

Sunday Missive – July 5, 2020



whale rock

The Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

Greetings, One and All, and welcome back to St. Peter's by the Sea here in beautiful Morro Bay. Today, Marti Lindholm, Nancy Castle and I return to offer you a service of prayer, word and song with love. This Sunday Missive will be delivered live on Facebook at 11:00 A.M. on Sunday, July 5. Click on the link below, or cut and paste into your browser bar and you should be able to watch our service. If you keep this Missive open too, you will have the hymn lyrics ready to sing, and prayer responses ready to speak. If you are unable to watch, please let Padre Sid know afterwards and we will try to get you up and running for next time: sssymington@gmail.com or (203) 209-2339. If you have a Facebook account, or would like to make one for the purpose of watching, be sure to go to "St. Peter's By The Sea, Morro Bay" using that exact spelling. There are a few other pages that are either inactive – and we can't take them down -- or another group entirely. Be sure to scroll down to "Posts" to see our service!
https://www.facebook.com/StPetersMorroBay/?ref=aymt_homepage_panel&eid=ARAUeH_DsZ84100oD17S5TKTJa9nPInamVaKKBDjC7zKd1Kvws0elUTfHmPTVaREXk2ty7B1JsL3bJxW

Grace to you and peace, from God our Creator, from Christ our Redeemer, who with the Holy Spirit sanctifies and nourishes us. **Let us pray: Almighty God**, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may more perfectly love, and more worthily magnify your holy Name. Amen.

On the occasion of the wondrous work-in-progress called the USA, let's sing

Hymn 716

God bless our native land; firm may she ever stand
through storm and night:
When the wild tempests rave, ruler of wind and wave,
Do thou our country save by thy great might.

For her our prayers shall rise to God, above the skies:
almighty hand.
Thou who art ever nigh, guarding with watchful eye,
to thee aloud we cry, God save our land!

A Reading from the Book of Genesis, Chapter 24

My master Abraham made me swear, saying, "You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, where I live; but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son." I said to my master, "Perhaps the woman will not follow me." But he said to me, "The Lord will send angels with you and make your way successful." I came today to the spring, and said, "O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going! I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, 'Please give me a little water from your jar to drink,' and who will say to me, 'Drink, and I will draw for your camels also' —let her be the woman whom the Lord has appointed for my master's son." Before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah coming out with her water jar on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, "Please let me drink." She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, "Drink, and I will also water your camels." Then I bowed my head and worshiped the Lord, and blessed the Lord, who had led me by the right way to obtain the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son

And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "May you, our sister, become thousands of myriads; may your offspring gain possession of the gates of their foes." Then Rebekah and her maids rose up, mounted the camels, and followed the man; thus they went their way.

Now Isaac went out in the evening to walk in the field; and looking up, he saw camels coming. And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she slipped quickly from the camel, took her veil and covered herself. Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. **Here ends the reading.**

Hymn 533

How wondrous and great thy works, God of praise!
How just, King of saints, and true are thy ways!
O who shall not fear thee, and honor thy Name?
Thou only art holy, thou only supreme.

To nations of earth thy light shall be shown;
their worship and vows shall come to thy throne:
thy truth and thy judgments shall spread all abroad,
till earth's every people confess thee their God.

A Reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 7

For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. Wretched soul that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? With my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

Here ends the reading.

The Holy Gospel According to Matthew, Chapter 11

At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by the Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. "Come to me, all you that are weary and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Our story from Genesis today has Abraham "well advanced in years, and already blessed in all things." Imagine being blessed in all things! Most of us can think of something in our lives that we would fix, or change, or do over. Thanks be to God we have the blessed assurance that even our wrongs can be forgiven should we ask. Did Abraham know it too? He did have his share of difficulties. Perhaps the characterization of him as 'blessed in all things' is made so that we,

who along with Jews and Muslims are all spiritual descendants of Abraham, will be forced to consider whether we too can see ourselves as blessed in all things.

Among the most complicated parts of life, blessing-wise, is parenthood. Mostly good though, right? Sometimes soul-stirring, hilarious, challenging, comforting; at times very sad. But you never hear somebody on their death bed say, "Ahh, I wish I hadn't spent so much time with those darn kids." In this story, we can take insight about how to be a parent, and nurture our progeny and thus our legacy, from Abraham's adventures.

Abraham said to his trusty advisor, "Put your hand under my thigh and I will make you swear by God." The thigh is the most powerful muscle, to be asked to put a hand under it was a time-honored way of expressing the utmost loyalty. So this is not just any messenger, this is the "A" team. But the servant is unnamed. He is loyal, capable and trusted, but anonymous. As ancient stories are passed down, characters – especially women and servants – often lose their names. This certainly speaks of gender and caste in the culture. Things are bad now, but they used to be worse. Namelessness also serves to make these characters' symbolic function sharper. Here, the fully-trusted "one" represents what we count on completely but cannot ever fully know. The servant is a force for goodness that operates outside self and ego. This tells us that Ole Abe has achieved blessedness in all things by learning to leave the important stuff to God. It's the running theme of his saga. God is in the form of an unnamed servant – marginalized and faceless – in whose hands lies the whole future.

St. Paul says today, "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." Left to my own devices, I will not do the right thing, let alone flourish. I must invoke and employ powers greater than myself, like the will of God as mediated through the marginalized, if I want to live. Listen to Jesus again: "I thank you, oh God, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants, for such was your gracious will." It's hard to deny the irony here: the best thinking of the self-styled wise and intelligent gets us in the most trouble. Unless we 'let go and let God' as the saying goes, we will not only fail, our family will cease to be. Left to purely human decision making, Ishmael would already be dead of thirst, Isaac would already be dead on a pile of burning sticks; no Rebekah, and mos def no offspring as numerous as the stars.

Abraham tells the servant to go get his son Isaac a wife from the old country.' Either he's a bigot, which doesn't help us much, or this is a way of saying he wants to get back to his roots. If Isaac marries a girl from the old country, then Abraham's grandchildren will be connected to his history, and have access to the wisdom of the generations of his people, the people of God.

The man tries to talk him out of it. 'What if she won't come all the way out here to Canaan? Then I'm gonna have to take Isaac all the way to her house and

leave him. You don't want me to do that, do you?' But Abe is certain. God is directing and protecting his interests as he decides and acts; he is blessed in all things, and he knows it. If the plan doesn't work, he promises not to hold the man responsible. So off he sets back to the old country where he hangs around the oasis and prays to God for success.

You and I don't have servants – to speak of. Which means if we're going to enjoy and benefit from this story, we have to relate to it in a different way. We could approach the problem the same way psychologists treat dreams, wherein the different characters in the story are just different aspects of ourselves. That way everybody is us. In such a scenario, Abraham is seen to call upon the most trustworthy, reliable, integral parts of himself to discern the wisdom of the deity, to avail himself of its power and depth, and to bear witness to this power to and through his children.

His best self, the servant, goes back to arrange the marriage of his greatest gift, Isaac, to the most sublime and beautiful cultural wellspring, Rachel. This is sounding more and more like Anglican theology all the time: Reason, Scripture, and Tradition! But what does it have to do with parenting? Perhaps it is as plain as this: whatever we seek for our children, whatever we recommend they pay attention to, whatever we try to convince them of, let it be a product of the life we have lived, a reflection of the faith we possess. Let it not be a vaunting of our resentments and fears. If we do our own growing up and resist the urge to push the tough questions onto the next generation, then we are being nurturing parents. If we try to convince our children that our curses have defined us more than our blessings, then we harm and handicap the very ones through whom we would live and be remembered.

Abe wants a good relationship for Isaac; he wants to establish a precedent for good relationships in his family. Which, don't forget, stands to number as numerous as the stars in the heavens. A billion good relationships start at home. Actually, on the Jungian dream theory, good relationships start with trying to help the several voices in our own heads get along with each other. As the chosen one of God, the one who is blessed by God in all things, if Abraham is going to, as the saying goes, 'clean house and let the grace come in,' he has to start with himself, with his very own life. That's why he returns to his spiritual roots to meet the future mother of his grandchildren, to establish the foundation of his new family. He gets back to basics.

We say that Jesus has come to initiate a transformation of human history characterized by justice and peace making instead of domination and power. God knows, as well as you and I, that we have slowed and obstructed this project in innumerable, stunning and awful ways. But equally clear is the reason, the commission and the vocation we have, to live our lives in resistance to injustice, to call out misuses of power, and put a name on desperate greed wherever and whenever we encounter it, to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. The

process, of course has to begin between our own ears; ours is the first house we have to clean.

The childlike understanding Jesus talks about is one of faith, courage and commitment, not of intellectual discernment and wile. Organized grownups in charge of things tend to want to get all their ducks in a row before fooling around with letting go of power for others' sake, or making justice their primary goal (ahead of order). Letting go seems foolish, irresponsible, and unacceptably risky. But only such a childlike faith and confidence, a spiritual, humble, un-intellectual kind of understanding will enable us to act as our best selves in building our best society. It's a basic truth.

Prayers

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart, and especially the hearts of the people of this land, that the barriers which divide us may crumble, the suspicions which paralyze us may disappear, and the hatreds which sicken us may cease; that, our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace. ***Amen.***

O Lord our only true monarch, bless the leaders of our land, that we may someday become a people at peace among ourselves and transform ourselves so as to truly benefit the other nations of the earth. ***Lord, keep this nation under your care.***

To the President and members of the Cabinet, to Governors of States, Mayors of Cities, and to all in administrative authority, grant wisdom, grace and a hunger for truth in all they do or say in the exercise of their duties. ***Give grace to your servants, O Lord.***

To those who hold political power in our Nation, our States, our Cities, and our Towns, give courage, wisdom, foresight and forbearance to fairly consider and provide for the needs of all people, and to be worthy of the leadership challenges arising amongst the nations. ***Give grace to your servants, O Lord.***

To the Judges and officers of our Courts give understanding, compassion and integrity, that human rights may be safeguarded and justice served, especially among the marginalized and powerless. ***Give grace to your servants, O Lord.***

Teach us to rely on your strength and to accept our responsibilities to our fellow citizens, that we may elect trustworthy leaders and make wise decisions for the well-being of our society – even if it brings discomfort, frustration and hardship -- that we may serve you faithfully in our generation and honor your

holy Name of love. *For such is the true kingdom, O Lord, which alone is exalted above all. Amen.*

LEVAS Hymn 207 We'll Understand It Better By and By

By and by, when the morning comes,
When the saints of God are gathered home,
We will tell the story how we've overcome;
For we'll understand it better by and by.

We are often tossed and driv'n on the restless sea of time.
Somber skies and howling tempests oft succeed a bright sunshine.
In that land of perfect day, when the mists have rolled away,
We will understand it better by and by. (refrain)

Trials dark on ev'ry hand, and we cannot understand,
All the ways that God would lead us to that blessed Promised Land.
But we're guided by God's eye, and we'll follow till we die.
For we'll understand it better by and by. (refrain)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXUHW3WHIeE&pbjreload=101>

And now, may the peace of God which passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God in the unity of Christ. And may the blessing of the creating, redeeming, and sanctifying One be with you this day and remain with you forever.

Be safe, be well, be kind to yourselves and one another. Keep in touch and know that you are beloved.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jl0r58RdLVU>