grand gesture, the first thing Jesus has to do is to resist the urge to chide him for not being himself. In this, Jesus does not entirely succeed. He does not openly mock the fellow by calling him a hypocrite, but he doesn't answer his question either. Perhaps what Jesus would like to say is "Get up off your knees there, sir. Don't pretend to be so humble with me when we both know that you are a man about town who is used to giving orders not taking them, and receiving obeisance instead of making it." Instead, Jesus looks upon him and loves him despite his lack of self-awareness. He says to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. And a godly life is not based solely on deeds, but on one's attitude towards self. Are you living in childlike wonder at all there is you don't know? Are you eagerly teachable? Are you honest, open and willing to receive the influence of God's direction, wherever it may lead? Or are you all set, fully formed, done and done?"

Well-knowing that he is setting the fellow up like a bowling pin as an example for everyone who may be listening, Mark's Jesus avoids the man's question by pretending not to understand it. As the probation officer said to the convict when asked, "What do I have to do to stay out of jail," Jesus says, "Obey the law." Reading between the lines, we can almost hear Jesus muttering to himself, "What must you do? You mustn't do anything. You must simply be." And we can also just about hear Jesus saying behind the back of his hand to whomever is around, "Watch this, guys. Pay close attention. This fellow here is exactly what I've been talking about."

As if he is not quite sure of the question, but wanting to understand the man more clearly, Jesus reminds him of what not to do instead: "You know the commandments: 'don't murder; don't commit adultery; don't steal; etc., etc.'" Defrauding, like all lying and betrayal, comes under 'false witness.' In other words, 'obey all the holy laws.' And sure enough, the man steps right into it: "Oh, no problem. I have kept all these since my youth. But isn't there something else positive and definitive I can put on my to-do

list, or better still give orders to have done so that I can stop worrying about the dim dark future and enjoy life. I want the platinum card. What's the procedure? Where do I sign? Do you take Amex?"

Jesus, looking at him, loved him. Instead of pointing out the little probability of the fellow's claim, Jesus loved him by knowing him fully, just as Jesus knows each of us. As the letter to the Hebrews points out, he has "in every respect been tested as we are." And he knows there is nothing to do to inherit eternal life. An inheritance is a gift. Eternal life is the gift available to everyone who humbly asks for it. The way to redeem this gift is merely to allow oneself to feel a childlike wonder in the gift itself. All we have to do is set aside, and leave behind anything and everything, every attachment that interferes with our perception of the presence and power of goodness. What can we do to inherit eternal life? Simply clear away whatever it is that keeps us from knowing that it is already ours.

Nobody keeps all the commandments perfectly from their youth or otherwise. At least I've never met anybody who did. But each of us has a mirror to wipe more clean so that we may see ourselves more as God sees us. Each of us has some emotional cobwebs that cling to us when we listen to these stories of redemption. Each of us faces snags and logjams and tough rapids in the rivers of our lives. If we believe that we are not alone in them, and are bound for smoother waters downstream, then that belief is its own performance; it is already so. We do still have to paddle and steer the boat.

In the life of the wealthy young man, Jesus could see that his money and possessions were what was blocking his belief. So he said, "You are very close. In fact, you lack only one thing: just go sell what you own, give the money to the poor (understanding that you will have treasure in heaven), and come follow me." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. The man didn't know he had been asking Jesus a trick question, "What must I do to inherit eternal

life?" It was a trick question to which Jesus provided a trick answer. Because if the man had realized that he already had eternal life, he wouldn't have needed the advice to give everything away. He could have kept some of what he wanted, sure, given lots away and followed Jesus home.

So we must ask ourselves what is in our lives that blocks our sure and certain knowledge that we are loved forever. What 'some' can we obtain and keep and enjoy? And what 'all' must we give away or just throw overboard because it's no good to anybody? These are the questions to contemplate when we are stripped bare like Job, when we open ourselves to the one whose hand, even if we take the wings of the dawn to dwell at the sea's furthest end will hold us fast.

### **The Prayers of the People**

**Prayers for healing and strength:** Sue, Karen, Katharine, Kelli, Gail, the family and friends of Jinny Cahill and all those we hold in our hearts this day. **For those who have died:** Jinny Cahill

#### **Confession and Absolution:**

*Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.*

### **Hymn 460 Alleluia! Sing to Jesus!**

Alleluia! sing to Jesus! his the scepter, his the throne;  
Alleluia! his the triumph, his the victory alone;



Hark! the songs of peaceful Zion thunder like a mighty flood;  
Jesus out of every nation hath redeemed us by his blood.

Alleluia! not as orphans are we left in sorrow now;  
Alleluia! he is near us, faith believes, nor questions how:  
    Though the cloud from sight received him,  
        When the forty days were o'er,  
Shall our hearts forget his promise, "I am with you evermore"?

Alleluia! Bread of Heaven, thou on earth our food, our stay!  
Alleluia! here the sinful flee to thee from day to day:  
Intercessor, friend of sinners, earth's Redeemer, plead for me,  
Where the songs of all the sinless sweep across the crystal sea.

Alleluia! King eternal, thee the Lord of lords we own:  
Alleluia! born of Mary, earth thy footstool, heaven thy throne:  
    Thou within the veil hast entered,  
        Robed in flesh, our great High Priest:  
Thou on earth both priest and victim in the eucharistic feast.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9wxyYMAZnoc>

Gracious God, send us anywhere you would have us go ... only go there with us. Place upon us any burden you desire ... only stand by us to sustain us. Break any tie that binds us ... except the tie that binds us to you. Make us better in whatever we do; and work in us that which is well-pleasing in the sight of all Creation. And now, may the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer be with you this day and remain with you forever. **Amen.**

## Orchard

I saw the first pear  
As it fell—  
The honey-seeking, golden-banded,  
The yellow swarm  
Was not more fleet than I,  
(Spare us from loveliness)  
And I fell prostrate  
Crying:  
You have flayed us  
With your blossoms,  
Spare us the beauty  
Of fruit-trees.

The honey-seeking  
Paused not,  
The air thundered their song,  
And I alone was prostrate.

O rough-hewn  
God of the orchard,  
I bring you an offering—  
Do you, alone unbeautiful,  
Son of the god,  
Spare us from loveliness:

These fallen hazel-nuts,  
Stripped late of their green sheaths,  
Grapes, red-purple,  
Their berries  
Dripping with wine,  
Pomegranates already broken,  
And shrunken figs  
And quinces untouched,  
I bring you as offering.

Hilda Doolittle