

The Sunday Missive – August 28, 2022
The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 376 Joyful, joyful we adore thee

Joyful, joyful, we adore thee, God of glory, Lord of love;
Hearts unfold like flowers before thee, praising thee, their sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; drive the dark of doubt away;
Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day.

All thy works with joy surround thee, earth and heaven reflect thy rays,
Stars and angels sing around thee, center of unbroken praise.
Field and forest, vale and mountain, blooming meadow, flashing sea,
Chanting bird and flowing fountain, call us to rejoice in thee.

Thou art giving and forgiving, ever blessing, ever blest,
Wellspring of the joy of living, ocean depth of happy rest!
Thou our Father, Christ our Brother: all who live in love are thine;
Teach us how to love each other, lift us to the joy divine.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaEH1e Dlm0>

The Collect of the Day

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Jeremiah 2:4-13

Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. Thus says the Lord:

What wrong did your ancestors find in me
that they went far from me,

and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves?

They did not say, "Where is the Lord
who brought us up from the land of Egypt,

who led us in the wilderness,
in a land of deserts and pits,

in a land of drought and deep darkness,
in a land that no one passes through,
where no one lives?"

I brought you into a plentiful land
to eat its fruits and its good things.

But when you entered you defiled my land,
and made my heritage an abomination.

The priests did not say, "Where is the Lord?"
Those who handle the law did not know me;

the rulers transgressed against me;
the prophets prophesied by Baal,
and went after things that do not profit.

Therefore once more I accuse you, says the Lord,
and I accuse your children's children.

Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and look,
send to Kedar and examine with care;
see if there has ever been such a thing.

Has a nation changed its gods,
even though they are no gods?

But my people have changed their glory
for something that does not profit.

Be appalled, O heavens, at this,
be shocked, be utterly desolate,

says the Lord,

for my people have committed two evils:
they have forsaken me,

the fountain of living water,
and dug out cisterns for themselves,

cracked cisterns
that can hold no water.

Psalm 81

Ring out your joy to God our strength* ***Shout in triumph to the God of Jacob.***

Raise a song and sound the timbrel, the sweet-sounding harp and the lute*
Blow the trumpet at the new moon, and when the moon is full, on our feast.

For this is Israel's law, a command of the God of Jacob* ***He imposed it as a rule on Joseph, when he went out against the land of Egypt.***

A voice I did not know said to me: "I freed your shoulder from the burden;
your hands were freed from their load* ***You called in distress and I saved you.***

I answered, concealed in the storm cloud* ***At the waters of Meribah I tested you.***

Listen, my people, to my warning* ***O Israel, if only you would heed!***

Let there be no foreign god among you* ***No worship of an alien god.***

I am the Lord your God, who brought you from the land of Egypt* ***Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.***

But my people did not heed my voice and Israel would not obey*
So I left them in their stubbornness of heart to follow their own designs.

O that my people would heed me, that Israel would walk in my ways*
At once I would subdue their foes and turn my hand against their enemies.

The Lord's enemies would cringe at their feet* ***And their subjection would last forever.***

But Israel I would feed with finest wheat* ***And fill them with honey from the rock.***

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." So we can say with confidence,

"The Lord is my helper;
I will not be afraid.

What can anyone do to me?"

Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Wonder, Love and Praise Hymn 812 I, the Lord of sea and sky

I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin, my hand will save.
I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?

Here I am Lord, is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.

I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my people's pain.
I have wept for love of them, they turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone, give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them; whom shall I send?

I, the Lord of wind and flame; I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them, my hand will save
finest bread I will provide, till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give my life to them, whom shall I send?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhTpjdrLf0s>

Luke 14:1, 7-14

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.

When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place,' and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

In Philadelphia -- Proper 17C

Our journeys through Luke's Gospel and the prophecies of Jeremiah continue to provide the frame of reference we must have if we are to be faithful people in community. The stories remind, exhort, chide, encourage, discomfit and reassure us by turns. It is because we continue to turn to these stories that we are called "People of the Book." I love to tell these old stories – they make me ponder what it means to be in relationship with God and goodness: Eden, The Flood, The Exodus, and the heroic tales of Jesus telling truth to power. If we cease to tell, enact and live by our sacred stories, other narratives will rush in to displace them.

If each of these stories is a kind of play, then the psalms could be considered musicals – or little operas – they define us as "People of the Songbook" as well. Although the psalm we said together today was probably composed 3 or 4 hundred years earlier than Jeremiah lived, the themes of Psalm 81 and Jeremiah's prophecy are similar: We were in covenant with God, but now we are in violation of that covenant; what's to be done about it? And how to deal with the idea in song?

81 begins with "an instruction to the musicians:" There is a note in some texts: "You musicians, play this on the little harp." The song is organized as follows: How to celebrate:

Ring out your joy to God our strength; shout in triumph to the God of Jacob.
Raise a song, sound the timbrel, the sweet-sounding harp and the lute;

Followed by reminders of why we celebrate: Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our feast. New moon is Rosh-Hashanah – the 'Head of the Year,' the first day of the Jewish calendar, and the beginning of the season called the 'High Holy Days,' or 'Days of Awe.' It commemorates the creation of Adam and Eve.

"At the full moon, on our feast..." refers to the day, halfway through the month, when the moon has become full. In the seventh month, two weeks after Rosh-Hashanah, comes the feast of Tabernacles, or the feast of Booths, known as Succos. The booths refer to the temporary shelters – mostly tents, in which the Israelites dwelt during the forty years of their wanderings following the Exodus from Egypt.

For this is Israel's law, a command of the God of Jacob, imposed on Joseph, when he went out against the land of Egypt.

So far, so good. Celebration. There's a party goin' on around here a dedication to last throughout the years... And why? Easy: Creation, (life itself) and Liberation from servitude, two good reasons. We might say 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.' But here the song takes a strange turn. Instead of thanking God for things, or asking God for things, or examining ourselves next, this number dives into a mysterious monologue by God's very self. The psalmist says, "A voice I did not know said to me..." and the rest is a peek inside the mind of God, whispering the truths that would keep us well, if only we could embrace them. And what happens when we don't.

God broods, "I freed your shoulder from the burden; your hands were freed from their load. You called in distress and I saved you. I answered, concealed in the storm cloud; at the waters of Meribah I tested you. (Meribah is where the people were revolting [in both senses of the word] and accusing God and Moses of letting them die of thirst. Moses appealed to God and struck the rock of Horeb; water gushed out.

(God continues talking to Godself) Listen, my people, to my warning. O Israel, if only you would heed! Let there be no foreign gods among you, no worship of an alien god. (Remember the Elijah stories, 'my god's better than your Baals, etc.) I am the Lord your God, who brought you from the land of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it. But my people did not heed my voice, and Israel would not obey. So I left them in their stubbornness of heart, to follow their own designs. O that my people would heed me, that Israel would walk in my ways! At once I would subdue all their foes, and turn my hand against their enemies. The Lord's enemies would cringe at their feet; their subjection would last forever. Israel I would feed with finest wheat and fill with honey from the rock."

The water metaphor – water so sweet and welcome that we liken it to honey, thus the water they received at Meribah was "honey from the rock." So that's what it's like being God, yearning to nourish human love but continually frustrated by human fear.

By the time Jeremiah speaks, the people of Israel have been conquered and many of them deported into servitude (again) in Babylon. What possible explanation is there for God's turning away, other than that they turned away from God first? They wandered, wasted, and wished away their awareness of and allegiance to Yahweh and this disaster is the result. Well, nowadays, not too many of us can buy that logic. We know that war and

disease and misfortune come to good people as well as to bad people. We cannot say to, or of a conquered people, "It's because you didn't pray rightly." So we have to treat these illustrations as metaphorical and indeed continue to listen to Jeremiah on the subject of God's wishes for us and our inconsistent ability to embrace those wishes. Again using vivid water imagery, the prophet asks, "Which do you want as your source of supply, a leaky, unreliable cistern or a permanent, sparkling fountain of 'living water?'"

What does goodness require of us? How do we know when we're headed off into the wilderness, or in danger of some kind of enslavement? If indeed "The fear of the Lord (that is closeness to God) is instruction in wisdom and humility goes before honor," here is the wisdom of proverbs: "Haughty eyes and a proud heart—the lamp of the wicked—are sin." "There are those who are pure in their own eyes yet are not cleansed of their defilement. There are those—how lofty are their eyes, how high their eyelids lift! There are those whose teeth are swords, whose teeth are knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, the needy from among mortals."

For Luke, nothing is more serious than table talk. So, when Jesus sits down at a meal and the conversation is recorded, we would do well to listen up. The heart of the matter is often revealed over dinner. As they say in Malawi, "Chidzawa mchipande powomola." 'All will be known at the sharing of the meal.' And we are still doing it. What does Jesus talk about? It's the wisdom of the ages: All those who are arrogant are an abomination to the Lord. Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. It is better to be of a lowly spirit among the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud.

As usual, Jesus goes a step further; over-accepting as it were the rules of traditional religion, and transforming them into a mode of life that transcends religion: Do not just take a more lowly place yourself, but invite people to your table who have no hope of repaying you -- that's a true gift. All other gifts participate in a worldly economy. The saving grace comes by participation in the immeasurable benefits of a spiritual economy instead. Demand less than you are due – all the rest will be gravy. Turn away from the pursuit of prestige. Make a commitment to love. Invite others out of love, not because it's a project of yours to buy merit.

On this subject of merit, the great Yiddish sage Sholom Aleichem told the story of the tradition of inviting the Urumeleit, the poor and destitute to any feast. And about the time in Kiev when there were two weddings on the

same day and the poor Urumeleit were so partied out already after the first wedding, the second family had to pay them to show up.

We're unhappy because we're separated from God. So, let us celebrate; pay attention to the precepts of our religion. And also be transformed by cultivating humility and giving precedence in our lives to compassion, charity and healing even over religious observance. Be the hands and feet and voice of Jesus in the world, even if it means diverging from tradition – and we will be entertaining the angels. As someone once said, “Humility is like underwear: you should always wear it, but never let it show.” The Greek word we have translated as ‘hospitality’ literally means ‘love of stranger.’ Not a project you take on, but acceptance and embrace. And the Greek word for ‘mutual love’ we find in the New Testament is ‘Philadelphia.’ Now this may remind us of the incomparable W.C. Fields, whose movie career consisted of one unloving, selfish and hilariously antisocial character after another. He is credited with saying about a big contest: “First Prize: A week in Philadelphia. Second Prize: Two weeks in Philadelphia!” But Jesus would argue there's a Grand Prize: “A lifetime of philadelphia, of mutual love no matter where you are, that will be its own reward.”

Hymn 450 All hail the power of Jesus name

All hail the power of Jesus' Name! Let angels prostrate fall;
Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown him Lord of all!

Crown him ye martyrs of our God, who from his altar call:
Praise him whose way of pain ye trod, and crown him Lord of all!

Hail him, the Heir of David's line, whom David Lord did call,
The God incarnate, Man divine, and crown him Lord of all!

Ye heirs of Israel's chosen race, ye ransomed of the fall,
Hail him who saves you by his grace, and crown him Lord of all!

Sinners, whose love can ne'er forget the wormwood and the gall,
Go, spread your trophies at his feet, and crown him Lord of all!

Let every kindred, every tribe, on this terrestrial ball,
To him all majesty ascribe, and crown him Lord of all!

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

River Roads

Let the crows go by hawking their caw and caw.

They have been swimming in midnights of coal mines somewhere.

Let 'em hawk their caw and caw.

Let the woodpecker drum and drum on a hickory stump.

He has been swimming in red and blue pools somewhere hundreds of years

And the blue has gone to his wings and the red has gone to his head.

Let his red head drum and drum.

Let the dark pools hold the birds in a looking-glass.

And if the pool wishes, let it shiver to the blur of many wings, old swimmers from old places.

Let the redwing streak a line of vermillion on the green wood lines.

And the mist along the river fix its purple in lines of a woman's shawl on lazy shoulders.

Carl Sandburg