

The Sunday Missive – June 26, 2022

The Third Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 565 He who would be valiant be

He who would valiant be 'gainst all disaster,
Let him in constancy follow the Master.
There's no discouragement shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent to be a pilgrim.

Who so beset him round with dismal stories
Do but themselves confound, his strength the more is.
No foes shall stay his might, though he with giants fight;
He will make good his right to be a pilgrim.

Since, Lord, thou dost defend us with thy Spirit,
We know we at the end shall life inherit.
Then fancies flee away; I'll fear not what men say,
I'll labor night and day to be a pilgrim.

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

The Collect of the Day

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14

When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel.

Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, saying, "Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

Psalm 77

I will cry aloud to God* ***I will cry aloud, and God will hear me.***

I will remember the works of the Lord* ***And call to mind your wonders of old.***

The waters saw you, O God and trembled* ***The very depths of the sea were shaken.***

The clouds poured out water; the skies thundered* ***Your arrows flashed to and fro; your lightnings lit up the world***

The sound of your thunder was in the whirlwind* ***The earth trembled and shook.***

You are the God who works wonders* ***You have declared your power among the peoples.***

By your strength you have redeemed your people* ***The children of Jacob and Joseph.***

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQ3x0_DBGT8

Galatians 5:1,13-25

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Hymn 513 Like the murmur of the dove's song

Like the murmur of the dove's song, like the challenge of her flight,
Like the vigor of the wind's rush, like the new flame's eager might:
Come, Holy Spirit, come.

To the members of Christ's Body, to the branches of the Vine,
To the Church in faith assembled, to her midst as gift and sign:
Come, Holy Spirit, come.

With the healing of division, with the ceaseless voice of prayer,
With the power to love and witness, with the peace beyond compare:
Come, Holy Spirit, come.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4q-nj66X-0>

Luke 9:51-62

When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But he turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village.

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Free To Love -- Proper 8C - Pent+6

For freedom Christ has set us free. Free to do what exactly? Here's a man whose sphere of influence was pretty small in his lifetime, and

who got himself executed as a political prisoner. Yes indeed, we remember joyfully the day and the phenomenon of resurrection, but of all the other martyrs since then -- and there have been quite a few -- of that lot, no others have been resurrected. They stay dead. Their spiritual power continues to resound with us, and the memory of their deeds lives on, but they are not only merely dead, they're really most sincerely dead.

So what is this freedom, for which Christ has prepared us? Is it just freedom to die righteously? We've talked about this before, the great benefit and power of a life of faith being the choice of how to die. But most of us are interested in living while we can. So we want to know what the freedom is for which Christ has set us. If we are to follow Jesus, we may understand that our payoff will be far more spiritual than material, but we still want to have some idea of what the reward entails.

'For what' indeed, are we being prepared, in this free-setting God has dealt us? As always, there is a paradox in the story, a 'yes, but' that shakes us up and wakes us up and challenges us to live our lives differently than before, differently from our natural inclinations. The paradox is this: We are set free in order to be freely enslaved. Or you might say, 'we surrender to become victorious,' or perhaps, 'we give away all power in order to possess it.'

A friend recently gave me a fascinating article about a Japanese monk who spent much of his life interacting with and counseling would-be suicides. The rate of suicide is higher in Japan than almost anywhere; there it is not looked on as an ungodly or dishonorable act, but as a valid choice. Nevertheless, the Japanese people in general, and their mental health community in particular are anxious and eager to see if they keep so many people from doing themselves in.

The story of this monk has two main thrusts: his work with the suicidal is frustrating, endless and inconclusive. People don't get better, they just keep talking to the monk. Once he stops talking with them, they just go ahead and do it. The other subject of the story is this monk's early training. Together, the two aspects of this one life can help us understand what God would have us know about following the

path of Christ. The monk's training can only be described as gruelling; not something you and I would ever want to take on, with little sleep and much hardship and almost nothing in the way of validation or encouragement. The goal of such training is to attain a state of total awareness of one's self, one's surroundings, and one's connection to a reality beyond material, mortal and selfish concerns – a state of peacefulness and choice about how to respond to whatever life brings.

His interaction with the suicidal folk who seek the monk's counsel eventually results in the realization that he can't fix people, he can't stop them from being unhappy or fixated on ending life, he can only help and support those who choose to be helped. A most telling incident is one wherein a man walks several days to seek the monk's advice and finally reaches the monastery. By the time such a great effort has been made, the man realizes that he doesn't need help anymore. The fact of his effort has convinced him he wants to keep living after all.

As Elisha, the anointed successor to Elijah persists in following his spiritual mentor, in staying close and asking for more and stronger connectedness – the double portion of power he crazily demands – his seriousness and worthiness demonstrate themselves, and he realizes he has taken over the prophet's role.

When Jesus 'sets his face to Jerusalem,' indicating that he is determined to see his destiny through, he is surrounded by people who would get on the bus with him, but who have little idea of the cost of such a ride. There is rejection, and there are difficult, even excruciating choices to be made. Jesus is not telling us that our work, our relationships and our families have no importance. He is pointing out that we may have to undergo the most difficult of choices. Like the training monk, we may not be validated or encouraged, let alone gratified as followers of the way. But our goal, our 'face to Jerusalem' must be an ever-present reality – our eyes must be on the prize -- and only if we choose to remind ourselves of this, can we be truly free.

Saint Paul writes, 'you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the

whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed.’ Otherwise, we will be just like the ‘Cats of Kilkenny:” “There once were two cats of Kilkenny, who both thought there was one cat too many. They fought and they fit, they scratched and they bit, til apart from their nails and the tips of their tails, instead of two cats there weren’t any.”

So what is it we are free for, after all? On March 7, 1965 approximately 600 people left Brown Chapel AME in Selma, Alabama on a march to Montgomery. They were seeking voting rights for African American citizens – 100 years after the end of the Civil War, mind you. When the group reached the Edmund Pettis Bridge they were violently attacked by police on foot and horseback and a larger group of citizens who had been recruited as a “posse.” The “posse” used rubber tubes wrapped with barbed wire. The day became known as Bloody Sunday. 70 – 80 people were injured and 17 were hospitalized overnight. The group was undeterred.

The violence so horrified a nation that two days later 1500 people gathered from around the country to join the group. Led by Martin Luther King Jr. the marchers were once again met by state troopers King knelt, led the group in prayer and returned to Brown Chapel to avoid violence.

The third attempt to march to Montgomery began on March 21 when thousands gathered in Selma. President Johnson, ordered the National Guard to protect the marchers. Only 300 were allowed on the road to Montgomery. They walked about 12 miles a day in temperatures which fell below freezing. They slept in farmer’s fields where local churches brought food and blankets. It rained almost every day.

Today there are still blatant, outrageous and successful efforts in many places to keep the poor and the marginalized – most especially people of color – from voting. The fact is that despite great progress, examples of people fraudulently voting or trying to vote in America number near 0, whereas many thousands of legitimate would-be voters continue to be impeded or effectively deprived of that right to

this day. Likewise the terrible decision by our so-called justices this week, that thrusts our society backwards in time.

As Adrienne Maree Brown put it, "Things are not getting worse, they are getting uncovered. We must hold each other tight and continue to pull back the veil." And we must continue the fight for improvement, unless we admit that democracy is not what we want. And this is exactly the same freedom to which Christ has called us. It is a real freedom, wherein all participate and the outcome is just and thus Godly. And it struggles against the enslavement to power and fearmongering, privilege and position that keeps us from our true path. The old bumper sticker asks, "If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"

Following this path means taking the risk of a kind of freedom that can feel very uncomfortable indeed. Because it is a discipline. It is a commitment. Paul would call it an enslavement to each other. It is a discipline of asking ourselves each day – even each moment – ‘Do the words of my mouth, the meditations of my heart, the causes I support, the votes I cast truly reflect what Jesus means by freedom and neighbor love?’ As the feller says, “No one among us has attained anything like perfect adherence to these principles, the point is we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. We seek progress, not perfection.” We remain teachable; improvable. And it starts with not kidding ourselves, neither about our progress, nor about our motivations for the changes we seek, the identity and nature of today’s true enemies of justice, or the status quo we would protect at a terrible cost.

Hymn 371 Thou whose almighty Word

Thou, whose almighty word chaos and darkness heard,
And took their flight;
Hear us, we humbly pray, and, where the Gospel day
Sheds not its glorious ray, let there be light!

Thou who didst come to bring on thy redeeming wing
Healing and sight,
Health to the sick in mind, sight to the inly blind,
Now to all humankind, let there be light!

Spirit of truth and love, life-giving holy Dove,
Speed forth thy flight!
Move on the waters' face bearing the gifts of grace,
And, in earth's darkest place, let there be light!

Holy and blessed Three, glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, love, might;
Boundless as ocean's tide, rolling in fullest pride,
Through the world far and wide, let there be light!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bs255M8e77k&t=3s>

The Layers

I have walked through many lives, some of them my own,
and I am not who I was, though some principle of being
abides, from which I struggle not to stray.
When I look behind, as I am compelled to look
before I can gather strength to proceed on my journey,
I see the milestones dwindling toward the horizon
and the slow fires trailing from the abandoned camp-sites,
over which scavenger angels wheel on heavy wings.
Oh, I have made myself a tribe out of my true affections,
and my tribe is scattered!
How shall the heart be reconciled to its feast of losses?
In a rising wind the manic dust of my friends,
those who fell along the way, bitterly stings my face.
Yet I turn, I turn, exulting somewhat,
with my will intact to go wherever I need to go,
and every stone on the road precious to me.
In my darkest night, when the moon was covered
and I roamed through wreckage, a nimbus-clouded voice
directed me: "Live in the layers, not on the litter."
Though I lack the art to decipher it,
no doubt the next chapter in my book of transformations
is already written.
I am not done with my changes.

Stanley Kunitz