

## The Sunday Missive -- November 8, 2020



### The Twenty-third Sunday After Pentecost

**Greetings, one and all,** and welcome home to St. Peter's by the Sea. Janis Johnson, 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 from home: [facebook.com/StPetersMorroBay](https://www.facebook.com/StPetersMorroBay) Scroll down until you see today's Sunday Missive, anytime after 11 A.M. on Sunday, November 8. No facebook account is needed! A reminder, there will not be an outdoor service tomorrow. We will resume next Sunday, November 15, weather permitting. Check *The Pebble* for news of that. Please direct any questions or comments to your rector, The Rev. Sidney Symington via: (203) 209-2339 or: [sssymington@gmail.com](mailto:sssymington@gmail.com). **And so we begin:**

Grace and peace to you from God; may God fill you with truth and joy. May the Lord bless you and keep you this day, for this is the day which the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

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 truly love you and more worthily praise your holy name; through Christ our Saviour, *Amen*.

## **Hymn 620 – Jerusalem My Happy Home**

Jerusalem, my happy home, when shall I come to thee?  
When shall my sorrows have an end? Thy joys when shall I see?

Thy saints are crowned with glory great; they see God face to face;  
They triumph still, they still rejoice in that most happy place.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, God grant that I may see  
Thine endless joy, and of the same partaker ever be!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySssVj7XCs>

### **A Reading from the book of Joshua -- Chapter 24**

Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel and summoned the elders; and they presented themselves before God. And Joshua said to the people, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac; and to Isaac I gave Jacob, who went to Egypt. Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I brought you out and your eyes saw what I did to Egypt. Afterwards you lived in the wilderness a long time. Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites, who lived on the other side of the Jordan; they fought with you, and I handed them over to you, and you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them before you. I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove out before you the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow. I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and you live there now; you eat the fruit of vineyards and oliveyards that you did not plant.

Now if you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good." And the people said to Joshua, "No, we will serve the Lord!" Then Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses." He said, "Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel." The people said to Joshua, "The Lord our God we will serve, and him we will obey." This is the Word of the Lord.

## Psalm 78

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching\* Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

I will open my mouth in a parable\* I will utter dark sayings from of old.

Things that we have heard and known\* That our ancestors have told us.

We will not hide them from our children\* We will tell all to the coming generation.

So that they should not be like us, their ancestors\* A stubborn and rebellious generation.

A generation whose heart was not steadfast\* Whose spirit has not been faithful to God.

Yet he, being compassionate, forgave our iniquity\* And did not stir up all his wrath.

He remembered that we are but flesh, a wind that passes and does not come again.

But we tested God again and again\* And provoked the Holy One of Israel.

He drove out nations before us\* He settled the tribes of Israel in our tents.

Yet we have tested the Most High God, and rebelled against him\* We do not observe his decrees.

We provoked God to anger with our high places\* We move him to jealousy with our idols.

When God sees this, he is full of wrath\* And he will utterly reject Israel.

He will abandon his dwelling at Shiloh\* The tent where he dwells among mortals,

And delivered their power to captivity\* His glory to the hand of the foe.

## **A Reading from the Prophecy of Amos -- Chapter 5**

Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light; as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies, says the Lord. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. If you will please me, you need do nothing but let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream. This is the Word of the Lord.

## **Hymn 324 – Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence**

Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and with fear and trembling stand;  
Ponder nothing earthly minded, for with blessing in his hand  
Christ our God to earth descendeth, our full homage to demand.

Rank on rank the host of heaven spreads its vanguard on the way,  
As the Light of Light descendeth from the realms of endless day,  
That the powers of hell may vanish as the darkness clears away.

At his feet the six-winged seraph; cherubim, with sleepless eye  
Veil their faces to the Presence, as with ceaseless voice they cry,  
"Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia, Lord Most High!"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWTdLD5w92c>

## **A Reading from the Gospel According to Matthew -- Chapter 25**

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they went to buy it, the

bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. This is the Gospel of the Lord.

We have a choice, says Joshua. His folks and us folks both. Whether it is a choice about what to do unto others, or a choice of how to respond when done unto. We have choices, and when we have fallen into sin and become subject to evil, we can choose to change. As Hazrat Khan likes to say, "To be really sorry for one's errors is to open the door of heaven."

There are specific, discreet, irreversible choices like casting a vote, or jumping into the water, or getting intimate with someone, or getting behind the wheel of a car when you've consumed intoxicants. The result of each momentary choice may be neither wondrously productive nor stunningly destructive. Each good choice may not result in a "gift that keeps on giving," ironically or otherwise. Nor is every bad choice necessarily going to lead to pain, humiliation and tragedy. On the other hand, with each one, we're either moving toward goodness or away.

"As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord," declares Joshua. We have all the information we need; this is our future. He knows full well that the future is built one choice at a time. So when the people cry, "We too will serve the Lord!" Joshua is a wise enough leader to be sure they understand what this means: it is not a once-for-all declaration, but a convicted intention that might lead to an ongoing pattern of choosing: "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him; so put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord.' You said it, now let's see you do it.

There's a discipline involved; our reward is not in arriving at a time of life when we get to stop choosing. It's death that has no sting for the faithful. Life can sting plenty. The discipline is in choosing as well as we can without regard for the day or the hour. Don't be fooled by the future tense in the story of the wise and foolish women. This is a story about making choices today, in this life. It's a story about whether we can accept that our choicemaking determines our character. There are indeed many things we cannot be sure of, but of one power, we can never be deprived: it is the power to say, "As for me, I will serve the Lord." It must have been getting along to wintertime if they needed lamps to go to a wedding. Then things got even later and they all fell asleep. Finally, the party got started and the

wise ones still had spare lamp oil to get them through the night. The unwise ones had only been thinking short-term, so they lost out. They failed to cut back on fuel consumption.

It's as if we were floating down a river together. Each of us has a different craft, some are in fancy LL Bean canoes, some in beat-up kayaks or dented flatboats. Some ride in patched inner tubes from old truck tires, with their silly long valve stems that poke into the fleshy area of the lower back. And some of us are just bobbing free, with hands facing down to protect our own fleshy areas from the sharp rocks on the river bottom. Some of us can provide more, in the way of canoeing skills, food, drink and useful equipment at the campsite than others, some can only lend a smile or a good ghost story or a knack for spotting hawks.

But we're all here together, floating on and in the current together, all headed for the same delta, the same ocean, the same soup, eventually. Many of us try paddling upstream, but it wears us out. We try distracting ourselves, by being busy or bothered or oblivious, or by attaching ourselves to someone else's boat through dependence or crime. But the losses are mainly ours, and the prices we pay are lives expended between the poles of doubt and despair.

The prophet Amos paints a picture of God's river current that might make us want to avoid it entirely. But of course, that is one of the things – the main one – that we have no choice over. No matter how we choose to worship, or how we choose to think, say and do things, the day is coming; the party is on, with or without us. Lots of sound and show will not make up for sincere attempts on our parts to keep awake and choose well.

Not that Amos is saying that having parties and making music together is wrong, mind you, or if he is, then I don't agree with him; it's just that those are not the activities that alone will insure us a foundation of godly preparedness. Festivities and joyful liturgies and happy musicmaking surely make life grand; perhaps old Amos was a bit grouchy, and never had a *Dia de Muertos* party. But his point is simple and unassailable; it gets at the root of all our Godly choicemaking, and reiterates our part of the covenant.

The next verse in Amos' prophecy is, of course the heart. What it means to serve the Lord is simply to go with the flow; keep paddling; be on, be in the river, and "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream." One choice at a time.

## Prayers

I ask your prayers for those who are far off and those who are near, especially Jan Swanson, Jim Harker, John Powell, Lynn Enns, Janelle Muff, and those we name now – silently or aloud -- beloved of this community who are sick, injured, undergoing medical treatment or in recovery. Pray for all who are in any need or trouble this day. ***Amen***

Loving God, hope of the poor and source of all health: Look with compassion upon your creatures who suffer under the weight of the current pandemic. Fill us with love toward our neighbors; deliver us from partisan motives as we strive for the common good; and strengthen those who labor for our health. We ask this through the healer of your creation, Jesus Christ, our health and our salvation. ***Amen.***

O Lord our Governor, bless the leaders of our land, that we may be a people at peace among ourselves and once again become a blessing to other nations of the earth. Grant our leaders courage, wisdom, forbearance, discretion and foresight to provide for the needs of all our people, for the preservation of the Earth and her resources and for the fulfilment of our obligations in the community of nations. Teach our people to accept their responsibilities that they may support only trustworthy leaders who make wise decisions for the well-being of our world; that we may serve you faithfully in our generation and honor your holy Name. For yours alone is the true kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. ***Amen.***

### **LEVAS Hymn 227 – We Shall Overcome (vss 1, 4 &5)**

We shall overcome, we shall overcome; we shall overcome someday  
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall overcome someday.

We are not afraid, we are not afraid; we are not afraid today;  
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe, we are not afraid today.

We shall live in peace, we shall live in peace; we shall live in peace someday;  
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall live in peace someday.

And now, may the peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and Christ. And may the blessing of the Creator, the Redeemer; the sustaining Spirit be with you this day and remain with you always. Let us go in peace to love and serve The Lord.  
***Thanks be to God, alleluia, alleluia!***

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