

Sunday Missive – September 19, 2021

The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 408 Sing praise to God who reigns above

Sing praise to God who reigns above, the God of all creation,
The God of power, the God of love, the God of our salvation;
With healing balm my soul he fills,
And every faithless murmur stills: to God all praise and glory.

What God's almighty power hath made,
His gracious mercy keepeth; by morning glow or evening shade
His watchful eye ne'er sleepeth.
Within the kingdom of his might, lo! All is just and all is right:
To God all praise and glory.

Let all who name Christ's holy Name give God all praise and glory;
Let all who know his power proclaim aloud the wondrous story!
Cast each false idol from its throne, the Lord is God, and he alone:
To God all praise and glory.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ba1XYxvWUU>

The Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-2:24

God did not make death, and does not delight in the death of the living. For he created all things so that they might exist; the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them, and the dominion of Hades is not on earth. For righteousness is immortal.

But the ungodly by their words and deeds summoned death; considering him a friend, they pined away and made a covenant with him, because they are fit to belong to his company. For they reasoned unsoundly, saying to themselves, 'Short and sorrowful is

our life, and there is no remedy when a life comes to its end, and no one has been known to return from Hades. For we were born by mere chance, and hereafter we shall be as though we had never been, for the breath in our nostrils is smoke, and reason is a spark kindled by the beating of our hearts; when it is extinguished, the body will turn to ashes, and the spirit will dissolve like empty air. Our name will be forgotten in time, and no one will remember our works; our life will pass away like the traces of a cloud, and be scattered like mist that is chased by the rays of the sun and overcome by its heat. For our allotted time is the passing of a shadow, and there is no return from our death, because it is sealed up and no one turns back.

‘Come, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that exist, and make use of the creation to the full as in youth. Let us take our fill of costly wine and perfumes, and let no flower of spring pass us by. Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they wither. Let none of us fail to share in our revelry; everywhere let us leave signs of enjoyment, because this is our portion, and this our lot. Let us oppress the righteous poor man; let us not spare the widow or regard the grey hairs of the aged. But let our might be our law of right, for what is weak proves itself to be useless.

‘Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions; he reproaches us for sins against the law, and accuses us of sins against our training. He professes to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a child of the Lord. He became to us a reproof of our thoughts; the very sight of him is a burden to us, because his manner of life is unlike that of others, and his ways are strange. We are considered by him as something base, and he avoids our ways as unclean; he calls the last end of the righteous happy, and boasts that God is his father. Let us see if his words are true, and let us test what will happen at the end of his life; for if the righteous man is God’s child, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries.

Let us test him with insult and torture, so that we may find out how gentle he is, and make trial of his forbearance. Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected.'

Thus they reasoned, but they were led astray, for their wickedness blinded them, and they did not know the secret purposes of God, nor hoped for the wages of holiness, nor discerned the prize for blameless souls; for God created us for incorruption, and made us in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it.

Psalm 1

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked* Or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers.

Their delight is in the law of the Lord* And on God's law they meditate day and night.

They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season* And their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.

The wicked are not so* They are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment* Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous* But the way of the wicked will perish.

James 3:13 - 4:8

Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you suppose that it is for nothing that the scripture says, "God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? But he gives all the more grace; therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

482 Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy

Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
Whose trust, ever childlike, no cares could destroy,
Be there at our waking, and give us we pray,

Your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
Whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,
Be there at our labours, and give us, we pray,
Your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
Your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
Be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
Your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.

Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
Whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
Be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
Your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-D_aT8CXyc

Mark 9:30-37

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

Let Go and Let God – Proper 20B

You don't have to worry, and don't you be afraid. Joy comes in the morning; troubles they won't last always. Remember there's a friend in Jesus who will wipe your tears away.

We can wait until we have no choice, 'til we're flat on our backs, out cold, or up some creek, or we can take a baby step, a child's step, however hesitant, fearful, tentative and halting that step may be, in the direction of allowing ourselves to be cared for.

It's good to have a gentle helping hand when I can use one. But how often do we hear, "Can I give you a hand with that?" and reply, "No thanks, I got it?" We will accept help only sparingly – even dubiously – lest our ability to handle things be called into doubt, lest we build up a greater helping-hand debt than we would like to own, lest we be beholden to one another, trapped in a limitless but severely limiting ecumenical riptide of communities and relationships, none of which have any curb appeal or leverage at the ATM.

We so-called modern people are so intent on our self-sufficiency that we have engendered a whole array of occupations, a whole layer of our society whose concern, whose task, whose enterprise is to make us think we need whatever they have, despite the ready availability of evidence to the contrary. Inventors, entrepreneurs and speculators spend their lives coming up with ideas for things that can be sold. Publicists, marketers and ad-people spend their lives hunched over their chemistry sets of cultural and biological compounds, mixing up potions that, when consumed, make us want to run out and have whatever it is they're selling. A beautiful photograph – of some French fried potatoes; a gentle, comforting voice -- coming from some luxurious piece of furniture; a sudden warning – about how much fun we're missing if we don't buy a certain automobile; a mythically handsome and appealing model,

perfectly fit and powerful, yet perfectly vulnerable and available who will be our best friend and more -- if only we will act now.

There is an alchemy of desires that depart entirely from the humility, mutual understanding and compassionate support that form our deeper, more childlike desires, the ones God placed in our hearts from the beginning. Instead, we look into the smoky eyes of these sultry marketing creatures and allow ourselves to be convinced by them that whatever they're selling is what will make us whole. Instead, it makes a hole in us. "Weeping may endure through the night, but joy comes in the morning," cries the psalmist, reiterating the promise of God's enduring love beyond time and space. But with far too much of what we acquire these days, with far too many of the choices we make about how to use our resources, with far too pervasive and proud self-reliance, the opposite holds true: Any joy we obtain from these thoughts and feelings, triumphs and acquisitions may indeed endure through some nights, but all too often lead to disappointment, dismay and tears that drown the promise of the dawn. And we can find ourselves saying, "Oh, Lord, I'm still not sure what I stand for. What do I stand for? Most nights I don't know anymore..."

Language lovers notice every new cultural tic in American speech. Someone comes over to us, with a pitcher of water, an umbrella, a set of directions, a pot of coffee. The good citizen asks some version of the question: "Would you like some?" Assuming, just for the moment that we do not desire whatever is on offer (we've had enough water, it's not raining, we know where we're going, we're maxed out on caffeine, etc.), how do we respond? It used to be, "No thank you," or "No thanks," for short. Nowadays, we are more likely to hear, "I'm good." "I'm good!" "I'm good... and nothing you can do right now can make me better," is the rest of that thought.

Of course when we say, "I'm good," instead of some variation of, "No, but thank you for asking" we're not all consciously declaring entire and triumphant self-sufficiency. We are just using our current idiomatic shorthand for "We're done here. Our

relationship is moot unless and until I have a new desire that you might fulfil... like dessert.” Then, if you are a waitperson, you might come back with an outrageously worded and illustrated dessert menu. But again, I don’t need you unless I decide I need you, and if I don’t decide I need you, then I certainly don’t want you hanging around. “Would you like to see the dessert menu?” “I’m good.”

Instead of merely announcing our state of mind and being, we could practice gracious acceptance of offers of help, whatever their origins or even their ultimate usefulness in a given situation. We could treat the most mundane and even spurious overtures as worthy of full consideration – if even for a moment – and polite response. We could treat them as if the hand of Jesus were somewhere behind them, at all times behaving as if we knew we might be entertaining angels unaware. This is true even if our response has to be, “No, I’m not interested, I haven’t got the time to hear your sales pitch, and I’m asking you not to call me again.”

Developing this approach to the small ups and downs, offers and interactions of everyday life – treating everyone as if they were an angel (however torn and tattered) can prepare and equip us for the more serious crises that each of our lives inevitably contains. Similarly, if we experience some disturbing medical symptoms, we might engage in fearful avoidance of anything that exacerbates those symptoms, plus we’ll cross our fingers, pray the symptoms go away, and engage in denial and depression. On the other hand, we might arrange a visit to a doctor to see what the symptoms mean instead. That doctor might ask for blood tests. The problem with blood tests is that, once you get ‘em, you’re stuck with the results. Likewise, when we say, “No, but thanks,” we are stuck with a teensy little relationship with whomever offered us whatever they offered us. They might even say something scary like, “You are (most) welcome.” Aww, gee, now I’m in a ‘thing’ here. These people might be getting the idea they know me a little, and I them. I knew I shoulda just said, ‘I’m good,’ and nipped this thing in the bud.

Those blood tests might indicate the presence of a potentially dangerous cancer growing within one. And if one goes back to the doctor with the tests in hand, she or he might say one is facing a choice: roll the dice on your own quality of life – indeed your own existence, with the statistical odds stacked heavily against you, or hand the dice back to the doctor and say something along the lines of, “Thanks for giving it to me straight, discomfiting as this choice is. With your expertise, you have given me some clarity about how to go about choosing. I’m just gonna go get a second opinion from another expert in this and if it agrees with yours, I will put myself entirely in your hands, come what may. We will be in full relationship, with me being entirely vulnerable to your ministrations – for a time. Because you know more about what’s wrong with me than I do, I choose to let you tell me what to do about it, I put my whole existence into your hands; I’m like a baby.

It is childish to follow our own ways and means when there are people with more information standing by offering help. That’s children’s job, to make mistakes, drive by red flags and gain experience of their own. But it is childlike to say, “Here I am; do with me as you see fit.” The older we grow, the more likely it becomes that childishness on our part will bring discomfort, troubling complexity and even catastrophe down on our own heads. Harmful childishness involves an increase in collateral damage too, as our families expand and our ranges of options narrow. But childlike wonder, receptivity to relationship, and trustfulness of those who offer to share their experience, strength and hope with us will propel us into nothing less than the Kingdom of Heaven, even while we’re still shuffling around in these our mortal coils.

If we have to be fragile beings, and make no mistake, we have to be fragile beings, then the only choice that makes sense is to surrender to our communities of love, to let go and let God handle the situation. God knows more about us than we do.

Upon hearing that a payday would have to be postponed, a great man once assured his out-of-pocket boss, "You can't fire me. You don't have to pay me, but you can't fire me." This is what surrender to community means. I may not be triumphant in any measurable way, paying out spiritual or financial dividends unto the umpteenth generation. I may not receive the amount of ease, comfort and pleasure I think I deserve in this life in return for my payments; our physical existence is a fleeting one even in the best of circumstances. But I can't fire God. We may stop listening to God's voice coming through others; we may turn a blind eye to God's hand at work in the world around us; from time to time fear and pain and petulance may even render us un comforted, unconvinced and unbelieving, but the love will keep working just the same, even to the ages of ages, whether we allow ourselves to share it or not, whether we allow ourselves to be cared for or not.

Blessed indeed are those whose delight is in the Lord. Like trees planted beside flowing waters, whose leaves shall never fade, they yield their fruit in due season, and all that they do shall prosper.

The Prayers of the People

In peace, let us pray to the Lord, saying, after each petition, as you will: ***Lord, have mercy***

For the holy Church of God, that it may be filled with truth and love, we pray to you, O Lord.

For all who fear God and believe in you, Lord Christ, that our divisions may cease, and that all may be one as you and the Creator are one, we pray to you, O Lord.

For those who do not yet believe, and for those who have lost their faith, that they may receive the light of the Gospel, we pray to you, O Lord.

For the peace of the world, that a greater spirit of respect and forbearance may grow among nations and peoples, we pray to you, O Lord.

For those in positions of public trust, that they may learn to serve more justly, and better promote the dignity and freedom of every person, we pray to you, O Lord.

For better use of the riches of creation, that the world may be freed from poverty, famine, and unnatural fire and flood, we pray to you, O Lord.

For the poor, the persecuted, the sick, and all who suffer, especially the people of Afghanistan, Haiti and Louisiana and all who are made ill or destitute due to the pandemic, and all who are experiencing misery from fire and flood we pray to you, O Lord.

For this congregation, those who are present, and those who are absent, that we may be delivered from hardness of heart, and show forth your glory in all that we do, we pray to you, O Lord.

For our enemies and those who wish us harm, and for all whom we have injured or offended, we pray to you, O Lord.

For those on our prayer list: _____ and those we name now, silently or aloud: _____ we pray to you, O Lord.

For all who have died in the communion of your Church, and those whose faith is known to you alone, that, with all the saints, they may have rest in that place where there is no pain or grief, but life eternal, especially Danny, we pray to you, O Lord.

Rejoicing in the fellowship of all the saints, let us commend ourselves, one another, and all our life to Christ our God. **Amen.**

LEVAS Hymn 72 Just a closer walk with thee

I am weak but thou art strong; Jesus, keep me from all wrong;
I'll be satisfied as long as I walk, let me walk close to thee.
Just a closer walk with thee, grant it, Jesus, is my plea,
Daily walking close to thee, let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

Through this world of toil and snares, if I falter, Lord, who cares?
Who with me my burden shares?
None but thee, dear Lord, none but thee.

When my feeble life is o'er, time for me will be no more;
Guide me gently, safely o'er to thy kingdom shore, to thy shore.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPmJemdLGf8>

448 O Love, how deep, how broad, how high

O love, how deep, how broad, how high, how passing thought and fantasy,
That God, the Son of God, should take our mortal form for mortals' sake!

For us baptized, for us he bore his holy fast and hungered sore;
For us temptations sharp he knew; for us the tempter overthrew.

For us he rose from death again; for us he went on high to reign;
For us he sent his Spirit here to guide, to strengthen, and to cheer.

All glory to our Lord and God for love so deep, so high, so broad;
The Trinity whom we adore forever and forevermore.

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

And now, 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.

Amen.

August Moonrise

The sun was gone, and the moon was coming
Over the blue Connecticut hills;
The west was rosy, the east was flushed,
And over my head the swallows rushed
This way and that, with changeful wills.
I heard them twitter and watched them dart
Now together and now apart
Like dark petals blown from a tree;
The maples stamped against the west
Were black and stately and full of rest,
And the hazy orange moon grew up
And slowly changed to yellow gold
While the hills were darkened, fold on fold
To a deeper blue than a flower could hold.
Down the hill I went, and then
I forgot the ways of men,
For night-scents, heady, and damp and cool
Wakened ecstasy in me
On the brink of a shining pool.

O Beauty, out of many a cup
You have made me drunk and wild
Ever since I was a child,
But when have I been sure as now
That no bitterness can bend
And no sorrow wholly bow
One who loves you to the end?
And though I must give my breath
And my laughter all to death,
And my eyes through which joy came,
And my heart, a wavering flame;
If all must leave me and go back
Along a blind and fearful track
So that you can make anew,
Fusing with intenser fire,
Something nearer your desire;
If my soul must go alone
Through a cold infinity,
Or even if it vanish, too,
Beauty, I have worshipped you.

Let this single hour atone
For the theft of all of me.

Sara Teasdale