

The Sunday Missive -- October 18 2020



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The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Greetings, one and all, and welcome home to St. Peter's by the Sea. Janis Johnson, Nancy Castle, Thelma Knight Huchthausen, Diane and Roger Ludin 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 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, October 18. 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 Holy Spirit live as one God. Let us pray. Almighty and everlasting God, who enkindled the flame of your love in the hearts of your holy martyrs, grant to us, your humble servants, a like faith and power of love, that we who rejoice in their triumph may also profit by their example; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. **Amen.**

Hymn 488 – Be Thou My Vision

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
All else be nought to me, save that thou art
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father; thine own may I be;
Thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

High King of heaven, when victory is won,
May I reach heaven's joys, bright heaven's Sun!
Heart of my heart, whatever befall,
Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihJAJA4ibEs>

A Reading from the Book of Exodus -- Chapter 33

Moses said to the Lord, "You have said to me, 'Bring up this people' and 'You have also found favor in my sight.' If I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you. Consider too that this nation is your people." The Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." Moses said, "Show me your glory, I pray." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But, you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live. Stand on that rock; I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I cover you with my hand while I have pass by; then, when I take away my hand, you shall see my back; but not my face." This is the Word of the Lord

Psalm 96

O sing to the Lord a new song* Sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Sing to the Lord, bless God's name* Tell of salvation from day to day.

Declare God's glory among the nations* Marvelous works among the peoples.

For the Lord is greatly to be praised* And revered above all gods.

For the gods of the peoples are all idols* It is the Lord who made the heavens.

Honor and majesty are before God* Strength and beauty are in the sanctuary.

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples* Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due God's name* Bring an offering, and come into the holy courts.

Worship the Lord in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qo9bs8i4mgU>

A Reading from St. Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians, Chapter 1

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church in Thessalonika: Grace to you and peace. We give thanks to God for you, and mention you in our prayers, remembering your works of faith, labors of love, and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

You became imitators of us in spite of persecution. You received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you in every place your faith has become known. The people of many regions report what kind of welcome we had among you; how you turned to serve a living and true God, and to wait for God's Son from heaven, who was raised from the dead. It is indeed Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

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.

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=17T1nBlqFao>

A Reading for the Gospel According to Matthew -- Chapter 22

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to trap him in what he said. They sent their minions to him saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a *denarius*. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "It is Caesar." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

One of the great hymns that emerged in the wake of the mind-numbing horrors of the Civil War to become a favorite of the peaceloving Quakers goes like this: "My life flows on in endless song above earth's lamentation. I hear the sweet, though far-off hymn that hails a new creation. When tyrants tremble, sick with fear, and hear their death-

knell ringing, when friends rejoice both far and near, how can I keep from singing?"

What is all this talk in our scriptures about new songs; the singing of new songs? The very first chapter of the first book of the Hebrew Bible, The Book of Genesis (meaning 'Origin') records God as saying, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. And God created man in His own image -- created them, blessed them and said to them, "Rule over every living thing that moves."

Scholars note that 'Us' is a holdover from the mythologies of the Ancient Near East that comprised a pantheon of gods. Nowhere in this story of our modes of formation does it say: "Subdue and rule other humans," but the practice is built into the system. There were different gods for different things, with individuals and communities identifying with some gods more or less than others, who would naturally rationalize their own subduing and ruling over other humans who had orientations and allegiances of their own.

The multiple god system led of course to some folks being subdued and ruled and other folks doing the subduing and the ruling. It became clear to the former that the system was deeply flawed. They realized this because they were enslaved. The only answer was the awareness that there could be only one god, with whom everyone must identify and to whom everyone must have allegiance. If there were to be justice, there had to be humility and its consequent equality. If the earlier system led to enslavement, this new realization would lead to freedom. Our traditions tell us that Moses and the Exodus put that realization into action.

Soon enough, however, the subduing and ruling resumed, with one group listening to the One God who told them to do it, and another group claiming that their One God had given them the go-ahead to subdue and rule instead. We know the result of this resumption; we are living it still. Each group considers itself to be justified by virtue of its God-given character and the mandate it implies.

But this cannot be what God intended, a fight to the death with whomever refuses to be subdued or dominated. Setting aside for a

moment the disastrous consequences of our assumed mandate to rule everything that moves, our attitude toward one another is pathologically suicidal. It can't be sustained, which means the world can't survive us without our altering our ways, without singing new songs. Civil War and autocracy don't solve problems; they are merely postponed, and at a horrifying price.

A wise therapist and a young couple gradually acknowledged the painful truth that separating would be best for the pair. But how to avoid hurting their children as the reality of separation unfolded? The therapist suggested they follow a formula – a commandment, so to speak – that the new song they sing be a radical departure from their instincts. She pointed out that their instinctive behaviors had not served them well; that even deeply-considered points of view -- seemingly godly points of view -- had only brought about deeper conflict and estrangement. She said the only way to avoid hurting the children was for each of the two not to make sure their own point of view was justified and understood by their kids. The only way was for each of them to make it their business to see that their children had the best possible relationship with the other parent.

That was the new song they would have to sing – not subtly but out loud – if they were to be purveyors of peace in their family. It worked. Were there disagreements, sure. But no more than in most families. All of them are glad of each other. They are happy to be sharing the planet and their reconfigured family.

Our human proclivity for returning to the same old song when difficulties arise: subdue and rule, has never worked and never will. When Jesus appeared and spoke God's truth, this was the truth, the formula, the commandment that was heard: We must each of us make it our business to see to it that the rest of Creation has the best possible relationship with the God of their understanding; we must each make it as good as possible for the rest of humanity to live their own lives.

We must sing this new song, says Jesus, even though we are daunted by the deafness of others to its power. We must sing it loudest in the face of the most selfish, violent and hardhearted. If there are forms of

violence to be subdued, in ourselves or in others, we must subdue them. But we must never seek to rule anyone but ourselves, much less claim greater resemblance to God. Above all, we must keep on singing this song, for it will always be new.

Prayers

Gracious Creator, today, we are still here, still alive, still breathing. We lift our prayers this day for those who cannot shelter at home, because of their work, providing food and services, caring for others, struggling with disasters and emergencies. May they find shelter in each other, and in the knowledge that we hold them in our hearts.

Open-hearted and broken-hearted, we are gaining new awareness that their work, deemed essential has always been sacred and comes at a cost. They are exposed, laid bare by something we cannot see except in its devastating wake and anticipation. And yet, this suiting up, this tagging-in calls to them in their vocations.

Let each of us become aware of a place deep within our hearts: the home of our very essence that is ready to listen, ready to assess, ready to intervene to the best of our ability, ready to be a loving presence.

May we notice this miraculous part of ourselves and our unsung heroes today. And may our support help them to the next minute, the next patient, the next hour, the next shift-change, the next day. And in every moment, especially the most fearful or weary ones, may they know for certain that they are loved and they are not alone. ***Amen***

This is another day, O God. We know not what it will bring, but we trust in you to make us ready for whatever it may be. If we are able to move freely and be of help to others, help us to stand and act bravely. If we are to sit still, help us to be patient, reflective and creative. If we are to lie low, help us to do it safely and wisely. And we are to do nothing, let us do so gallantly. Make these words more than words, and give us the spirit to live into them. *Amen.*

Hymn 493 - O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing

O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise;
The glories of my God and King, the triumphs of his grace!

Hear him, ye deaf; ye voiceless ones, your loosened tongues employ;
Ye blind, behold your Savior comes, and leap, ye lame, for joy!

Glory to God and praise and love be now and ever given
By saints below and saints above, the church in earth and heaven.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Exf7DO2vxE>

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

And now, let us go forth in peace to follow the good road. And let us go forth without fear, for the one who made us will always be with us, and loves us like a good mother. And the blessing of God Almighty: Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer be with you this day and remain with you always.