

The Sunday Missive – September 3, 2023

The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Season of Creation Care

Hymn 199 Come ye faithful raise the strain

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=3V30XQwpgrI>

The Collect of the Day

Lord of all love and glory, the author and giver of all good things:
Graft in our hearts the love of your Creation; increase in all true
unity; nourish the world with all goodness; and bring forth the
fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ the Wisdom of Creation,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and for
ever. *Amen.*

Exodus 3:1-15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I am has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the

God of Jacob, has sent me to you;’ this is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.”

Psalm 105

Give thanks to the Lord and call upon God’s Name* ***Make known God’s deeds among the peoples.***

Sing to the Lord, sing praises unto God* ***Speak of the marvellous works of the Lord***

Glory in God’s holy Name* ***Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.***

Search for the Lord, the all-powerful* ***Continually seek the face of God.***

Remember the marvels the Lord has done* ***The wonders and the judgments of God’s mouth.***

O offspring of Abraham, God’s servant* ***O children of Jacob, the chosen of the Lord,***

Israel came into Egypt* ***And Joseph became a sojourner in a foreign land..***

The Lord made the people exceedingly fruitful* ***Made them stronger than their enemies;***

Whose hearts turned, so they oppressed God’s people* ***They dealt unjustly with the servants of the Lord.***

Until the Lord sent Moses, God’s servant* ***And Aaron whom he had chosen to lead the people. Hallelujah!***

Romans 12:9-21

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Lift Every Voice and Sing Hymn 143 Wade in the water

Wade in the water, wade in the water, children,
Wade in the water, God's a-gonna trouble the water.

See that host all dressed in white, God's gonna trouble the water.
The leader looks like the Israelite, God's gonna trouble the water.

See that band all dressed in red, God's gonna trouble the water.
Looks like the band that Moses led, God's gonna trouble the water.

Look over yonder, what do I see? God's gonna trouble the water.
The Holy Ghost a-coming on me, God's gonna trouble the water.

Don't believe I've been redeemed? God's gonna trouble the water.
Follow me down to Jordan stream, God's gonna trouble the water.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_euSS86dvE

Matthew 16:21-28

Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?"

"For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

True Lives – Proper 17A

How fortunate we are to come home to Morro Bay. Moses's story gives us the message that God is to be found in the wildness of nature. Our beautiful and wild surroundings give us an especially rich and potent experience of the God the ruler of all nature. In the coming weeks, our prayers and liturgy here in church will emphasize the awareness and care of Creation; meanwhile in this extraordinary setting we can be prayerful just by looking around.

Elsewhere, there is a great big world out there, full of loving, interesting, diverse personalities; every one with joys and

troubles of their own, so the human experience can be fully had and deeply explored anywhere you go. Weddings and funerals happen in Washington, D.C. just like they do in Washington State. Dear friends grow old and frail in New York just like they do in Los Osos.

Meanwhile, each day's newspaper brings word of societies around the globe who are in the grip of stunningly tragic events that can make our difficulties seem minute by comparison. The closer they are to us, the more dramatic they seem. 100 people losing their lives in our country can seem somehow more tragic than 1200 in South Asia only because it is here. But truly the individual lives of human beings are at once both strangely similar and sublimely unique no matter where they are.

They tell the story of the Jewish guy visiting Japan. Friday arrives and he thinks maybe he ought to worship on the Sabbath if he can find a local congregation. After asking at the hotel and in the taxicab, looking in the phone book and online, he finally finds the name of a place in a remote part of town. He makes his way through winding streets and back alleys, climbs a dark staircase to find the meeting room at last. He puts on his yarmulke and opens the door. "May we help you?" says one of the men inside. "I'm here for the service." And the man replies, "Funny, you don't look Jewish."

In the face of these truths, if we will pay attention to the richness of our lives and our surroundings, our hearts will be moved on two levels simultaneously: to an undeniable empathic connection with all of humanity, and to a more powerful and wondrous devotion to those whose lives are lived in immediate involvement with ours. These twin forces are all the more active in today's environment, where things that happen to far flung others around the planet, especially bad things that happen, are known to us right away and in often excruciating detail. This means that we cannot pretend not to know what's going on. And, on the other hand, with the pace and complexity of our culture, opportunities to express affection for, and take good care of our

nearest and dearest seem more important – even urgent – than ever.

If we are paying attention to what life is offering us, we cannot and will not seek to distance ourselves from the struggles and pain of people in places far away; we will offer them whatever help we can through prayer and political involvement and peace-giving charity. And we will cultivate a heightened awareness of the home folks, the people closest to us, listening to their desires and joys and life stories, sharing ours with them, caring for them, and letting them care for us. We will know that we are just another outpost of humanity, no more or less significant than any other. And we will know that this is where we must begin and concentrate our participation and passion for living. They say ‘home is where the heart is.’ So, we might add, ‘home is where the heart works.’ Whatever else we may do, across town, or on the global stage, our first project is a domestic one. Not only is it good to be home; it’s home to be good.

In our story today, we encounter Moses, as he exercises this very truth, taking care of his father-in-law Jethro’s flock. It’s not by accident that countless comedy routines and colorful stories from Shakespeare to Shecky Green feature interaction – challenging interaction – between young people and their in-laws. In the Yiddish language, which developed as a mechanism for facilitating the difficult lives of Jews in Eastern Europe, lots of words have double, or ironic meanings. There is the descriptive, practical function of words, but also the underlying commentary suggested by their origins and other meanings in the Hebrew, Russian and German languages which are the roots of Yiddish.

For example, the Yiddish word for father-in-law is *Schwere*. The German word *schwere* means ‘heavy.’ In one’s life, the heaviest (another metaphorical meaning), the heaviest figure is likely to be your father-in-law. If you can’t get along with him, not much else matters. He can make you or break you or run you out of town. In fact, you need his permission to even be his son-in-law. Notice the re-borrowing into English: in the movies, made by

studios once run to a great extent by first- and second-generation Jewish immigrants, “the heavy” is the tough guy.

When the story starts out with Moses tending his father-in-law’s flock, the stakes are up. Flock of course does not just mean ovine creatures capable of providing milk, meat and wool. Flock means those in one’s immediate care, your nearest and dearest, the folks at home. So Moses is doing ‘Job 1,’ and he’d better be good, or else. Because Jethro ain’t his brother, he is heavy.

Under these circumstances, who could blame Moses for doing some praying, some meditating, some earnest contemplation of nature (in his case the mountains and their bushes), maybe a little daydreaming and, hot as it is, even the occasional hallucination. And from these activities, undertaken in the earnest desire to do good for his homfolk, the *Schwere’s* flock, Moses encounters the source of all goodness; he hears the voice of God.

For Moses to come back, however earnestly, with the story that he’s seen a burning bush and been talking with the Lord, means he’s bound to encounter a certain amount of skepticism. But he knows it happened, and he knows it happened in the context of his desire to seek the will of God for himself and his homfolk. Like us, he longs to be good to them and good for them. Moses formulates a plan, based on the current political and economic situation of his people, and he formulates this plan in a context of humility, prayerfulness and selflessness. These are the conditions under which he attempts to be a good leader, a good shepherd, a good son-in-law. Having established this context for his leadership, his heart fills with certain knowledge.

We read this as a conversation between Moses and God, but, at least as far as the rest of us are concerned, it might be more useful to see it as Moses maintaining an attitude and outlook and spiritual discipline that make him open to the voice of God working and speaking within his own heart. When his best friend sees Moses caring for his homfolks with righteousness and courage and compassion, he’ll surely overlook the nutty parts:

burning bushes, etc. That's when we come to the best part of this story. Moses thinks to himself, or asks God, if you like, "What is the name of this force of nature that has led me to my conviction to do and be good? Who are you, God?"

And his heart simply resounds with the spirit of truth that is equally available to each and every one of us. Moses surely and swiftly comes to know all he needs to know about the who, why and wherefore of the existence of God: "I am who I am." Go on and tell the Israelites, I am has sent you. The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob is what you have looked for and found. This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations." "There is only one God, and I'm it.' That force, that power, that inexplicable yet undeniable existence is all Moses got by way of answer to his question: "Who are you?" It was all he needed.

From then on, nothing would or could convince him that, in seeking God's help, he had not assured himself of it. Whatever it was he had to do from then on, he would be supported and upheld. From that moment, his intentions would be mediated by his desire to please God. And his greatest desire, to be a good shepherd of the homefolks, would be supported by the greatest power in the universe.

When Jesus describes the suffering he must undergo, and Peter tries to talk him out of it, Jesus responds with a vehemence born of the same kind of heart-knowledge. He knows his desire to be a good shepherd will be upheld forever, no matter what happens on the physical plane. And anyone who questions this is talking Satan talk; they are a stumbling block. It is not our earthly lives we must preserve in order to be good shepherds of each other; our earthly lives will come and go. What we must cultivate and preserve and rejoice in is our unearthly desire to serve God's goodness by caring for one another. For what will it profit us if we gain the whole world but forfeit our true lives? Those who want to save their lives will lose them, but those who lose their lives for

goodness' sake, for the folks at home and wherever their hearts may roam, will live forever.

Hymn 779 The Church of Christ in every age

The church of Christ in every age, beset by change but spirit led,
Must claim and test its heritage and keep on rising from the dead.

Across the world, across the street, the victims of injustice cry
For shelter and for bread to eat and never live until they die.

Then let the servant church arise. A caring church that longs to be
A partner in Christ's sacrifice, and clothed in Christ's humanity.

For Christ alone, whose blood was shed, cures the fever in our blood.
And teach us how to share our bread and feed the starving multitude.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpc79eRG0xk>

Ripening is not Just for Pears

but for the seasons of our lives—though real pears
lie nestled in newspaper upon the floor
and I look in on them each day. Turn them
so they ripen all around. Count them and plan
their use. Today I dream of mincemeat with apples,
cranberries, currants, rind of lemon and orange,
the perfect spices. Would that I could be so kind
when I look upon my own years. Turn them so
the ripe parts show. Imagine what could yet
become of me.

Judith Heron