

The Sunday Missive – August 2, 2020



Jacob Wrestles with the Angel – Eugene Delacroix 1850

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

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Greetings, one and all, and welcome back to St. Peter's by the Sea on this Sunday morning, the second day of August; the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost in this extraordinarily challenging year of our Lord, 2020. The above link should take you to our facebook page, where you can join Nancy Castle, Marti Lindholm, Mary Sue Gee and The Rev. Sid Symington **any time after 11 A.M. for a service of word, prayer, song and love as presented in this *Missive*. If you have any prayer requests, and difficulties in tuning in to facebook, or other questions, concerns or suggestions, please contact Padre Sid via telephone (203) 209-2339 or email: sssymington@gmail.com. **You do not need a facebook account to join us!** And so we begin...**

Blessed by God, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier. *And blessed be God's Kingdom, now and forever.* Let us pray:

O God our shield and armor of light, whom we adore with all the angelic host: defend us from evil; watch over any who are in danger this day and give your angels charge over them; and grant that we may always rejoice in your heavenly protection and serve you bravely in the world. **Amen.**

Let your continual mercy, O Lord, cleanse and defend your Church; and, because we cannot continue in safety without your help, protect and govern us always by your goodness; through Jesus, Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Hymn 518 -- Christ is Made the Sure Foundation

Christ is made the sure foundation, Christ the head and cornerstone,
Chosen of the Lord, and precious, binding all the Church in one;
Holy Zion's help for ever, and her confidence alone.

All that dedicated city, dearly loved of God on high,
In exultant jubilation pours perpetual melody;
God the One in Three adoring in glad hymns eternally.

To this temple, where we call thee, come, O Lord of Hosts, today;
With thy wonted loving-kindness hear thy servants as they pray,
And thy fullest benediction shed within its walls away.

Here vouchsafe to all thy servants what they ask of thee to gain;
What they gain from thee, forever with the blessed to retain,
And hereafter in thy glory evermore with thee to reign.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p73XRON9r78>

A Reading from the Book of Genesis – Chapter 32

Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the country of Edom, instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, 'I have lived with Laban as an alien until now; I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male and female slaves; and I have sent to you my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.'" The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him." Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. So he divided his people, and his flocks and herds and

camels, into two companies, thinking, "If Esau comes to the one company and destroys it, the half that is left will escape."

And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as numerous as the sand of the sea.' We have crossed this river Jordan; and have divided ourselves into two companies. Deliver us, please, from the hand of my brother, Esau, for I am afraid of him; that he may come and kill us all, even the mothers and their children.

So he spent that night there, and from what he had with him he took a present for his brother Esau. These he delivered into the hand of his servants and said, "When Esau my brother asks you, 'To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these herds ahead of you?' you shall say, 'They belong to your servant Jacob who is behind us; they are a present sent to my lord Esau.' For he thought, 'I may appease him with the gifts that go before me, and when I see his face; perhaps he will accept me.'" So the gifts went on ahead, and he himself stayed back. The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and led them across the ford of the Jabbok. He took them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had.

Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." The sun rose upon him as he went on his way, limping because of his hip. Here ends the reading.

Psalm 145

I will bless the Lord day after **day*** And praise God's name **forever**.

The Lord is great and highly to be **praised*** Whose greatness cannot be **measured**.

Age to age shall proclaim your **works*** Shall declare your mighty **deeds**.

They will recall your abundant **goodness*** Age to age shall ring out your **justice**.

The Lord is kind and full of **compassion*** Slow to anger and abounding in **love**.

All your creatures shall thank you, O **God*** And your friends shall repeat their **blessing**.

The eyes of all creatures look upon **you*** You give them their food in due **season**.

You open wide your **hand*** To grant the desires of all who **live**.

Let me sing the praises of the **Lord*** Let all peoples bless God for ages **unending**.

We are climbing Jacob's Ladder Arranged by Richard Walters Mary Sue Gee, Soloist

We are climbing Jacob's ladder -- We are climbing Jacob's ladder
Ev'ry round goes higher higher -- Ev'ry round goes higher higher
Sinner do you love my Jesus -- Sinner do you love my Jesus
If you love Him why not serve Him -- If you love Him why not serve Him
Do you think I'd make a soldier -- Do you think I'd make a soldier
Faithful prayer will make a soldier -- Faithful prayer will make a soldier
We are climbing Jacob's ladder -- Soldiers of the cross

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EW6z-ftfJeg>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3eL8_1xCrjE

A Reading from the Gospel According to Matthew, Chapter 14

Jesus left Nazareth and went to a deserted place, where he set out in a boat by himself. But the crowds heard where he was, and followed him on foot from the surrounding towns. When he came ashore, a great crowd was gathered. And he had compassion for them and cured those who were sick.

When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he told the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. All of them ate and were filled. They took up all that was left over of the broken pieces and there were twelve baskets full. Those who ate numbered about five thousand families.

What can make us soldiers of the cross? This sounds like an inherent contradiction; a trick question. That is, unless we understand the interiority of the struggle. The practice of a life spent climbing Jacob's Ladder is made up of wrestling with the angels of God by night, so that we can spend our days making peace with the rest of Creation. Every round goes higher, higher and only faithful prayer can keep us on the ladder. The metaphor of soldiering is a delicate one to interpret. We are not bidden to serve God by finding the right heads to bash. Our struggle is to hold onto God, to maintain our difficult conversation with truth, to remind ourselves that we are blessed, no matter the challenges and uncertainties we face.

The twin stories of Jacob's Ladder and Jacob's wrestling match with the mysterious being are parables for this struggle in which we must engage. In many ways, life is a wilderness. No matter what we hear or read or observe, we must experience life for ourselves and face the uncertainty of what will happen next. Almost everything is out of our control, so we must pay the closest attention to those things over which we do have direct influence. We will be injured by life; we will limp. But the only way through is to hold onto our relationship with reality; to stay in the struggle without letting ourselves get distracted by falsehood. Henri Nouwen observes:

The spiritual life is a life in which we are more and more able to be led, to be guided to hard places, places we would rather not go. For Jesus, it was the cross. For all the disciples, it meant a lot of suffering. It is not masochism. It is not being hard on ourselves. It is being in love. It is being so fully and so totally in love that we go to places we would rather not go.

Anyone who has ever been on a tall ladder knows the feeling that comes when you are high enough above the ground that jumping – or falling – off ceases to be a viable option for continued health and safety. The higher you climb, the more you have to trust in the process: the integrity of your ladder and its footings; the angle at which gravity works to hold it in place; your grip on its rungs. The more

we follow this godly love affair, the closer attention we must pay to the integrity of our relationship with God: our faith and our accountability. We may sing, "Christ is made the sure foundation," today, but we must also see that it is true in our lives. Truth is the gravity that will hold us to our course, if only we can accept it and behave accordingly. And we have to hold on tight. We must pray and search, not for lighter burdens for ourselves, but for broader shoulders to share the burdens of others.

Jesus had compassion on the crowds because they were sheep without a shepherd. Jesus will have compassion on us too, if we only will let it be. The times we're living in are, by any measure whatsoever, a wilderness, and the roster of good shepherds seems all but depleted. The disciples' first response to the plight of fifteen-thousand or so hungry people is to send them away. *Nie mój cyrk, nie moje małpy* as the Polish say, 'Not my circus, not my monkeys.' But Jesus wakes them up on the subject, so famously that the stories of these great feedings are among the few that appear in all four gospels. "You give them something to eat," he directs. "Who, us? But, but, but, we only have..." It's a place they would rather not go. But they do, because they know they are blessed by love. Time and culture have warped the story into "Jesus feeds the 5000." But that leaves out the women and children. And it also glosses over the deeper truth: Jesus feeds the disciples; it is the disciples who feed the people.

Have we lost our ability to hear these parables. Have we lost our ability to stand in need of the gravity and footing God alone provides? Have we as a people lost our abilities – if we ever had them -- to tolerate uncertainty, to exercise moderation, to champion justice? Have we ears to hear the Gospel? Or have we not ability to stand in tension, to do without just what we want just when we want it? Can we stand to do without our idea of perfection and wealth without blaming and punishing and depriving and taking undue advantage of others? Can we ever stop trying relieve our discomfort by transferring it to the weak? It is and has always been a futile strategy; a dead-end street. We live in a culture where lashing out is a common and accepted practice for all too many. But we will never get to peace by travelling the road of anger. We will never improve our lot by degrading and destroying the lives of others, whoever they may be. We will never, ever become soldiers of the cross by siding with the greedy and hateful. Faithful prayer alone will make a soldier. If we love, why do we not serve?

We must ask ourselves these kinds of questions as we wrestle with God's angels in our own dream states. "Do you think I'd make a soldier?" "Am I climbing Jacob's Ladder?" "Will I follow the truth, even to places I would rather not go?" "Will I be a disciple?" "Am I in love?"

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 diseases, the coronavirus, and others. 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 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

WLP Hymn 763 As We Gather at Your Table

As we gather at your Table, as we listen to your Word,
help us know, O God, your presence; let our hearts and minds be stirred.
Nourish us with sacred story till we claim it as our own;
teach us through this holy banquet how to make Love's vict'ry known.

Turn our worship into witness in the sacrament of life;
send us forth to love and serve you, bringing peace where there is strife.
Give us, Christ, your great compassion to forgive as you forgave;
may we still behold your image in the world you died to save.

Gracious Spirit, help us summon other guests to share that Feast
where triumphant Love will welcome those who had been last and least.
There no more will envy blind us nor will pride our peace destroy,
as we join with saints and angels to repeat the sounding joy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HtPEuPw7k8>

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

In the words of the prophet Isaiah, “Fear not, for God has redeemed you, and called you by name. When you pass through the waters, God will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. + For the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior will always be with you, even unto the end of the age. **Amen.**”



Limbourg Brothers, Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry, « Jesus Feeding the 5,000 » c. 1416