

The Sunday Missive – October 24, 2021
The Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 411 -- O Bless the Lord, My Soul Vv. 1, 4, 5 & 6

O bless the Lord, my soul! His grace to thee proclaim!
And all that is within me join to bless his holy Name!

He pardons all thy sins, prolongs thy feeble breath;
He healeth thine infirmities and ransoms thee from death.

He clothes thee with his love, upholds thee with his truth;
And like the eagle he renews the vigor of thy youth.

Then bless his holy Name, whose grace hath made thee whole,
Whose loving-kindness crowns thy days: O bless the Lord, my soul!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aez0n2QasLA>

Or...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZZulHl0X4M>

The Collect of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Job 42:1-17

Then Job answered the Lord: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.' I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has done." So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the Lord had told them; and the Lord accepted Job's prayer.

And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring. The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters. He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch. In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers. After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations. And Job died, old and full of days.

Psalm 34

I will bless the Lord at all times* God's praise ever on my lips.

In the Lord shall my soul make its boast* The humble shall hear and be glad.

O Glorify the Lord with me* Together let us praise God's name.

I sought the Lord who answered me* And from every terror set me free.

Look towards God and be radiant* Let your face not be abashed.

See this poor man who called the Lord* The Lord heard and rescued him from distress.

The angel of the Lord is encamped* Around those who revere him, to rescue them.

O taste and see that the Lord is good* O revere the Lord, all you peoples.

Turn aside from evil and do good* Seek and strive after peace.

Hebrews 7:23-28

Furthermore, the former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

Hymn 773 Heal me, hands of Jesus

Heal me, hands of Jesus, and search out all my pain:
Restore my hope, remove my fear and bring me peace again.

Cleanse me, blood of Jesus, take bitterness away;
Let me forgive as one forgiven and bring me peace today.

Know me, mind of Jesus, and show me all my sin;
Dispel the memories of guilt, and bring me peace within.

Fill me, joy of Jesus: anxiety shall cease
And heaven's serenity be mine, or Jesus brings me peace!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REJMko4m-Tg>

Mark 10:46-52

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

The Wise and The Wealthy – Proper 25B

This morning, we see Job vindicated and restored; we get a description of the fundamental uniqueness of Jesus Christ as perfect priest; and we hear the beautiful story of blind Bartimaeus shouting his way past the entourage of gatekeepers and into the healing presence of Jesus. But with your indulgence, I'd like to turn our attention back to the literature of Wisdom, which gets too little attention, both in the New Testament and in our culture. The Book of Proverbs, Chapter 9 begins, "Wisdom has built her

house, she has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table. She has sent out her servant girls, she calls from the highest places in the town, 'You that are simple, turn in here!' To those without sense she says, 'Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight.'"

It is in this text, as well as many other places in the Bible and elsewhere, that we hear the voice of Wisdom, the female voice of God. Not long ago, the fortunate among us saw a stunning exhibit devoted to the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit in Los Angeles. Containing not just pieces of the discovered ancient manuscripts themselves, the show was a fascinating and thorough description of human activity culminating in the Ancient Near Eastern culture that produced those ancient texts. It is the culture that produced Modern Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In other words, it is our culture. It began with an overview of human activity in what we call the Holy Land; the Middle East; the Levant, Mesopotamia, the Cradle of Civilization. We modern folk might add, "from a religious perspective," but up until a relatively short time ago, history-wise every perspective was a religious perspective; that descriptor would have been redundant. What religion just depended on which deity had the most glory at the moment. That depended on which society had the most power.

One display case contained a few dozen of the hundreds of figurines of the goddess Asherah or Astarte found in Palestine. She was the deity who accompanied the Baals and Moloch's and Yahweh's of this world. It seems that for most of theological history, God was understood to be female; until powerful men insisted that she be male. Otherwise, we would be saying 'Our Mother, who art in Heaven.' Officials and those they controlled around Jerusalem and the Great Temple became aware of and attached to a single paternal deity long before the common folk did, who continued their fervent allegiance to female gods until a combination of illegalization, displacement and the passage of time made them scarce. Sound familiar? Human history continues to cycle from enlightenment to powermongering, failure, revolt and fresh enlightenment. Those whose activities are curtailed for a truly greater good always respond by trying to outlaw and demonize the peacemakers. The people didn't want a god who was many days journey away and under the control of who-knows what greedy officials; they wanted gods who would give very present help in trouble, who would not suffer their feet to be moved, who would neither slumber nor sleep nor be restricted to Jerusalem.

Speaking of Coliseums: In other archaeological news, they're restoring the Emperor Nero's palace in Rome. The year '64 – not our '64, mind you, the one with The Beatles, Cassius Clay, and the first Ford Mustang, this was in '64 CE or AD, as we used to call it: The Christian Era, The Year of our Lord. In these appellations we see how the religious perspective of those in power determines Time itself. Mother Nature has given way to Father time in the dominant human narrative, although not at all in the big picture, where a day is no different than a thousand years. In July of that first '64, a catastrophic fire burned large areas of Rome to the ground. In the fire's aftermath, a huge swath of the city was commandeered by Nero for his personal use. The palace he built had its own artificial lake and hundreds of rooms, some with 36' ceilings and little perfume spritzers mounted above to keep everybody fresh. Clearly this was not the house that Wisdom built. Majestic and glorious, maybe, but not having been built on anything but violence and injustice, it could hardly stand firm forever. Four years was more like it. I recently learned that Lithuania was founded by people who fled 2500 miles to escape Nero. He was so horrible that his immediate successors knocked down a big part of the palace and eventually built a stadium that came to be known as The Coliseum because a colossal statue of Nero had once stood there. The Romans could be a little vain at times, even about their villains. Kind of like the way we name airports and things after politicians, even if their careers were pretty checkered. The rest of the palace was filled in with dirt, which they're now removing so we can look again with amazement upon what Nero perpetrated.

Nero was always a man who thought he was God and thus historically necessary, but he had to find a scapegoat to blame for the catastrophic (however convenient) fire. The perfect target was that obscure new religious sect, the Christians. So, many Christians were arrested and crucified, burned or thrown to wild animals in the circus. It is because of this brutal persecution that Nero was dubbed *The Antichrist* in the eyes of the Christian Church. Sounds like he deserved it. The second Antichrist on the other hand, is a little harder to guess. Anybody? It was Martin Luther, demonized by edict of The Church. Indeed, in a time when every perspective was still a religious one, it most certainly did depend on how much power and/or glory someone had at the moment. This year's guy in a loincloth scampering around the circus ring being chased by a lion, could be next year's berobed Grand High Inquisitor, give or take a few generations. What's worse, a brutal dictator who says he's going to persecute you and does, or a brutal regime of so-called holy men who say they're going to save your soul but persecute and torture you instead? Humanity continues to produce both of these types, in grisly variety.

All human relationships operate according to various economies. These economies are based on various currencies. For those subject to Nero's reign, the economy was one of pure physical power: he had it, they didn't. The main currency was violence: do what I say or I will destroy you. This is the situation that prevailed during persecutions of Christians then. Subsequently it has often been the situation during persecutions by Christians too. Violent physical power masquerading as spiritual power is still the prevailing situation in many places in the world today.

Contrast this with the economy at work when physical power is deprioritized in favor of spiritual power and wisdom. The goddess figurines, for example, did not afford their owners any leg up in the marketplace, nor did they emit a high-pitched signal capable of neutralizing an invading force or sickening embassy personnel. They simply reminded their owners of the blessed assurance their faith provided: a very present help in trouble, steady companionship along the way and stability in the face of all life affords and inflicts. This is the kind of power that the earth goddess represents, that Wisdom represents, that Jesus represents. It is no accident that Jesus perceivable gender is fluid to say the least; God is not male any more than God is female. In this spiritual economy, presented in The Proverbs, (parabolized) by Jesus, proclaimed by Paul and preached by Luther, maturity, wisdom and peace are of highest value, instead of wealth, prestige and the dominion: "Lay aside immaturity, and live. Walk in the way of insight." "Be careful how you live, not as unwise people but as wise." In this economy, the currencies that have the most buying power are humility, forbearance, lovingkindness and charity, the opposites of worldly power and wealth.

"Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed," exhorts Wisdom." "Do not get drunk with wine," warns Paul, "but do be enspirited as you sing your sacred songs." In other words, have a very good time, but don't get carried away, for you will destroy yourselves if you do. And Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them; the ones who do so will live forever." In the Bible wine is often used to represent what is most desired and valued in this life, a symbol of God's wisdom and coming reign. Here too, Jesus is the symbol himself: flesh and blood that are the spiritual currency of which Wisdom speaks: "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live. Walk in the way of light and insight."

For us, maturity means continual assessment of the currency we are using in our relationships, and continual effort to align ourselves with God's

spiritual economy. Notes Richard Foster, “Each activity of daily life in which we stretch ourselves on behalf of others is a prayer of action—the times when we scrimp and save in order to get the children something special; the times when we share our car with others on rainy mornings, leaving early to get them to work on time; the times when we keep up correspondence with friends or answer one last telephone call when we are dead tired at night. These times and many more like them are lived prayer.”

The practice of lovingkindness must find its roots deep within us. Wayne Muller tells the story of how Mohandas Gandhi once settled in a new village. At once he began serving the needs of the villagers who lived there. A friend inquired if his objective in serving the poor was purely humanitarian. Gandhi replied, “Not at all. I am here to serve no one else but myself, to find my own self-realization through service to these village folk.”

It is with wisdom Gandhi points out that even as we serve others, in a spiritual economy, we are continually working for ourselves; every act, every word, every gesture of genuine compassion naturally feeds the do-er too. There is never a question of who must be healed first, it is always the poor who take precedence. And when we attend to ourselves with compassion and mercy, more healing is made available for others; when we serve others with an open and generous heart, great healing blesses us.

Prayers of the People October 24, 2021

After each petition, please respond: “We thank you, Lord

Let us give thanks for all God’s gifts so freely bestowed upon us: For the beauty and wonder of your creation, in earth and sky and sea. ***We thank you, Lord.***

For all that is gracious in our lives; all that reveals to us the image of Christ, ***We thank you, Lord.***

For our daily food and drink, our homes and families, and our friends, ***We thank you, Lord.***

For minds to think, and hearts to love, and hands to serve, ***We thank you, Lord.***

For health and strength to work, and leisure to rest and play, ***We thank you, Lord.***

For the brave and courageous, who are patient in suffering and faithful in adversity, ***We thank you, Lord.***

For all valiant seekers after truth, liberty, and justice,
We thank you, Lord.

For the communion of saints, in all times and places, for all the faithful, ***We thank you, Lord.***

Above all, we give thanks for the great mercies and promises given to us in Christ Jesus our Lord; to him be praise and glory, with you, O Father, and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. ***Amen.***

I ask your prayers this day for all who are in any sickness, need or any kind of trouble, especially Sue, Karen, Katharine, Kelli, Gail, the family and friends of Jinny Cahill, are there others?_____ Pray for those in distress and mourning.

I ask your prayers this day for those who have died, especially Jinny Cahill, are there others?_____ Pray for the faithful departed. ***Amen.***

Hymn 410 Praise my soul, the King of heaven

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven; to his feet thy tribute bring;
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, evermore his praises sing:
Alleluia, alleluia! Praise the everlasting King.

Praise him for his grace and favor to his people in distress;
Praise him still the same as ever, slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Alleluia, alleluia! Glorious in his faithfulness.

Father-like he tends and spares us; well our feeble frame he knows;
In his hand he gently bears us, rescues us from all our foes.
Alleluia, alleluia! Widely yet his mercy flows.

Angels, help us to adore him; you behold him face to face;
Sun and moon, bow down before him, dwellers all in time and space.
Alleluia, alleluia! Praise with us the God of grace.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-n BPn5BxH4>

Ghosts and Fashion

Although it no longer has a body
to cover out of a sense of decorum,

the ghost must still consider fashion—

must clothe its invisibility in something
if it is to “appear” in public.

Some traditional specters favor
the simple shroud—

a toga of ectoplasm
worn Isadora-Duncan-style
swirling around them.

While others opt for lightweight versions
of once familiar tee shirts and jeans.

Perhaps being thought-forms,
they can change their outfits instantly—

or if they were loved ones,
it is we who clothe them
like dolls from memory

Elaine Equi