

The Sunday Missive -- September 27, 2020



The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Greetings, one and all, and welcome home to St. Peter's by the Sea. Jan Swanson, Nancy Castle, Jeff Wheelwright and I bring you this service of prayer, scripture and song with love. 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 1 P.M. on Sunday, September 27. 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. Let us pray.

O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Grant us the fullness of your grace, that we, running to obtain your promises, may become partakers of your heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. **Amen.**

Hymn 523 – Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken (Abbot's Leigh)

Verses 1, 2 & 4

Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God;
He whose word cannot be broken formed thee for his own abode;
On the Rock of Ages founded, what can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation's walls surrounded, thou may'st smile at all thy foes.

See! the streams of living waters, springing from eternal love,
Well supply thy sons and daughters and all fear of want remove.
Who can faint, when such a river ever flows their thirst to assuage?
Grace which, like the Lord, the giver, never fails from age to age.

Blest inhabitants of Zion, washed in the Redeemer's blood!
Jesus, whom their souls rely on, makes them kings and priests to God.
'Tis his love his people raises over self to reign as kings:
And as priests, his solemn praises each for a thank-offering brings.

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

A Reading from the Prophecy of Ezekiel – Chapter Eighteen

(Jeff)

The word of the Lord came to me: What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"? As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die. If one is righteous and does what is lawful and right, follows my statutes, and is careful to observe

my ordinances, such a one is righteous and shall surely live, says the Lord God.

And if one has a child who sees all the sins that his parents have done, considers, and does not do likewise: who does not worship idols, nor defile a neighbor's spouse, does not wrong anyone, exacts no pledge, commits no robbery, but gives bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, refrains from iniquity, takes no advance or accrued interest, observes my ordinances, and follows my statutes, that one shall not die for his parents' iniquity. That one shall surely live. As for his parents, because they practiced extortion, robbed their sisters and brothers, and did what is not good among their people, they shall die for their iniquity. The person who sins shall die. A child shall not suffer for the iniquity of a parent, nor a parent suffer for the iniquity of a child; the righteousness of the righteous shall be his own, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be his own.

But if the wicked turn away from all their sins that they have committed and keep all my statutes and do what is lawful and right, they shall surely live. None of the transgressions that they have committed shall be remembered against them. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that they should turn from their ways and live?

Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn, then, and live.

Psalm 25

(Spoken. Alternating by half-verse. Led by Nancy)

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul* Do not let me be put to shame.

Make me to know your ways* O Lord; teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth, and teach me* For you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord* And of your steadfast love from of old.

Do not remember the sins of my youth* Or my many transgressions.

But according to your steadfast love remember me* For your goodness' sake, O Lord!

My eyes are ever toward the Lord* Who will pluck my feet out of the net.

O turn and be gracious to me, O Lord* For I am lonely and afflicted.

Relieve the troubles of my heart* Bring me out of my distress.

Consider how many are my foes* And with what violence they oppress me.

O guard my life, and deliver me* Do not let me be put to shame.

For I take refuge in you, O Lord* For you alone will redeem and preserve me.

Praise to the Creator and to the Child* And to the Holy Spirit.

The God who was, and is, and is to come* At the end of the ages, hallelujah!

A Reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians – Chapter Two

(Jan)

If then there be any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of

God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore, God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God.

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Here ends the reading.

Hymn 411 – O Bless the Lord My Soul – verses 1, 2, 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!

O bless the Lord, my soul! His mercies bear in mind!
Forget not all his benefits! The Lord to thee is kind.

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=1Vauscta8js>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZZulHI0X4M>

The Holy Gospel According to Matthew – Chapter 21

(Nancy)

When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority?” Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question; tell

me the answer, then I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask us 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the people; for all regard John as a true prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Ahh, so neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

Instead, he told them a parable: "What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later the son changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I will go, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even though you became aware of it, you did not change your minds. This is the Gospel of the Lord.

All of us develop, over time our own sense of right and wrong. A baby's outrage at not being fed, or changed, or dandled stems from its sure and certain conviction that a grievous wrong is being committed. Slowly but surely the concept of who is to blame takes hold. Free-floating objections to states of affairs take on a more personal character: "You do that to me." A parallel development is blame avoidance. We know how unpleasant it is to have people mad at us, so either we try not to do anything that anyone might object to, or we try to shift the blame for uncomfortable realities away from ourselves.

The errors, the sins – whether of commission or omission, things done or left undone – committed by the family or the society whence we have sprung tend to bring out our most urgent creativity and most fervent denials. When it comes to blame, most of us are adamant in our refusal to take responsibility for the past; we didn't do it, so why take any blame for it? I had nothing to do with the genocide of Native Americans or the existence of chattel slavery. I did not cause our dependence on fossil fuels, our mind-numbing wealth gap, the

ubiquity of single-use plastics, nor did I have anything to do with the circus into which our political system has disintegrated. Ezekiel's words today serves to remind us that we must put down the urge to deny our own roots in past and ongoing failures, if ever we hope to nourish a healthier society and contribute to a more sustainable ecology.

Ezekiel insists, not only that we remain aware of our own history, but also learn to stand apart from it and act independently of it. Blaming the past for what we are failing to do in the present is a surefire way to see that there is no future. This is what Paul means when he enlightens the Philippians to: "Work out your own salvation; God is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for good. We can only conclude that Ezekiel, too, is more interested in God's grace than in God's judgement.

Whether or not it is just, the sins of the parents will indeed be visited upon the children, yea unto the umpteenth generation. It may not be their fault, but it is their problem. Our children will be dealing with terrible decisions about the environment and hopelessly out of touch judges for decades. Maybe forever.

We must work the works of good while it is day; for night is coming and then it will be too late. One is reminded of the story in John's Gospel, wherein Jesus is asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" As Jesus prepares to heal the man, he answers: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him." It was neither the sin of the man's parents, nor his own sin that made him suffer. But the combination of past and present have created a situation where only grace can prevail.

So the idea – become a proverb – that blames the past for present difficulties does no one any good. It merely clouds the issue before us: Our righteousness stands alone. What can we do? What should we do? What must we do?

Part of our challenge is to continually examine the characteristics of our own society to detect ongoing and new ways we find to blame some for misfortunes or conditions not remotely of their making. How

do we stigmatize, marginalize, oppress, incarcerate, even murder the few, for example, and explain it away as the cost of doing business, the price of our so-called security?

The sour grapes are in our mouths because of us and the strictures that permeate our world. Theologian Amy Plantinga Pauw comments on this passage: “God is warning us not to fall into the trap of perpetuating and passing along the sins of our parents, and fail to acknowledge how we have been affected by the sinful legacy we have received.” This amounts to wasted life. When our attitudes and behaviors are prescribed by history alone, when we resist change merely because it is change, we steal from Very God the opportunity to cultivate our hearts for good, in the inestimable ways of which she is capable. But if we will turn again and live, welcoming what life would have us change each day for the better, then all is possible.

Prayers

Gracious God, we ask you to bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live deep within our hearts.

Bless us with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom and peace.

Bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war, so that we may reach out our hand to comfort them and turn their pain to joy.

Bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we can begin to do what others claim cannot be done. ***Amen.***

LEVAS Hymn 189 – Great is Thy Faithfulness

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with thee;
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not,
As thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.

Refrain:

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed thy hand hath provided,
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness,
To thy great faithfulness, mercy and love. [Refrain]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4vNde-6NRM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiVJ2jpbLbc>

Have a peaceful, healthy and love-filled week. Be safe, wear your masks in public, stay in touch with friends and loved ones. Reach out if you need anything, and know that you are beloved.

And the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier be with you and yours this day and always.

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