

The Sunday Missive – September 13, 2020



The Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Greetings, one and all, and welcome to St. Peter's by the Sea. I am joined today by Mary Sue Gee, Nancy Castle, and Marti Lindholm to bring you this service of prayer, scripture and song with love. This will be Marti's last service as our Music Director; please join me in heartfelt thanks for her diligent service to our community and her generosity in sharing her talents and energies with us these past twelve years. She and Allan look forward to traveling adventures and well-earned rest. Thank you, Marti, and may God's blessings rain upon you and yours.

If you go to our facebook page, you can watch and participate in this service 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, September 13. No facebook account is needed! Please direct any questions or comments to your rector, The Rev. Sidney Symington via: (203) 209-2339 or sssymington@gmail.com. **And so we begin:**

You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but fellow citizens with the saints and true members of the household of God. Grace to you and peace from The Lord our Creator, and The Christ our Redeemer who, through the power of the Holy Spirit live as one God, now and forever. **Amen.** Let us pray.

O God, forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee, mercifully grant that thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts;

through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with thee and the same Spirit liveth and reigneth, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Lord God Almighty, who hast made all the peoples of the earth for thy glory, to serve thee in freedom and in peace: Give to the people of our country a zeal for justice and the strength of forbearance, that we may use our liberty in accordance with thy gracious will. *Amen.*

Hymn 435 – At the Name of Jesus – Verses. 1, 4 & 5

At the Name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
Every tongue confess him King of glory now;
'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord,
Who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

Name him, Christians, name him, with love strong as death,
Name with awe and wonder and with bated breath;
He is God the Saviour, he is Christ the Lord,
Ever to be worshiped, trusted, and adored.

In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue
All that is not holy, all that is not true:
Crown him as your Captain in temptation's hour;
Let his will unfold you in its light and power.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKD00f-shPQ>

A Reading from the Book of Genesis – Chapter 50

When their father had died, Joseph's brothers said to each other, "What if he still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrongs we have done to him?" So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crimes of your brothers and the many ways they harmed you.' Now therefore please forgive our crimes, for we are servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they said this to him. Then his brothers also wept. They fell down before him, saying, "We are now your slaves." But Joseph said, "No! Do not be afraid of me. Shall I take the place of God? Though you intended to do me harm, God has made it for good, and has preserved our people. So, have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." Here ends the reading.

Psalm 103

Bless the Lord, O my **soul*** All that is in me, bless God's holy **name**.

O Bless the Lord, my **soul*** And do not forget God's **benevolence**.

Who forgives all my **iniquity*** Who crowns me with steadfast love and **mercy**.

Who satisfies me while I **live*** That my youth is renewed like the **eagle**.

The Lord does not deal with us according to our **sins*** Nor repay us according to our **iniquities**.

For as the heavens are high above the **earth*** So great is God's love toward those who do **justice**.

As for mortals, our days are like **grass*** We flourish like flowers of the **field**.

For the wind passes over them, and they are **gone*** And their place knows them no **more**.

But the love of the Lord on the righteous is ever**lasting*** And God's favour to the children of their **children**.

Bless the Lord, O my **soul*** May all that is within me, bless God's holy **name**.

A Reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 12

Always welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while others eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them.

Who are you to pass judgment on the servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand. Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Why do you pass judgment on your sister or brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? We will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then, each of us will be accountable to God. Here ends the reading.

Anthem – *Laudate Dominum* – Mary Sue Gee, Soloist

From *Vesperae Solennes de Confessore* (Solemn Vespers) K 339

Ludwig Amadeus Mozart

<i>Laudate Dominum omnes gentes</i>	Praise the Lord all nations
<i>Laudate eum omnes populi</i>	Praise him all ye people
<i>Quoniam confirmata est supernos misericordia eius</i>	For his lovingkindness is great
<i>Et veritas Domini manet in aeternum</i>	And the truth of the Lord endureth forever

The Gospel According to Matthew -- Chapter 18

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, the king ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord released him and forgave him the debt.

But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and

threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. The other servants were greatly distressed, and went to their lord and reported all that had taken place.

Then his lord summoned him and said, 'You wicked man! I forgave you all of your debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow?' And he handed the man over to the jailer until his entire debt could be paid. And this is what will happen to every one of you, if you do not forgive your sister or brother from your heart." This is the Gospel of the Lord.

"Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or do you despise your brother or sister? We will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God. So then, each of us will be accountable to God." These wonderfully provocative questions and inescapably bracing statements from Paul's letter to the Roman church move us back into the mode of thinking of God as the inevitable force and purpose of nature, rather than as a big, strict, disorganized and often vindictive bully.

The response of the universe to the glory (or catastrophe) of human consciousness, is the miraculous Other Creation, the counter-instinctive forces of faith, hope and charity: Faith that goodness will prevail, hope for an experience of goodness in one's own life, and charity towards fellow creatures, which is to say the selfless, unconditional love that stems from humility and wonderment. There are many roads that lead to these gifts, lots of ways to skin this cat; who am I to judge the validity of somebody else's program, as long as the result is lovingkindness?

The human world turned completely upside down, or perhaps inside out when the power of faith emerged. Matthew McConaughey's most colorful and pragmatic character in the wildly provocative series, *True Detective* declares our human intelligence to be simply an aberrance of evolution, a creational mistake, a dead end that doesn't do anything or anybody any good. We're stuck with these incredible thought-producing machines we call our minds, but they didn't come with a manual, and left to themselves, they cause nothing but trouble.

Maybe so, but what's exciting is that, to deal with such an aberrance as human consciousness, the universe came up with an equally unprecedented response called Love.

Upon escaping bondage in Egypt, the people received Ten Commandments as a user manual for Love. But unless we treat them as a jumping off point, a frame of reference, we cannot live together. Anybody can go out and buy a violin, and a nifty, in-depth book to go along with it; but that doesn't make them a violinist. When Jesus is asked to explain the law in more depth, he gives examples such as "do not kill" as not enough. If you think angrily, you are just as guilty as if you had killed. Again, "do not commit adultery" is explained by Jesus as "if you look and have lust, you are adulterous."

What Jesus does with this more rigorous formula is to steer us into a more conscious, and thus more deeply human response. If our consciousness is what gets us in trouble, it is our consciousness that has to change. Harmful actions are the result of harmful thoughts. Short of voluntary extinction, we are stuck with ourselves and each other. Jesus comes to change the world by providing the miraculous cosmic response to the potentially catastrophic existence of human intelligence.

If having angry thoughts is equivalent to killing, having lustful thoughts is equivalent to adultery, and having envious thoughts means we've coveted our neighbor's whatever (however passingly!) then at least two things are true: One is, we all have, to some extent and for however brief a time, broken all of the commandments. Sorry. Might as well cop to it now. We're all in this together. Secondly, the answer to harmful human behavior is to, as we hear so often, "cleanse the thoughts of our hearts...that we may more perfectly love," and to seek help in doing so, rather than just white-knuckle it through life saying, "Phew! At least I didn't kill anybody today!"

Our help will come in the form of empathy that leads to compassion. The more we realize the commonality of human feeling, fearing and failing, the more we become able to love our neighbors as ourselves. We know what they're going through, and can respond in ways we would like to have done to us. Of course human consciousness can be wounded and warped to the point of burying any hunger for peace, so some people do have to be stopped. Although perfect love will indeed eventually cast out fear, fear is causing an awful lot of trouble in the meantime.

Does our participation in this realm of empathic love mean we are bidden to make the rules for others? No. "Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. It is before their own lord that they stand or fall." How people come to faith is their own business. Jesus doesn't say, 'Love your neighbor as long as he behaves himself the way you think he ought to behave himself.' Jesus says, 'Love your neighbor the way you would like to be loved if you had to deal with somebody like

you.’ Whenever I am upset with someone’s behavior, it helps to think about the therapy others will need to get over what I’ve done to them. Be prepared to forgive, not just seven, not just seventy, but seventy times seven times; to forgive and move on with an extravagance like the ten thousand talents, which the historians have calculated to be about a hundred and sixty-thousand days’ wages; something nobody can ever repay or deserve.

Self-serving is the problem. The world will only survive human intelligence if there is mutuality. However “upright” our activities may be, when we use our consciousness to serve ourselves, we are part of the problem, if we use it to serve others, we are part of the solution.

Don’t think your part isn’t significant either. Sister Pat Farrell writes: “We can claim the future we desire and act from it now. To do this takes the discipline of choosing where to focus our attention. If our brains, as neuroscience now suggests, take whatever we focus on as an invitation to make it happen, then the images and visions we live with matter a great deal. So we need to actively engage our imaginations in shaping visions of the future. Nothing we do is insignificant. Even a very small conscious choice of courage or of conscience can contribute to the transformation of the whole. It might be, for instance, the decision to put energy into that which seems most authentic to us, and withdraw energy and involvement from that which doesn’t.”

Someday we will reach the tipping point. On that Great Come and Get It Day, the Kingdom of Heaven will come to pass, and each of us will know what it’s like to cross the Jordan. But, as Sam Cooke sang, ‘meanwhile, we’ve got to work right here,’ care for those we encounter, listen to the sea, envision peace and sustainability and wonder, with the psalmist, ‘how long?’ well knowing that our help is in the name of the Lord, who made both heaven and Earth.

Prayers

We give thank for the justice of God and proclaim the dignity of all creatures. Holy God, your mercy is over all your works, and in the web of life each creature has its role and place. We praise you for ocelot and owl, cactus and kelp, lichen and whale; we honor you for whirlwind and lava, tide and topsoil, cliff and marsh. Give us hearts and minds eager to care for your planet, humility to recognize all creatures as your beloved ones, justice to share the resources of the earth with all its inhabitants, and love not limited by our self-interest and refusal to face truth. This we pray in the

name of Jesus, who unifies what is far off and what is near, and in whom, by grace and the working of your Holy Spirit, all things hold together. *Amen.*

We praise You, loving and merciful God, for the power of prayer, by which we can take what otherwise renders us helpless and lift up our anthems of heartbreak and suffering into your hands. We pray this day especially for those who have had their lives upended and their loved ones taken away by the catastrophe of wildfires. Our firefighters face the impossible every day. We cannot go before them as they walk into the maelstrom, but we can call upon you to release a blanket of protection upon them as they face what most of us only see in the news. “When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy,” so cries the psalmist. Please take a moment to consider the prayers of your own heart. *Amen.*

Hymn 618 – Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones Vss. 1, 3 & 4

Ye watchers and ye holy ones, bright seraphs, cherubim, and thrones,
Raise the glad strain, Alleluia!
Cry out, dominions, principedoms, powers,
Virtues, archangels, angels’ choirs,
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Respond, ye souls in endless rest, ye matriarchs and prophets blest,
Alleluia, alleluia!
Ye holy twelve, ye martyrs strong, all saints triumphant, raise the song,
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

O friends, in gladness let us sing, supernal anthems echoing,
Alleluia, alleluia!
To God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, Three in One,
Alleluia! alleluia! alleluia! alleluia! alleluia!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gn5L6XTCeWw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXZwijcyVY4>

And now, may the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God. And may the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, be with you this day, and remain with you always. *Amen.*