

## The Sunday Missive – August 23, 2020



### The Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost

**Greetings, one and all**, and welcome to St. Peter's by the Sea. Ms. Nancy Castle, Dr. Marti Lindholm, The Hon. Mary Sue Gee and Rev. Sidney Symington 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. No facebook account is needed! Just go to: <https://www.facebook.com/StPetersMorroBay> and scroll down until you see today's Sunday Missive, anytime after 11 A.M. on Sunday, August 23. Please direct any questions or comments to your rector via: (203) 209-2339 OR [sssymington@gmail.com](mailto:sssymington@gmail.com). **Thanks for joining us, and let us begin...**

Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ said: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.

**Let us pray.**

Almighty God, you have given your only Child to nullify sin for us forever, and to give us an example of godly life: Grant us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; who is Jesus, Christ our Lord, and who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Examine your lives and conduct by the rule of God's commandments, that you may perceive wherein you have offended in what you have done or left undone, whether in thought, word, or deed. Acknowledge your sins before Almighty God, with full purpose of amendment of life, being ready to make restitution for all injuries and wrongs done by you to others; and also being ready to forgive those who have offended you, in order that you yourselves may be forgiven. **Amen.**

### **Wonder, Love and Praise Hymn 778 – vss 1, 3 & 4**

We all are one in mission, we all are one in call,  
Our varied gifts united by Christ, the Lord of all.  
A single, great commission compels us from above  
To plan and work together that all may know Christ's love.

We all are called for service to witness in God's name.  
Our ministries are different, our purpose is the same:  
To touch the lives of others by God's surprising grace,  
That people of all nations may feel God's warm embrace.

Now let us be united and let our song be heard.  
Now let us be a vessel for God's redeeming Word.  
We all are one in mission, we all are one in call,  
Our varied gifts united by Christ, the Lord of all.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0AmVKrX6xg>

### **A Reading from the Book of Exodus – Chapter One**

A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and join our enemies and escape from the land." So they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to hate them, and became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites. They made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor.

Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." But the midwives feared God; and so they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them; they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why

have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "It is because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife gets to them." So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket, plastered it with tar, put the child in it and put it among the reeds on the bank of the river. The her daughter watched from a distance, to see what would happen to him.

That day, the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent a maid to bring it. When she opened the basket, the child was crying and she took pity on him, "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said. The child's sister appeared and said, "Shall I go and get you a nurse? One of the Hebrew women can nurse the child for you." And Pharaoh's daughter agreed. So the girl went and called the child's very own mother to be its nurse. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. And when the child had grown, Pharaoh's daughter, took him as her own son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water." Here ends the reading.

### **Psalm 124 - *Nisi qua Dominus***

If the Lord had not been on our **side\*** This is Israel's **song**.

If the Lord had not been on our **side\*** When they rose up **against us**,

Then would they have swallowed us **alive\*** And the torrent swept **over us**.

O blessed be the **Lord\*** Who did not give us as prey to their **teeth**.

Our life, like a bird has **escaped\*** Has escaped the snare of the **fowler**.

Indeed the snare has been **broken\*** And all of us have **escaped**.

Our help is in the name of the **Lord\*** Who made both Heaven and **Earth**.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1bx8NSb7G8>

## **A Reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 12**

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. This is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. Here ends the reading.

### ***Come, Gracious Spirit***

**Music: Luigi Zaninelli -- Words: S. Browne, 1720**

#### **Mary Sue Gee -- soloist**

Come, gracious Spirit, Heav'nly Dove,  
With light and comfort from above;  
Be thou our guardian, thou our guide,  
O'er ev'ry thought and step preside.

The light of truth to us display  
And make us know and choose the way;  
Plant holy fear in every heart,  
That we from thee may ne'er depart.

Lead us to heaven, that we may share  
Fullness of joy forever there;  
Lead us to God, our heavenly rest,  
That we may be forever blest.

## **A Reading from the Gospel According to Matthew – Ch. 16**

Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, and asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” They said, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For the evidence of flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but rather faith from God in heaven. And so I tell you now: you are Peter, the rock. On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will never prevail against it.

Here, I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’ This is the Gospel of the Lord.

### **Enough Already -- Proper 16A**

The world is not an easy place. Hurricanes, powermongers, liars, damaged people who betray us, either by abandonment or theft, all kinds of violence threaten to get in the way of our peace. Thou shalt not steal says the Commandment, or bear false witness, or kill. But someone who betrays your trust is stealing from you just as much as someone who takes money from your wallet or as a liar is lying or a killer kills. It’s a jungle out there. Evil is.

And the concept of what is evil develops in concert with human history. For example, there was a time, not so long ago when human slavery was not only tolerated but embraced by many people from whom lots of us in this room are descended. Now we know it’s just plain evil. In other news, nutrition scientists and food researchers have discovered compounds that enable us to make miracle burgers that have the taste, texture and cooking qualities of meat. Sort-of. They even bleed, for goodness’ sake. Check out Impossible Foods dot com. How long will it be before we will have to explain to our grandchildren about the old days when people actually killed and ate animals, evil as that will sound to them.

Or what about the progress of medical science, which is nothing less than astonishing – seemingly miraculous – and that affords quality and extension of life to humanity in stunning ways. With every discovery, the frontiers of mortality are pushed back, but they are never eliminated. Every medical discovery only points up what hasn’t yet been discovered. How stunningly clear it has become this year. And for everyone whose life is saved from some condition that once was invariably fatal, the condition we all have is of course only postponed.

The biggest question for those who would lead lives of fulfillment, accomplishment, charity and peace is of course, “So, what about the horrors of uncontrollable evil?” We conceive of God as omnipotent, all-powerful; we also conceive of God as benevolent, all good. Yet terrible things happen. Those three statements are difficult, if not impossible to hold in the same worldview. Every faith tradition tries to address this conundrum, but none do a very impressive job of it. The Buddhists will tell us that bad things happen in this life to folks who deserve them because of things they did in past lives. The Christian Scientists will tell us that evil is just a figment of our collective imagination. Neither of these helps much. Christianity, on the other hand, “ultimately offers no theological solution at all. Christianity merely points to the cross and says that, practically speaking, there is no evil so dark and so obscene – not even this – but that God can turn it to good.” So writes Frederick Buechner

The agnostic and the cynic will assert that the stories we tell one another of God’s influence on our lives are the stuff of desperation. In order to avoid accepting our fragility, impermanence, insignificance and tragic fate, it is in desperation that we kid one another about the existence and benevolence of a power greater than ourselves. But the message Jesus brings is not one of desperation, but of inspiration. Whether or not the existence of a dimension of cosmic goodness – that we choose to call God – can be logically proven to exist, believing such a thing is a means of bettering ourselves, of freeing ourselves for whatever life has to offer. Life is too short to worry about death. The life lived in faith is all the proof we need.

Thoreau, on the other hand famously said that the mass of us lead lives of quiet desperation, which is to say, petrified enough by the prospect of life’s end to regret its beginning and miss out on its middle. There is another way. Jesus suggests that we instead lead lives of quiet inspiration, celebrating its beginning and embracing its middle by contemplating the good despite its end. The result is what we call the peace that passes all understanding. It is a peace that remains with us – as they say, *nunc et in hora mortis nostrae*: now and at the hour of our death. The result is a transformation of the nature of evil. No longer does the reality of our fragility, impermanence and insignificance constitute a tragic fate. On the contrary, mysteriously, magnificently, miraculously, each of us is given unlimited power to love. Unlimited power – imagine such a thing. Will we be able, at the moment of their crimes, to forgive those whose deeds are evil, like Jesus did? Maybe not. OK probably not. But since we know that there is no limit on what our lives can be; ‘there is no evil so dark and so obscene but that it can be turned to good.’

The great preaching writer Frederick Buechner tells of the time he and his wife were grocery shopping in the little Vermont town where they live. Across a couple of aisles, he calls to her: “Don’t forget the cream!” To which she replies,

“Don’t forget you’re trying to lose weight...” Buechner’s waggish reply is loud enough to be heard by the harried checkout lady: “You only live once,” he says. The checkout lady, who, on that very hot and muggy summer day has worked hard all day and is plenty tired and flushed with the press of customers feels it is time to interject. “Don’t you think once is enough?” she asks.

Whether the woman’s response was by way of indicating she had had enough for one day, for one lifetime; or she was pointing out to him that ‘You only live once’ is not a phrase to be tossed out lightly, that one lifetime is plenty, we can’t know. That was all she said: “Don’t you think once is enough?” We do know, most of us from one or more connections, about lives that were all too short, lives that ended when they had much more becoming to do. We survivors carry the sorrow of those loves through our lives if we’re paying attention. But the truth persists; reality insists: we do only get one life. Whatever its duration, character, flourishing and fortune, one is all we get, so it better be enough for us; it must be enough for us.

“Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” asks Mary Oliver. And how can we go about it in the face of all the adversity, futility and mortality we encounter? These have long been justifications for selfishness and violence. But we come together in this community to see about pursuing lives of peace and charity instead. How can we break the snare of the Fowler who seeks to destroy us? Birds are mortal too, but meanwhile, they fly.

Is one life enough? It is: if, and only if it is conducted as a celebration of good, whatever we go through. If not, a thousand lifetimes will never be enough for us. Joseph knew this when he forgave his brothers. Jesus preached this to all who would listen, and lived it out with his last breath, so that all who contemplate his existence might embrace such truth. We too can know and love the sufficiency of our lives. And we can do it now. All we have to do is accept the complete freedom that a life of faith can bring, and accept the blessing of the tie that binds us as one.

## **Prayers**

**We give thanks this day** for Diane and Roger Ludin, who celebrate their 54<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary this coming Thursday. And for Eve Symington who turned 32 on Friday. May the Lord bless and keep them!

**Let us pray:** O God of all Creation, we live in a world where both beauty and danger surround us. Receive our prayers for those impacted by, and living in fear of, today’s wildfires: For all who cannot find adequate food, safety, or shelter. For all who have lost their homes, churches, community centers, and workplaces. For all your glorious natural Creation that has been destroyed or remains in harm’s way. We pray for all in need. Heal the pain of all whose lives have been affected. Strengthen with your presence all who are numb with fear and distress. Guide those who anxiously search or wait for loved ones. Be near those who are

grieving, and bless them with your peace. Uphold in body and spirit the brave firefighters, whose tasks can seem unimaginably difficult.

In the midst of disaster we give thanks for moments of generosity and human-kindness. Grant tenderness, strength, and wisdom to doctors and nurses, police and military, fire-fighters and emergency responders; to the wildlife conservationists and stewards of the earth; to all who minister to human need in our time of distress.

We gather these prayers with the assurance that you already know our needs, And are always with us in times of sorrow and distress, as well as in times of joy and thriving. *Amen.*

### **Hymn 685 -- Rock of Ages**

Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee;  
Let the water and the blood from thy wounded side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power.

Should my tears for ever flow, should my zeal no languor know,  
All for sin could not atone; thou must save, and thou alone;  
In my hand no price I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.

While I draw this fleeting breath, when mine eyelids close in death,  
When I rise to worlds unknown and behold thee on thy throne,  
Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee.

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nhk4bb0VmEI>

**And now, until we meet again,** may the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of God's only begotten child Jesus. And the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier be among you this day and remain with you always. *Amen.*