

**The Sunday Missive – August 13, 2023**  
**The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost**

**Hymn 559 Lead us, heavenly Father lead us**

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us  
o'er the world's tempestuous sea;  
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,  
for we have no help but thee,  
yet possessing every blessing,  
if our God our Father be.

Savior, breathe forgiveness o'er us;  
all our weakness thou dost know;  
thou didst tread this earth before us;  
thou didst feel its keenest woe;  
yet unfearing, persevering,  
to thy passion thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending,  
fill our hearts with heavenly joy;  
love with every passion blending  
pleasure that can never cloy;  
thus provided, pardoned, guided,  
nothing can our peace destroy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wqzau4v23m0&t=12s>

**The Collect of the Day**

Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## **Genesis 37:1-28**

Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. This is the story of the family of Jacob, named Israel.

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him. Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "Here I am." So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock; and bring word back to me." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron.

He came to Shechem, and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" "I am seeking my brothers," he said; "tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." The man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him" —that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. Then Judah said to

his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers agreed. When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

## **Psalm 105**

Give thanks to the Lord and call upon his Name\* ***Make known his deeds among the peoples.***

Sing to him, sing praises to God\* ***And speak of all God's marvellous works.***

Search for the Lord and his strength\* ***Continually seek the face of God.***

Remember the marvels he has done\* ***His wonders and the judgments of his mouth.***

When there was a famine in the land\* ***And the supply of bread was no more.***

He sent a man before them\* ***Joseph, who was sold as a slave.***

They bruised his feet in fetters\* ***His neck they put in an iron collar.***

Until his prediction came to pass\* ***And the word of the Lord spoke through him.***

Then the king released Joseph\* ***The pharaoh of the peoples set him free.***

And set him as a master over his household\* ***Made him ruler over all his possessions,***

To instruct his princes according to his will\* ***And to teach his elders wisdom, hallelujah!***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-th6C3sLAW>

## **Romans 10:5-15**

Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that “the person who does these things will live by them.” But the righteousness that comes from faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

### **Lift Every Voice and Sing Hymn 72, Just a closer walk with thee**

I am weak but thou art strong; Jesus, keep me from all wrong;  
I'll be satisfied as long as I walk, let me walk close to thee.

Refrain:

Just a closer walk with thee, grant it, Jesus, is my plea,  
Daily walking close to thee, let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

Through this world of toil and snares, if I falter, Lord, who cares?  
Who with me my burden shares?  
None but thee, dear Lord, none but thee. [Refrain]

When my feeble life is o'er, time for me will be no more;  
Guide me gently, safely o'er  
To Thy kingdom shore, to thy shore. (Refrain)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00KaircCiGI>

## **Matthew 14:22-33**

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

### **Success Story – Proper 14A**

"O God, enlighten our minds with truth  
Inflame our hearts with love  
Inspire our wills with courage  
Enrich our lives with service  
Pardon what we have been  
Sanctify what we are  
Order what we shall be  
For yours shall be the glory  
And ours the eternal salvation  
Through Jesus Christ, Amen"

Today's readings draw our attention to the phenomenon of faith. Since human beings have existed, among our defining features has been an appetite and a longing for connection with something greater than ourselves. When Kipling has his character – the Holy Man, the Lama – declare that there are many paths to the feet of the One, but

thither do we all travel, we are reminded that all of humanity is engaged in the same quest: a faith that will work under all conditions.

In this house, we teach about the christ-ian way with Jesus, who lived and died and rose again as a goal and dwelling for the faith we would develop. As we do so, we can know that when we take all our burdens to Jesus, we are on the universal human quest for blessed assurance; we are trying to establish our place at 'the feet of the One,' the 'Great and Terrible,' 'Immortal, invisible God only wise.' We do so because we, too want to feel connected. The word 'religion' itself simply derives from Latin 'to bind again,' 're' is again and 'ligare' is to bind. Think of ligaments binding the body together, or ligatures in writing or surgery. 'Bind us again, O God to our origins, to our true selves, to permanence.'

Jesus is said to have proven his supernatural powers by, among other things, walking on the surface of the Sea of Galilee. Today he gets Peter to do it too, purely as an illustration of the vital nature of faith. The point is clear: Without faith, we will drown – either literally, like a man overboard, or figuratively, as one drowning in sorrows. We will drown in riches; we will drown in worry and intrigue and the engulfing ocean of the self. With faith however, anything is possible: moving mountains, de-stinging death, even walking on water.

We know that there are many who look for permanence through the machinations of the self, the manipulations of power and wealth; through the domination of others and the successful deployment of intellect and armament and the worldly laws of human fabrication. It's a funny word 'success,' especially here in our nation. We use it to indicate worldly wealth and tangible accomplishment: A successful businessperson is one who turns a profit, a successful athlete is one who wins, a successful film or book or piece of music is so because it makes money. To say someone is a great success has very clear connotations for us.

Paul is today challenging that mindset of ours in the Letter to the Romans that barrels through two thousand years of human history to get up in our business. We've heard it said that "The business of America is business." We're hearing it a lot today. Of course, nobody is

directly quoting Calvin Coolidge; whose declaration was the precursor to the Great Depression. But the tenor of our times sings loudly of salvation through wealth as the primary aim of a strong and successful – a ‘great’ people. Deft, bold, tenacious manipulation of the laws of humankind will lead to success in the worldly realm and somehow that will translate into spiritual gratification. Laws are made to get around, and those who die with the most toys, win.

In preaching the Gospel of Jesus, Paul flips the ‘most toys’ notion on its head. “The person who does those things will live by them.” ‘Live by the sword; die by the sword,’ live by the ledger, die clutching it in our hands like Jacob Marley; live by the waving of warheads, die... guess how. But one who believes in the heart is justified, and one who confesses with the mouth is saved. The scripture says, “No one who believes will be put to shame.” Any attempt to set aside worldly concerns and bind ourselves again to the greater cosmic good will bear fruit, and in abundance. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and generous to all who call.

“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” Just imagine a day when the meaning of success has been transformed into a spiritual one, beyond ordinary metrics. How would it be if success meant the development of a faith that works under all conditions. Imagine a successful man as one who became peaceful and grateful and charitable despite being incarcerated for life. Imagine a successful woman as one who never had much and never did much in the way of wealth-building, but whose life was filled with the love and nurture of her profession, her family and her community, and whose every day was characterized by some kind of service to others. Imagine a successful nation as one who takes good care of the least fortunate, the most challenged, the weakest links and latest arrivals. A successful nation would be one who never wins a war – or loses one – because its leaders leave no stone unturned in preserving peace.

We need hardly look further than the story of Joseph to see how this works. Under attack throughout his life by the actions of a cast of characters that embodied the seven deadly sins: Pride, Anger, Greed, Gluttony, Lust, Envy and Sloth, Joseph nevertheless keeps his eyes on the greater good and his heart on the deeper success. In so doing, he

ends up saving his people from certain destruction, and without violence.

If we would be successful, we must have faith. There is too much violence in the world; too many whose lives consist of cycling through that list of vices for us to sit by and merely observe them or wring our hands over them. We who have the great gift of heart-knowledge that all will be well if only we pursue wellness, by that nature have the obligation to do so. Faith will come in abundance, as the reward for our pursuits, that parabolic faith that obligates continued activity; you can't keep it unless you give it away. Merely setting our minds, our imaginations and our hands on such good works and authentic storytelling makes us successful people, but we must do that. As Kamau Bell put it, "A lot of us are like a bunch of Clark Kents out there, pretending not to be Superman. It's time for us to cape up, get out there and save the world."

Tara Brach tells a story of mid-1950s Bangkok, Thailand where a huge clay statue of the Buddha began to crack due to heat and drought. Monks arrived to investigate and shone a flashlight into the largest of the cracks. What they saw surprised everyone. Deep under the drab brown clay was the gleam of gold. No one had known that inside this popular but ordinary-looking statue was a solid-gold Buddha. It had been covered with clay six hundred years earlier in the successful effort to protect it from an invading army.

Just as the monks disguised the beauty of the golden Buddha in order to protect it during dangerous times, we cover our own innate purity and goodness as we encounter a challenging world. Perhaps we were criticized, ignored, misunderstood, or abused as children leading us to doubt that gold within us. But as David Brooks warns in his essay this week, we cannot live just to retreat from our experience into safety. Blissful self-understanding and isolated self-reliance are no substitute for a faithful heart that loves.

For all too many of us trauma has become the primary source of identity. People define themselves by the ways they have been hurt. As Brooks continues, "If we're going to build a culture in which it is easier to be mature, we're going to have to throw off some of the tenets of the therapeutic culture. Maturity, now as ever, is understanding that I'm



not the center of the universe; the world isn't a giant story about me. Proponents of the therapeutic mindset aim to create well-adjusted individualists who feel good about themselves. But truly secure people don't build their identities alone. They grow stable selves from commitments and attachments to others. Their identities form as they fulfil responsibilities -- as friends, family, employees, neighbors and citizens. Maturity is achieved by getting out of one's own point of view enough to make room for the views, experiences and well-being of others."

One of the greatest indicators of our own spiritual maturity is revealed in how we respond to the weaknesses, the inexperience and the potentially offensive actions of others; the ability to respond with understanding when other people have done something stupid and given you the opportunity to feel superior.

The late great Leonard Cohen liked to say, "There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in." One might add, with that Bangkok Buddha in mind: Cracks, wounds and brokennesses are also how the golden light gets out.

### **Hymn 680, O God our help in ages past**

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home:

Under the shadow of thy throne thy saints have dwelt secure;  
Sufficient is thine arm alone, and our defense is sure.

Before the hills in order stood, or earth received her frame,  
From everlasting thou art God, to endless years the same.

A thousand ages in thy sight are like an evening gone;  
Short as the watch that ends the night before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all our years away;  
They fly, forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day.

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,  
Be thou our guide while life shall last, and our eternal home.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRwA-bc9GEs&t=81s>

## **The Gift to Sing**

Sometimes the mist overhangs my path,  
And blackening clouds about me cling;  
But, oh, I have a magic way  
To turn the gloom to cheerful day—  
    I softly sing.

And if the way grows darker still,  
Shadowed by Sorrow's somber wing,  
With glad defiance in my throat,  
I pierce the darkness with a note,  
    And sing, and sing.

I brood not over the broken past,  
Nor dread whatever time may bring;  
No nights are dark, no days are long,  
While in my heart there swells a song,  
    And I can sing.

James Weldon Johnson