

**The Sunday Missive August 21, 2022
The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 16**

Hymn 8 Morning has broken

Morning has broken like the first morning,
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird.
Praise for the singing! Praise for the morning!
Praise for them, springing fresh from the Word!

Sweet the rain's new fall sunlit from heaven,
Like the first dewfall on the first grass.
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden,
Sprung in completeness where God's feet pass.

Mine is the sunlight! Mine is the morning
Born of the one light Eden saw play!
Praise with elation, praise every morning,
God's recreation of the new day!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SV8qLn1FB6s>

The Collect of the Day

Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in unity by your Holy Spirit, may show forth your power among all peoples, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*

Isaiah 58:9-14

If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,

if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,

then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.

The Lord will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;

and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.

Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;

you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.

Psalm 103

Bless the Lord, O my soul* ***And all that is within me, bless God's holy name.***

Bless the Lord, O my soul* ***And forget not all God's benefits.***

Who forgives all our sins* ***And heals all our infirmities***

Who redeems our life from the grave* ***And crowns us with mercy and lovingkindness***

Who satisfies us with good things* ***Renews our youth like an eagle's.***

The Lord will execute righteousness* ***And judgment for all who are oppressed.***

He made his ways known to Moses* *And his works to the children of Israel.*

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy* *Slow to anger and of great kindness.*

Hebrews 12:18-29

You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them. (For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear.") But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven! At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of what is shaken-- that is, created things-- so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire.

Hymn 773 Heal me, hand of Jesus

Heal me, hands of Jesus, and search out all my pain:
Restore my hope, remove my fear and bring me peace again.

Cleanse me, blood of Jesus, take bitterness away;
Let me forgive as one forgiven and bring me peace today.

Know me, mind of Jesus, and show me all my sin;
Dispel the memories of guilt, and bring me peace within.

Fill me, joy of Jesus: anxiety shall cease
And heaven's serenity be mine, for Jesus brings me peace!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJGvIDzeOT4>

Luke 13:10-17

Now Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" When he said

this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

Proper 16C

In the readings today we take a walk together through the experience of groping for God. So many questions, so many ways to look for answers

Who is God and how will I know God is near?
What do I do to get in good with God and why should I bother?
Where do I seek God and when will God appear?

In the passage from Isaiah we heard what sounds almost like an advertisement from the prophet. “Are you tired and worn out from frustration and fear? Do you wish you could step off that merry-go-round of blaming, evil talk and selfishness? Well right now, in a few easy steps, you can have all the satisfaction and gratification you could ask for. But wait, there’s more!”

Give food to the hungry. Help to satisfy the afflicted. Don’t trample the Sabbath. That’s it! Just do this and wait ‘til you see what’s in store for you! Your light will shine in the darkness; your gloom will be like noonday. The Lord will make your bones strong, will guide you continually, and quench you when you’re parched. You will be like a watered garden, like a spring that never runs dry. You will repair the destruction of the past and what you build will last for generations. And it’s all so easy, just try a little tenderness.

What about the Sabbath issue? It’s a tough one. That’s why Jesus gets into heavy scrapes with the ‘powers that was’ over the question. In our groping for answers about God, to whom are we supposed to listen on how to treat the Sabbath? Ten Commandments say: “Remember the Sabbath; keep it holy,” right? Isaiah helps us here. “Don’t trample the Sabbath by pursuing your own affairs and interests, but instead delight to call it holy.” We

might say that work done on behalf of others isn't work at all in God's economy; if we're working for others, we're at play in the fields of the Lord. Amen. This is the product Isaiah is selling. An answer to our question: "What does God want?"

What is going on in psalm 103; how can it help our version of 'Where in the World is Great God Almighty?' This psalm is very unusual, the only one in which God is not directly addressed, It's an inner monologue, a note to self, a stream of poet's consciousness about the attributes of God. 'Let's see now, what do we know about God, and what advantages can I expect from hitching my wagon to this here star? Benefits — Forgives iniquity, need that. Heals all diseases, really? Redeems your life from the Pit. Ok, that can come in handy. Crowns with steadfast love and mercy, niice. Satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. That's what I'm talkin' about. Works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed. Eventually... and with my help. Well if God is offering all that to me, I'd have to be a total fool not to accept.' There is lovely proverb among the Mandinka of West Africa: Ning alla buloo kosi I ye; I dong! When God sets the tempo by clapping for you, you must dance!"

Later in this psalm, the poet goes on to muse, "As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for us, for he knows that we are dust.' Well this is interesting, I wonder if God has feelings. Because if God has feelings, God must feel pretty awful at times. Imagine an artist whose work is regularly destroyed soon after making it. Like actors and dancers and musicians, whose performances are given with love, knowing that they will end, God must continually see us created children pass through life and return to dust. They say the worst feeling in the world is the loss of a child to death. How must God feel who has lost every single one since the dawn of time, present company excepted? What power must God possess to withstand this unending stream of heartbreak, and how do I get me some of that

power? Says right here: “Keep the covenant, honor the commandments, bless the Lord oh my soul.”

In the letter to the Hebrews, we might think things are getting more complicated, not less. And lots of us are not that interested in hearing how obsolete the religion of the Hebrews is. After all, Jesus said he came not to abolish the laws and prophets but to fulfill them. So what is there in this intense and frightening speech to help us find God? The stakes are high enough already, we don't want them raised. Perhaps a clue lies in the metaphor of the consuming fire. Think of the Sequoia, the Manzanita, the Ponderosa Pine and the Jack. Forest fires, as horrifying and devastating as they are to human enterprise, are the only way those trees seeds can germinate. The cones have to be super-heated; only then will they be released to grow. For us, we might say the seeds of our Godly goodness are trapped in cones of self-interest. As Gray Temple put it, “The self that God created can emerge only as the self that I construct to retail to others is consumed.”

God's power is to eliminate death as the focal point of human life. It means setting aside our fears of fleetingness, insignificance and insecurity in favor of the kind of risky opening up of ourselves that God has done for us in Jesus. We have been given the opportunity, the invitation to join in a more joyful existence. Notice the woman Jesus heals on the Sabbath is already there. She does not come up to Jesus asking for anything. He calls her over. The point Jesus tries to make is that the Sabbath is a time for setting aside one's own interests in favor of others. She doesn't ask for anything – no foul. And Jesus does what he does only for her. Again no violation, according to what we heard back in Isaiah.

The woman is a figure for all folks who are bound and bent by ungodly rules – of the purity, doctrine and power prerogatives of the culture you might say. But Jesus demands to know, “If we water our livestock every day, then why on earth should not the broken and bent be free to drink deeply and daily from the oasis

of life, the wellspring of peace, the still waters of healing?" If Jesus is any indication... it almost seems like God wants every day to be, in some sense a Sabbath Day, as well as a day of atonement.

When, why, how? Don't despair, God is now. What, where, who? God is in you. When, how, why? All we can do is try.

All these questions about God cannot be answered in one easy lesson, but our stories are full of clues. We are invited into a new kind of life by way of God's presence in the earthly World and among our human lives. It's all there for the finding, in a lesson plan that has no end, a course of study, a seeking and groping that is the happy fate of those who would love fearlessly. What wiser response is there than surrender and cooperation? When God sets the tempo by clapping for us, we must dance! Ning alla buloo kosi I ye; I dong!

Hymn 397 Now Thank We All Our God

Now thank we all our God, with heart, and hands, and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done, in whom his world rejoices;
Who from our mother's arms hath blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us!
With ever-joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in his grace, and guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given,
The Son, and him who reigns with them in highest heaven,
Eternal, Triune God, whom earth and heaven adore;
For thus it was, is now, and shall be, evermore.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9c7VaTjyuLA>

To an Old Square Piano

Whose fingers wore your ivory keys
So thin—as tempest and tide-flow
Some pearly shell, the castaway
Of indefatigable seas
On a low shingle far away—
You will not tell, we cannot know.

Only, we know that you are come,
Full of strange ghosts melodious
The old years forget the echoes of,
From the ancient house into our home;
And you will sing of old-world love,
And of ours too, and live with us.

Sweet sounds will feed you here: our woods
Are vocal with the seawind's breath;
Nor want they wing-borne choristers,
Nor the ocean's organ-interludes.
—Be true beneath her hands, even hers
Who is more to me than life or death.

Robinson Jeffers