

The Sunday Missive – May 22, 2022
The Sixth Sunday in Easter

Hymn 537 Christ for the world we sing

Christ for the world we sing! The world to Christ we bring
With loving zeal; the poor and them that mourn,
The faint and overborne, sin-sick and sorrow-worn,
Whom Christ doth heal.

Christ for the world we sing! The world to Christ we bring
With fervent prayer; the wayward and the lost,
By restless passions tossed, redeemed at countless cost,
From dark despair.

Christ for the world we sing! The world to Christ we bring
With one accord; with us the work to share,
With us reproach to dare, with us the cross to bear,
For Christ our Lord.

Christ for the world we sing! The world to Christ we bring
With joyful song; the newborn souls, whose days,
Reclaimed from error's ways, inspired with hope and praise,
To Christ belong.

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

The Collect of the Day

O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. *Amen*

Acts 16:9-15

During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

Psalm 67

May God be merciful to us and bless us* ***Show us the light of his countenance and come to us.***

Let your ways be known upon earth* ***Your saving health among all nations.***

Let the peoples praise you, O God* ***Let all the peoples praise you.***

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy* ***For you judge the peoples with equity and guide all the nations upon earth.***

Let the peoples praise you, O God* ***Let all the peoples praise you.***

The earth has brought forth her increase* ***May God, our own God, give us his blessing.***

May God give us his blessing* ***And may all the ends of the earth stand in awe of him.***

Let the peoples praise you, O God* ***Let all the peoples praise you.***

Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

In the spirit the angel carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the

glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day-- and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

LEVAS Hymn 141 Shall we gather at the river

Shall we gather at the river, where bright angel feet have trod;
With its crystal tide forever flowing by the throne of God?

Refrain:

Yes, we'll gather at the river, the beautiful, the beautiful river;
Gather with the saints at the river that flows by the throne of God.

On the margin of the river, washing up its silver spray,
We will walk and worship ever, all the happy golden day. [Refrain]

Soon we'll reach the shining river, soon our pilgrimage will cease,
Soon our happy hearts will quiver with the melody of peace. [Refrain]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x4-KCcaEH3w>

OR

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UyOZ7pDYnc&t=22s>

John 14:23-29

Jesus said to Judas (not Iscariot), "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe."

Out of the Dark -- Easter 6C

"And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever." Images akin to this one from John's Revelation are everywhere in Holy Scripture. See Isaiah 42: "I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations," or Malachi 4: "But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings," to name just a couple. Whenever people try to talk about what it is God means, what it is they expect from God, what kind of power it is they are hoping to align themselves with in prayer and worship, the thought of a light in the darkness is a central, foundational metaphor. "If I say, 'Let the darkness hide me, and the light around me be night,' darkness is not dark to you; night is as clear as the day," cries Psalm 139.

But it's a much iffier image for us than it was for those who sang these songs and told these stories, who passed them along and wrote them down. We still sing the psalms together and read the stories, but relating to them is not as easy as it was. Even the hymn "In him there is no darkness at all, the night and the day are both alike, the lamb is the light of the city of God, shine in my heart, Lord Jesus," although written in 1966, relies on ancient sensations. It is a beautiful blend of melody and poetry, but can seem more romantic and pastoral than urgent and vital the way it must have done even

100 years ago, much less 2000 and more, when these ideas of God took shape.

How many times in our lives do we really experience darkness so as to be afraid of it? Certainly in childhood, when lots of things go bump, we all cry out for the comfort of light and company. Or when we're teenagers and we stay out a little too late or walk through unfamiliar streets or woods, we have that sense of reeeeeeally wanting to be home safe and sound. Maybe out in the country, if we stray from the campfire or the cabin, down by the river or the ocean on a moonless night, we'll get that adrenalin rush of fight or flight. But these are rare. Ever since Edison's light bulb, we've been moving further and further away from the dread of darkness upon which all these biblical references to God as light are based. The fear is deep within our psyche, available to moviemakers, but easily dispelled in developed countries. It's just not a problem for most of us, so we don't need God to solve it.

I don't know if this is so for everyone, but whenever I take an airplane ride at night, I always have a vague sense of wastefulness, even embarrassment, if not sin(!) looking down at the millions and millions of lights always on, eliminating the darkness, eliminating the night, doing God's job. I find myself yearning for some good darkness, to see more stars, get a break from civilization and dance with the phosphorescent plankton for a change. Darkness is a rare and valuable commodity in this day and age.

So what kind of imagery can work on and for us? What is it we don't have that we really need, that only God's grace can provide? How can we feel God's face is shining upon us, feel we are standing on the banks of 'a river whose streams make glad the holy habitation of the most high,' that, like Lydia our hearts have been opened and we are eager and hospitable? The Bible is cleverer than we think. They saw us coming along, they knew we would find lots of ways around the need for God, including having virtually the whole country lit up around the clock so that in us there is no darkness at all.

In the large city hospital where I did my chaplaincy training, I spent a good deal of time working with addicts in disease education, Bible study, and individual counseling sessions. I once asked the psychiatrist who headed the department of mental health what the factors are that make up effective mental health treatment. "It's a three-legged stool," he responded, "in reverse order, the legs are talk therapy, psychopharmacology, and willingness." In other words, unless someone has a good and willing

attitude, the meds won't necessarily work (because in all likelihood the meds won't get taken); and without both a positive, willing spirit and better chemistry, all the talk in the world may not help someone get well.

Perhaps this is a useful model for us to use when talking about God. If we're not having, nor likely anytime soon to have a problem with darkness, per se, we can surely admit that the barrage of images, expectations, temptations and falsehoods clamoring for our attention have made us fragile, frustrated and fickle when it comes to lives of faith. We try to process all this information, and it becomes a kind of darkness, a haze through which it is difficult to see life. So, like the old cartoon, *Fractured Fairy Tales*, we bend, twist, adapt and edit the stories of God's grace and power until they fit our view of the world. And we find ourselves counting on faith for less and less.

The three-legged stool is something we can still understand; nobody can sit on a two-legged stool. In the Anglican tradition, whence Episcopal tradition cometh, the three legs are scripture, tradition and reason. We could draw a parallel by saying scripture is the talk therapy, the received wisdom. Tradition is the chemistry that gets us all on the same page: our drug of choice. And reason we might call the willingness – what gets us in the door in the first place. That is, we are hungry for faith in community, so we come here; we worship together and take our medicine to put us in the mood, and then the word of God can work on us, the story of Jesus can change us. A little too complicated...

Or we might say that God is the talk therapy (the scripture), and Jesus is the brain chemical for an emotionally ill world (now our traditional medicine, aka Holy Communion). So what is the willingness, that third crucial leg -- the one we stuffy, intellectual, analytical Episcopalians call 'reason,' but really is as much or more of a mystery than any of them – willingness?

Jesus is cleverer than we might think. His mystery is the promise he gives, that he will always be here to remind us of himself. It is the one thing we will surely never figure out completely. And just in case we ever do think we have figured it out, there's an ejector seat mechanism in this ride. Because denying this mystery, says Jesus, denying the power of the Holy Spirit, is the only sin that's unforgivable. If you say there's no such thing as willingness, you're hopeless!

It is this undeniable third element: willingness/reason/openness of heart that can serve as an effective antidote for us ultra-modern folks who are

unimpressed by light images, water walking, loaves, fishes and altered states, people like us who know that God is not hanging out up in space somewhere, because we have been up there and checked. John's Gospel this morning called this thing the Holy Spirit, the Advocate. And lest we think it a minor deal, the word John actually used appears more than 100 times throughout the New Testament.

When translated, the word "Paraclete" comes out lots of ways: Counselor, Helper, Comforter, Advocate, Guide, Spirit of Truth et cetera. This variety helps us know the wideness of God's truth, goodness and mercy, but all these choices dilute our awareness of the Paraclete as a vital part of our spiritual life, as crucial to us as the third leg is to a stool. 100 appearances, it has got to be important. But we never hear the word Paraclete much outside academia. The seminary I went to was part of a big university, so our Divinity School soccer team was called the Paracletes. You had to be there...

Literally, it means "One who is Called Alongside," from the Greek. One who is called alongside to help us in present times of trouble. One who comes alongside to help us change the only thing we can surely change, that is ourselves. There is so much we cannot change in this world. We can't change somebody else, can't change institutions, can't change other countries or even our own government much, it often seems. We can't change City Hall, or even our own kids; can't change the weather or the outcome of an illness or a ball game. But if we call upon this Spirit, if we pray for the willingness, and just for a moment abandon the need to understand or substantiate or control things, we can indeed change ourselves.

That's what the Paraclete does, the Spirit as it is known, the Holy Ghost Power. If you call upon it, it will come to change you and make you willing. There are many lesser things we can't change, but the greatest gift is to change oneself. This power enables us to be who we want to be even when we can't do what we want to do. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I bring to you." This peace which passes all understanding comes from being who we want to be. A great woman once said, "When love and good humor merge, the result is peace." Surely that is what Jesus wants for us. And the image we must never, can never abandon or escape is that of willingness, the Spirit, the Holy Ghost Power. It is the lasting part of God's bargain with humankind. It is the power that lets us, like Lydia, open our hearts when we see a good thing and follow it.

Willingness is an image that works for us ultramodern types; it can make these scriptures and psalms about darkness as relevant to us as they ever were, no matter how much we learn about the cosmos, no matter how thoroughly we over-light our civilized world. The Spirit is to us as Jesus was to his disciples, as God has always been in the minds and hearts of the faithful, “a very present help in trouble,” so that “we will not fear, though the earth be moved, and though the mountains be cast into the depths of the sea, though its waters rage and foam, and the mountains tremble at its tumult.” For, once we get in the habit of praying for willingness, then we can never again doubt or deny that the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob our stronghold.

Hymn 518 Christ is made the sure foundation

Christ is made the sure foundation, Christ the head and cornerstone,
Chosen of the Lord, and precious, binding all the Church in one;
Holy Zion's help for ever, and her confidence alone.

All that dedicated city, dearly loved of God on high,
In exultant jubilation pours perpetual melody;
God the One in Three adoring in glad hymns eternally.

To this temple, where we call thee, come, O Lord of Hosts, today;
With thy wonted loving-kindness hear thy servants as they pray,
And thy fullest benediction shed within its walls always.

Here vouchsafe to all thy servants what they ask of thee to gain;
What they gain from thee, for ever with the blessed to retain,
And hereafter in thy glory evermore with thee to reign.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p73XRON9r78>

Noëlle Dorothy Valentine

Noelle was born on Christmas Day 1930 in Tampa Florida. Following graduation from San Francisco State College she became an elementary school teacher in California eventually returning to her home state of Florida. She received a Masters degree in psychology from the University of South Florida so she could work as a counselor in keeping with her life dedicated to

activism involving women's issues and gay rights. As well as human issues, she possessed great passion for animal rights reflected in her lifestyle as a vegan and participation in numerous demonstrations centered on prevention of cruelty to animals. Devoted to her own horses Beauty, Whisper & Glory; she rescued & sheltered mistreated horses and found them new homes. In 2012 she came back to California to be closer to her sisters Suzanne and Lynn (Enns). She lived in Morro Bay at Casa de Flores and later at Bayside Care Center until she passed away on December 8, 2021.

August Moonrise

O Beauty, out of many a cup
You have made me drunk and wild
Ever since I was a child,
But when have I been sure as now
That no bitterness can bend
And no sorrow wholly bow
One who loves you to the end?
And though I must give my breath
And my laughter all to death,
And my eyes through which joy came,
And my heart, a wavering flame;
If all must leave me and go back
Along a blind and fearful track
So that you can make anew,
Fusing with intenser fire,
Something nearer your desire;
If my soul must go alone
Through a cold infinity,
Or even if it vanish, too,
Beauty, I have worshipped you.

Let this single hour atone
For the theft of all of me.

Sara Teasdale