

The Sunday Missive – October 13, 2024

The Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost

559 Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us, for we have no help but thee,
Yet possessing every blessing, if our God our Father be.

Savior, breathe forgiveness o'er us; all our weakness thou dost know;
Thou didst tread this earth before us; thou didst feel its keenest woe;
Yet unfearing, persevering, to thy passion thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending, fill our hearts with heavenly joy;
Love with every passion blending pleasure that can never cloy;
Thus provided, pardoned, guided, nothing can our peace destroy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8KilOxEXE>

The Collect of the Day

Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, that we may continually be given to good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Job 23:1-9, 16-17

Job said: "Today also my complaint is bitter; his hand is heavy despite my groaning. Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his dwelling! I would lay my case before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would learn what he would answer me, and understand what he would say to me. Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; but he would give heed to me. There an upright person could reason with him, and I should be acquitted forever by my judge. "If I go forward, he is not there; or backward, I cannot perceive him; on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him; I turn to the right, but I cannot see him. God has made my

heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me; If only I could vanish in darkness, and thick darkness would cover my face!"

Psalm 22:1-15

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me* ***Why are you so far from my cry; the words of my distress?***

O my God, I cry in the daytime, but you do not answer* ***By night as well, but I find no rest.***

Yet you are the Holy One* ***Enthroned upon the praises of Israel.***

Our forefathers put their trust in you* ***They trusted, and you delivered them.***

They cried out to you and were delivered* ***They trusted in you and were not put to shame.***

But as for me, I am a worm and no man* ***Scorned by all and despised by the people.***

All who see me laugh me to scorn* ***They curl their lips and wag their heads, saying,***

"He trusted in the Lord; let him deliver him* ***Let the Lord rescue him if he delights in him.***"

Yet you are he who took me out of the womb* ***And kept me safe upon my mother's breast.***

I have been entrusted to you ever since I was born* ***You were my God when I was still in the womb.***

Be not far from me, for trouble is near* ***And there is none to help.***

Hebrews 4:12-16

The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hymn 458 My song is love unknown

My song is love unknown, my Savior's love to me,
Love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be.
O who am I, that for my sake my Lord should take frail flesh, and die?

He came from his blest throne salvation to bestow,
But men made strange, and none the longed-for Christ would know.
But O my friend, my friend indeed, who at my need his life did spend.

Here might I stay and sing, no story so divine;
Never was love, dear King, never was grief like thine.
This is my friend, in whose sweet praise I all my days could gladly spend.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMart4wXsI0>

Mark 10:17-31

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You

shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.” He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

Fire it Overboard – Proper 23B

“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Sell all you own, give the money to the poor, and follow me.” That is the Cliff’s Notes version of this episode from Mark’s relentlessly insightful and relentlessly challenging narrative that we revisit again this morning. But Oh! how we can be misled and even grow cynical if we turn the page and go about our business without listening more deeply to what Mark has to convey. With apologies to Mr. Cliff and his Notes for whatever degree of false witness I am about to bear unto him, that ain’t the half of it.

Jesus has just finished reminding whomever has ears to hear that the means to a godly life, the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, the formula for obtaining eternal life is to strip away sophistication, accomplishment and learning and approach the Throne as a child. "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Verily I say unto you that, whosoever receiveth not the Kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

So when the wealthy fellow approaches Jesus and kneels at his feet in a grand gesture, the first thing Jesus has to do is to resist the urge to chide him for being disingenuous, for not being himself. In this, Jesus does not entirely succeed. He does not openly mock the fellow by calling him a hypocrite, but he doesn't answer his question either. Perhaps what Jesus would like to say is "Get up off you knees there, Sir. Don't pretend to be so humble with me when we both know that you are a man about town who is used to giving orders not taking them, and receiving obeisance instead of making it." Instead, Jesus says to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. And a godly life is not based on deeds, but on one's attitude towards self. Are you living in childlike wonder at all there is you don't know? Are you eagerly teachable? Are you honest, open and willing to receive the influence of God's direction, wherever it may lead? Or are you all set, fully formed, done and done? To: How are you? Would you answer, "I'm good?"

Well-knowing that he is setting the fellow up as an example for everyone who is listening, Mark's Jesus avoids the man's question by pretending not to understand it. As the probation officer said to the convict when asked, "What do I have to do to stay out of jail," Jesus says, "Obey the law." Reading between the lines, we can almost hear Jesus muttering to himself, "What must you do? You mustn't do anything. You must simply be." And we can also just about hear Jesus saying behind the back of his hand to whomever is around, "Watch this, guys. Pay close attention. This fellow here is exactly what I've been talking about."

As if he is not quite sure of the question, but wanting to understand the man more clearly, Jesus reminds him of what not to do instead:

“You know the commandments: ‘don’t murder; don’t commit adultery; don’t steal; etc., etc.” He even adds one to the ten, about defrauding. In other words, ‘obey all holy laws.’ And sure enough, the man steps right into it: “Oh, that’s not a problem; I have kept all these since my youth. But isn’t there something else positive and definitive I can put on my to-do list, or better still give orders to have done so that I can stop worrying about the dim dark future and enjoy life. I want the platinum card. What’s the procedure? Where do I sign? Do you take Amex?”

Jesus, looking at him, loved him. Jesus loved him by knowing him fully, just as Jesus knows and loves each of us. There is nothing to do to inherit eternal life. An inheritance is a gift. Eternal life is the gift available to everyone who asks for it. The way to redeem this gift is merely to allow oneself to feel a childlike wonder in the gift itself. All we have to do is set aside -- and leave behind -- anything and everything that interferes with our perception of the presence and power of goodness. What can we do to inherit eternal life? Simply clear away whatever it is that keeps us from knowing that it is already ours.

Nobody keeps all the commandments perfectly from their youth or otherwise. At least I’ve never met anybody who did. And very few of us are so spiritually nimble and socially singular that being free of all possessions and worldly resources will result in our or anybody else’s betterment. No. But each of us has a mirror we can try to polish so that we might see ourselves more as God sees us. Each of us has emotional cobwebs that cling to us when we turn to hear these stories of redemption. Each of us faces snags and logjams and tough rapids in the rivers of our lives. If we believe that we are not alone in them, and are bound for smoother waters downstream, then that belief is its own performance; it is already so. Of course we still have to paddle and steer whatever vessel we’re in.

In the life of the wealthy young man, Jesus could see that his money and possessions were what was blocking his belief. So he said, “You are very close. In fact, you lack only one thing: just go sell all that you own, give the entire proceeds to the poor (understanding that you will have treasure in heaven), and come follow me.” When he heard this, the fellow was shocked. He went away grieving, for he had many possessions. The man didn’t know he had been asking Jesus a trick question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” It was a trick

question to which Jesus provided a trick answer. Because if the man had realized that he already had eternal life, he wouldn't have received the advice to give everything away. He could have kept some, given lots away, sure, and followed Jesus in style.

The late, great David Foster Wallace, novelist and essayist is also famous for a Commencement speech he gave some twenty years ago. He alludes to the difficulty we all face in staying the course of polishing our mirrors, recalibrating our ego's and listening for the guidance we need to stay in this compassion game we keep talking about.

He asserts,

“As I'm sure you know, it is extremely difficult to stay alert and attentive, instead of getting hypnotised by the constant monologue inside our own heads – it may be happening right now! I have come gradually to understand that the modern cliché about teaching you how to think is actually shorthand for a much deeper, more serious idea: learning how to think really means learning how to exercise some control over how and what you think. It means being conscious and aware enough to choose what you pay attention to and to choose how you construct meaning from experience. Because if you cannot exercise this kind of choice in adult life, you will be totally hopeless. The mind is an excellent servant but a terrible master.”

Like many clichés, lame and unexciting on the surface, this expresses a great and terrible truth. This is what the real value of your education is supposed to be about: how to keep from going through your comfortable, prosperous, respectable adult life dead, unconscious, a slave to your head and to your natural default setting of being uniquely, completely, imperially alone day in and day out.

We must ask ourselves what is in our lives that blocks our sure and certain knowledge that we are loved forever. What 'some' can we obtain and keep and enjoy? And what 'all' must we give away or just throw overboard because it's no good to anybody? That is the spiritual challenge we face; and our willingness, nay our eagerness to take up

this challenge, to clean our house and let the grace come in is what puts a smile on the face of God.

680 O God, our help in ages past

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home:

Before the hills in order stood, or earth received her frame,
From everlasting thou art God, to endless years the same.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all our years away;
They fly, forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day.

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,
Be thou our guide while life shall last, and our eternal home.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRwA-bc9GEs>

Moved

The great sea stirs me.
The great sea sets me adrift,
it sways me like the weed
on a river-stone.

The sky's height stirs me.
The strong wind blows through my mind.
It carries me with it,
and moves my inner parts with joy.

Uvanuk, a shaman of the Igloodik Inuit
recorded by Knud Rasmussen