

## **The Sunday Missive – March 3, 2024**

### **The Third Sunday in Lent**

#### **Hymn 143** The glory of these forty days

The glory of these forty days we celebrate with songs of praise;  
For Christ, through whom all things were made,  
Himself has fasted and has prayed.

So Daniel trained his mystic sight, delivered from the lions' might;  
And John, the Bridegroom's friend, became  
The herald of Messiah's name.

Then grant us, Lord, like them to be  
Full oft in fast and prayer with thee;  
Our spirits strengthen with thy grace, and give us joy to see thy face.

O Father, Son, and Spirit blest, to thee be every prayer addressed,  
Who art in threefold Name adored, from age to age, the only Lord.

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

#### **The Collect of the Day**

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

#### **Exodus 20:1-17**

Then God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing

children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. For six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

## **Psalm 19**

The heavens declare the glory of God\* ***The firmament shows God's handiwork.***

One day tells its tale to another\* ***One night imparts knowledge to the next.***

Although they have no words or language\* ***And their voices are not heard.***

Their sound has gone out into all lands\* ***Their message to the ends of the world.***

The law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul\* ***The testimony of the Lord is sure and gives wisdom to the innocent.***

The statutes of the Lord are just and rejoice the heart\* ***The commandments of the Lord are clear; they give light to the eyes.***

The fear of the Lord is clean and endures for ever\* ***The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.***

More to be desired are they than gold; more than much fine gold\* ***Sweeter far than honey, than honey in the comb.***

O Lord, keep your servant from presumptuous sins\* ***Let them not get dominion over me.***

Then shall I be whole and sound\* ***And innocent of a great offense.***

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be always acceptable in your sight\* ***O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9elcbyTG53s>

## **1 Corinthians 1:18-25**

The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

## **Hymn 676** There is a balm in Gilead

There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole,  
There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.

Sometimes I feel discouraged and think my work's in vain,  
But then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again.

If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul,  
You can tell the love of Jesus and say, "He died for all."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OXqs7TORCAY>

### **John 2:13-22**

The Passover was near and Jesus went up to Jerusalem according to Jewish custom. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." They said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." They were astonished saying, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

### **We Will Continue – Lent 3B**

--The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork. All we have to do is look around us to see what wonders the Creator hath wrought.

--Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. All day, every day and all night, every night we are blessed – and confronted – with manifestations of beauty and love that prove the power of God.

--There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard. Nothing is ever explicit in human language; there is no linguistic formula. There is a vocabulary for the workings of Creation, but we have only begun to comprehend it. Mostly, the music of the mystery of life is set aside as romantic, naive, elitist, or fanatical.

--Yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. None of us – not one; to the ends of the earth – is separate from the realities and verities of existence: the bliss of growth, the splendor of action, the glory of power; and likewise subject to our own fallibilities. Yes, it is ironic that the more bliss, splendor and glory to which we accede, the more vulnerable we are to moral turpitude, but that is our condition.

--In the Heavens God has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from the wedding canopy; like a strong man it runs its course with joy. Whatever we believe about the physics and mechanics of planetary motion, our sun is the big news of our life. The Sun: new every day; full of strength; defining joy.

--Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; nothing is hidden from its heat. The Sun's existence is our foundational miracle; Even if it just randomly appeared after some big bang, it is our most important fact. We cannot employ technical observations to help us answer the greater mystery: why us?

--The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple. And just as does the Sun, the rest of the realities that flow from Creation's source are unassailable; we ignore them or flout them at our own peril. Acquisitiveness, blithe ignorance; minimization of societal ills, flat out denial will always and only result in more sorrow. We know what is right in our hearts, yet our minds lead us astray.

--The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes. Only, if only

we will seek, hear and think about the Word of God, the teachings of Jesus and the pursuit of humility, we will live with the celerity and joy of goodly – which is to say godly -- lives.

--The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. This has always been true, and will always be. "Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light; 'tis only the splendor of light hideth thee."

--More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb. "A bird in the hand is worth two in a bush," goes the old proverb, leading many of us to conclude that salvation is swell, but I'd better get what I can while I can just in case. But this will never avail us. The quest for worldly triumph will never succeed, nor will it ever end. More than gold and honey; and what is better in things than gold? What is better in food than honey. Yet more than these is the value of God's direction.

--Moreover by them is your servant admonished; in keeping them there is great reward. What is it we will do with our one, wild and precious life?

--But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults. I cannot determine righteousness alone; I cannot serve in isolation; I cannot follow a phantom. I need company, I need perspective, I need help. Help me.

--Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. I so desire to be comfortable and happy, that I will believe anybody who promises me that. I will attach myself to anything I think might guarantee my worldly welfare and make me great again. But if I set aside these self-obsessed and greedy thoughts; I just might have a dog's chance at being who I will be glad to have been.

--Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Oh great Mystery, transform me, and give me direction, wisdom and strength. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

This psalm – this rich and extended prayer – expresses the truths and requirements of a good life, of a faith that works under all conditions. We are so stunningly prone to set aside our intentions when we feel threatened, that only regular and frequent reminders such as this prayer can give us any hope of living into those convictions.

We habitually assess and scrutinize the ways of God, and exercise our knowledge in trying to make sense of divine realities. And we think it is laudable. But, as Clementine Churchill admonished to Winston, “You are strong because you are imperfect. You are wise because you have doubts.”

For Paul, certainty represents a fundamentally flawed attitude towards God. Thus Paul quotes Isaiah: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart,” before asking, “Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?” Nowhere at all. We are all in need of transformation, direction and strength beyond ourselves, if we are to have a hope of hope.

Our false wisdom is our would-be defense against the inevitability of death and the threat of outsiders (and even our supposed friends) in the meantime. “Any deviation from worldly wisdom is viewed as foolishly exposing ourselves to attack from the hostile outside world. The world’s wisdom responds to core Christian disciplines of repentance and forgiveness with judgement and contempt,” says Adam Eckhart.

It is only by the practice, the effort, the discipline – as in discipleship – of seeking awareness of and engagement with God in Christ, that we will find transformation, direction, and strength beyond ourselves. Ignatius of Loyola, the 16th-century Church luminary observed, “One who seeks openness to the presence of God is less vulnerable to other thoughts, especially bad thoughts. As long as we believe God sees us, we are less likely to sin before such a witness and judge. The presence of God is, in two ways an antidote to sin: first, because God sees us, and second, because we see God.”

Does that mean it is easy? It doesn't matter, it just is so. The things that most fulfill our longings never come easily. As Richard Niebuhr wrote, the Cross does not deny the reality of death; it denies the finality of death." When we start cleansing temples to clear the paths between God and humanity, those who think they own the temples will object. They will summon all their worldly power to eliminate us. But we will continue. We will persist.

Likewise, when we try to cleanse the temples of ourselves, to treat ourselves the way we think we would like to treat Jesus, the voices in our heads and the forces of our habits, and the tectonics of our instincts object. Their worldly powers within us rise up in outrage against the enterprise of Christian living. But we will continue. We will continue. We will persist. We will prevail.

### **Hymn 495** Hail thou once despised Jesus

Hail, thou once despised Jesus! Hail, thou Galilean King!  
Thou didst suffer to release us; thou didst free salvation bring.  
Hail, thou universal Savior, bearer of our sin and shame!  
By thy merit we find favor: life is given through thy Name.

Paschal Lamb, by God appointed, all our sins on thee were laid:  
By almighty love anointed, thou hast full atonement made.  
All thy people are forgiven through the virtue of thy blood:  
Opened is the gate of heaven, reconciled are we with God.

Jesus, hail! enthroned in glory, there for ever to abide;  
All the heavenly hosts adore thee, seated at thy Father's side.  
There for sinners thou art pleading: there thou dost our place prepare;  
Ever for us interceding, till in glory we appear.

Worship, honor, power, and blessing thou art worthy to receive;  
Highest praises, without ceasing, right it is for us to give.  
Help, ye bright angelic spirits, all your noblest anthems raise;  
Help to sing our Savior's merits, help to chant Emmanuel's praise!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jo9WVbqSQ0E>



## **Call of the Night**

Dark, and the wind-blurred pines,  
    With a glimmer of light between.  
Then I, entombed for an hourless night  
    With the world of things unseen.

Mist, the dust of flowers,  
    Leagues, heavy with promise of snow,  
And a beckoning road 'twixt vale and hill,  
    With the lure that all must know.

A light, my window's gleam,  
    Soft, flaring its squares of red—  
I loose the ache of the wilderness  
    And long for the fire instead.

You too know, old fellow?  
    Then, lift your head and bark.  
It's just the call of the lonesome place,  
    The winds and the housing dark.

Djuna Barnes