

Sunday Missive – May 3, 2020



The Fourth Sunday of Easter

Psalm 13 *Usquequo, Domine? How Long, O Lord?*

How long, O Lord, will you forget me? How long will you hide your face?
How long must I bear grief in my soul, this sorrow in my heart day and night?
How long shall my enemy prevail?

Look at me, answer me, Lord my God! Give light to my eyes lest I fall asleep in death, lest
my enemy say: "I have overcome him";
lest my foes rejoice to see my fall.

As for me, I trust in your merciful love. Let my heart rejoice in your saving help:
Let me sing to the Lord for the goodness I have known,
singing psalms to the name of the Lord, the Most High.

Greetings, beloved friends, Just in case you are thinking you have reached the end of your rope, fear not. It is safe and sound at #545 Shasta Avenue in Morro Bay, awaiting your return! The psalmist's cry, "How long?" is resounding throughout the land and around the globe these days; everybody is singing the same song. It is a time when the greatest act a leader can perform is one of humility in saying, "I don't know." For us who would follow the lead of Jesus -- in our view of life and history, and in our attempts to live responsibly and responsively according to the realities of the day -- this not knowing 'how long' is our natural state. Jesus does not tell us how long. Jesus tells us how to live, however long it is.

The Gospel According to John -- Chapter 10

Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

In the teachings of Twelve-Step spirituality, the same theme is reiterated often:

If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it—then you are ready to take certain steps. At some of these we balked. We thought we could find an easier, softer way. But we could not. With all the earnestness at our command, we beg of you to be fearless and thorough from the very start. Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely. Remember that we deal with life — cunning, baffling, powerful! Without help it is too much for us. But there is One who has all power—that One is God. May you find Him now! Half measures availed us nothing. We stood at the turning point. We asked His protection and care with complete abandon. Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery...

That is where we are today. The end of our rope is held in God's steady hand.

A Reading from the First Letter of Peter

It is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Hymn 654

Day by day, day by day,
O, dear Lord, three things I pray:
To see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly,
Follow thee more nearly, day by day.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekoHxB4idmg>

A Reading from the Acts of the Apostles – Chapter Two

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Although we are not able to spend much time together in the temple, each day of this long winter, when we break bread at home, we can remember to imitate the disciples, who "ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people."

Hymn 325

Let us break bread together on our knees; let us break bread together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun, O Lord, have mercy on me.

Let us drink wine together on our knees; let us drink wine together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun, O Lord, have mercy on me.

Let us praise God together on our knees; let us praise God together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun, O Lord, have mercy on me.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7bNwpomzYc>

"Christianity is meant to shape the manner in which people relate -- to themselves and to others -- by virtue of the contrary characteristics of religious adherence. Because of the way faith is propelled, spiritual striving is not a competitive contest singling out individuals for praise or blame. Divine grace lessens the focus on individual achievement altogether: One makes progress by God's power rather than one's own. And the shared character of that grace does nothing to lessen the impact of it for one's own life. The ideal, fully enacted by God's grace in the end, is a community of persons all equally manifesting the same grace in lives transformed for the good." Kathryn Tanner

A Prayer for Our Time

Spirit of All Creation: May our faith in you and one another guide us as we cannot yet see our way through this time of crisis.

May our hope in you and the goodness of our neighbors strengthen us as we endure our discomforts and fears.

Give comfort to all who are emotionally, physically, and spiritually distressed.

Bless our healthcare providers and all who are taking care of those who are ill.

Grant wisdom and discernment to those who are researching and searching for medicines to combat our diseases, the coronavirus, and other illnesses.

Help us to reassure and comfort our children and protect them from harm and danger.

Grant, O God, those who lead our governments, institutions, hospitals, our schools and local organizations, safety and emergency services, and us, wisdom beyond our own wisdom to contain the coronavirus; faith beyond our own faith to help us to fight our fears and strength beyond our own strength to be resilient and sustain all of our vital institutions through this time of turmoil.

Although we are physically separated from one another help us, Eternal One, to maintain our social connections to one another by our creatively and ethically using social media.

Help each of us to know that there is something in us stronger than fear.

Birth in us a new sense of hope that will help us to rise above the clouds of despair.

Grant, Eternal Love, that we emerge from this time of crisis a more loving people who are more committed to the welfare of all and the earth that sustains us. Amen

Rachmana — Merciful God

In a time of fear we pray for calm.
In a time of illness we pray for health.
In a time of isolation we pray for community.
As we worry about ourselves and those we love
Help us keep others in our minds and in our hearts:
The bereaved, the bereft, the workers, the healers.
May the night find us courageous and compassionate
And the dawn come soon.

Rest in Peace, George Rozsa 1919-2020 PhD in Chemistry, a speaker of at least 5 languages, survivor of the Holocaust and of Romanian Communism, an American immigrant, entrepreneur; loving great-grandfather. He is survived by Hedy, his wife of 80 years.

Psalm 13

(“To the leader, a song of Gavin” adapted by Lenny Erickson)

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear the pain of those Protesters in my soul,
And have the sorrows of the Covid rate in my heart all day long?
How long shall the Beach-goers be exalted over me?

Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!
Give strength to my edicts, or I will look weak,
And the Protesters say, "I have prevailed."
The Beach-goers rejoice because I am shaken.

O Lord, I trust in the wisdom of the Fauci;
My heart rejoices in your affirmation of my decrees

I will sing aloud to the Lord,
Who from the beginning of time has understood all.
He knows Covid as Fauci and I do.

Hymn 199

Come, ye faithful, raise the strain of triumphant gladness! God hath brought his Israel into joy from sadness: loosed from Pharaoh's bitter yoke Jacob's sons and daughters, led them with unmoistened foot through the Red Sea waters.

'Tis the spring of souls today: Christ hath burst his prison, and from three days' sleep in death as a sun hath risen; all the winter of our sins, long and dark, is flying from his light, to whom we give laud and praise undying.

Now the queen of seasons, bright with the day of splendor, with the royal feast of feasts, comes its joy to render; comes to glad Jerusalem, who with true affection welcomes in unwearied strains Jesus' resurrection.

Neither might the gates of death, nor the tomb's dark portal, nor the watchers, nor the seal hold thee as a mortal: but today amidst thine own thou didst stand, bestowing that thy peace which evermore passeth human knowing.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nwuJkOj04>

Now let us go forth in peace to follow the good road – in heart and voice, if not in body. And let us go forth without fear, for the One who made us will always be with us, and love us like a good mother.

More Words from the Wise

The following is excerpted from an interview with The Rev. Earl E. Johnson, former Spiritual Care Manager for the American Red Cross, and author of *Finding Comfort During Hard Times: A Guide to Healing after Disaster, Violence, and Other Community Trauma* (2020)

Many people have become anxious from the dramatic jolts of the news cycle. The fears related to the coronavirus pandemic have heightened a sense of uncertainty, fear, and loneliness. From your perspective can you share some reasons to be hopeful during this crisis?

We know there are people who are trained to help us and they care. Not only the medical community but those who have clinical training to provide emotional and spiritual support. Vocation and mission are combined. I'm married to a doctor and I've worked as a hospital chaplain and I know how much we care. It is a common denominator for those entering and thriving in a helping environment.

We know medical personnel have professional ethics and standards of care. Fierce adherence to their oath to save and protect life and years of clinical training and experience have produced an extraordinary canon of best practices and standards of care. The care begins with the arrival of the EMTs and continues in the emergency room and throughout the continuum of care, insuring a safe and dignified environment, whatever the outcome.

We know their highest value is to save lives. During the beginning of the AIDS and COVID 19 pandemics, healthy appearing people would present early or no symptoms and be dead within weeks and months. The impact upon the medical community was acute as so many died without any treatment working. That powerlessness is not easily forgotten.

We know that how we treat the most vulnerable reveals who we are as a society. Whenever a patient presents symptoms or injury, there must be no discrimination based on race, creed, color, sexual orientation, or vocation. The effects of catastrophe and violence on the poor and marginalized continue to be hugely disproportionate in our communities. COVID-19 is no exception.

Be not afraid, but be informed. The truth will set us free.

From your experience, what are some steps each of us can take to support those around us who are feeling anxious?

Start the conversation by introducing yourself and briefly talking about who you are. While we're not able to offer a handshake or hug, we can connect verbally from a safe distance. That introduction may be the beginning of a life-saving or life-affirming act of hospitality or assistance.

Offer hospitality; be a good neighbour. Check-in with elderly neighbors and relatives and offer assistance with shopping and important errands.

Tell the truth. Keep your promises. People need accurate information and reassurance. Make sure you know what you're talking about is truthful and legitimate. Don't make promises one can't keep or that overwhelm the giver.

Be reassuring and genuine. This is the time to be authentic, honest and remarkable. Aspire to inspire. Encouraging someone is a good way to express love and compassion.

Don't assume that you will be completely heard. It's not that what you're saying is untrue or too hard to understand, it's that those who are traumatized or anxious may not listen at 100% capacity – who does? Repeat or re-emphasize things if it seems appropriate, but don't make the assumption that everything you've suggested or shared has been fully grasped.

What are the best resources you would suggest to a person who is feeling anxious?

Mostly people: Those who comfort and reassure. Family and friends who can rise to the occasion and show inner strength and reason and are trustworthy. Those who are kind and true and honest. Those who can companion with mercy and justice. Those who can comfort and do not overwhelm; who keep it simple.

Sometimes being with someone is enough and not about doing anything beyond having a cup of coffee or receptive ear. Listening to someone is a powerful gift and respect for one another is an ultimate value. It doesn't have to be complicated or unique, it just has to be true and authentic.

If you would like to talk, or are in need of any assistance, please call your Rector, The Rev. Sidney Symington, aka 'Padre Sid' at (203) 209-2339 and leave a voice message, write to him at 545 Shasta Avenue, Morro Bay, CA 93442, or via email:

sssymington@gmail.com

A Selection of Online Episcopal Church Services

Trinity Wall Street

<https://www.trinitywallstreet.org/blogs/watching-trinity-live-streamed-worship-services>

The National Cathedral, Washington, DC

<https://cathedral.org/online/>

All Saints Church, Pasadena

<https://allsaints-pas.org/live-stream/>

Church of the Incarnation, Dallas, Texas
<https://incarnation.org/digital-worship/>

St. Barnabas, Arroyo Grande
<https://www.facebook.com/StBarnabasAG/> Sunday at 10:00
To see the worship bulletin, or recording of the service later:
<https://saintbarnabas-ag.org/>

Migration

This year Marie drives back and forth from the hospital room of her dying friend to the office of the adoption agency.

I bet sometimes she doesn't know what threshold she is waiting at – the hand of her sick friend, hot with fever; the theoretical baby just a lot of paperwork so far.

But next year she might be standing by a grave, wearing black with a splash of mashed banana on it, the little girl just starting to say *Sesame Street* and *Cappuccino latte grande Mommy*.

The future ours for a while to hold, with its heaviness – and hope moving from one location to another like the holy ghost that it is.

Tony Hoagland

