

The Sunday Missive – September 1, 2024 The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 414 God my king thy might confessing

God, my king, thy might confessing, ever will I bless thy name;
Day by day thy throne addressing, still will I thy praise proclaim.

Honor great our God befitteth; who his majesty can reach?
Age to age his works transmitteth; age to age his pow'r shall teach.

Nor shall fail from mem'ry's treasure works by love and mercy wrought:
Works of love surpassing measure, works of mercy passing thought.

Full of kindness and compassion, slow to anger, vast in love,
God is good to all creation; all his works his goodness prove.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QfdESw0lC3Y&t=20s>

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.*

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

Moses said: So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances
that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and
occupy the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you.
You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away
anything from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God
with which I am charging you.

You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!" For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is whenever we call to him? And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today?

But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children.

Psalm 15

Lord, who may dwell in your tabernacle* ***Who may abide upon your holy hill?***

Whoever leads a blameless life and does what is right* ***Whoever speaks truth from the heart.***

There is no guile upon his tongue; he does no evil to his friend* ***He does not heap contempt upon his neighbor.***

In her sight wickedness is rejected* ***She honors those who fear the Lord.***

She has sworn to do no wrong* ***And she does not take back her word.***

He does not give his money in hope of gain* ***Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.***

Whoever does these things shall never be overthrown* ***And shall live in the house of the Lord forever.***

James 1:17-27

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfilment of his own purpose he

gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Hymn 660 O master, let me walk with thee

O Master, let me walk with thee in lowly paths of service free;
Tell me thy secret; help me bear the strain of toil, the fret of care.

Help me the slow of heart to move by some clear, winning word of love;
Teach me the wayward feet to stay, and guide them in the homeward way.

Teach me thy patience; still with thee in closer, dearer company,
In work that keeps faith sweet and strong,
In trust that triumphs over wrong,

In hope that sends a shining ray far down the future's broadening way,
In peace that only thou canst give, with thee, O Master, let me live.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HS5qoWuR-KQ>

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

When the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,

'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile." For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Seeing Ourselves – Pent+14B

James is encouraging us to lead lives of godly activity, through habitual reliance on godly influence. As archers, we go forth looking for targets of fun, food or foe. Whenever we encounter one of these, our senses react: fight, flight, kill and eat, kiss and reproduce and feelings arise: the desire for fun; the determination to get food or to destroy a foe before they destroy us; the urge to make more little Episcopalians. But before anything can be accomplished, we archers must reach back into our quivers, pull out a suitable arrow, notch and draw it according to our ability and training. Only then, with calm breath and open eyes can our best shot be taken.

Every one of us feels these feelings: desire, determination and destruction, regularly – hopefully not too much of the latter. We all

want happiness and entertainment; we all want to provide for ourselves and those we love; we all have situations we would change, forces we would arrest in ourselves and the world. The question is, do we select our arrows from the supply God suggests and provides, the kind that fly straight and true on wings of compassion, hope and equanimity? Or do we meet each situation with a desperate scramble for whatever arrow is nearest to hand, battered, warped, flimsy, rusty and obsolete though they may be, and just blast away? All too habitually, without thinking, we fire off volleys that boomerang back to lodge themselves in our own hides where and when we can least expect or tolerate them; often in places where the sun shineth not.

Yalla du rayal nit-i-bañ-am. From the Wolof of Senegambia. *Yalla du rayal nit-i-bañ-am.* God will not always destroy those whom one hates. God will not always destroy those whom one hates. In other words, my anger – or any other emotion of mine -- does not produce God’s righteousness, nor any other response of the universe. Wait a second! You mean to say ‘feelings don’t bestow rights? Instead, they occasion responsibilities? That’s what the fellow seems to be saying. Yes, our language can be confusing – that word responsibility sneakily implies that we have the ability to respond. But without a clear look in the mirror of God’s precepts – without acknowledging what we see there and how we are inclined to respond to those precepts – we have no ability; we are bound to falter. And unless this acknowledgement of ours is followed by a sustained awareness of our inclinations, when we falter, we veer, we rationalize; we justify listless, disappointing, even downright disagreeable behavior. As our Communion prayer confesses, ‘we wander far away.’

Perhaps we come away from our godly mirrors with some clarity of vision and conviction of purpose but, as Jesus says, “We hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word that is sown in us.” In other words, we have feelings, and they obscure our vision. *Ojos que no ven: Corazon que no siente.* “With eyes that do not see, comes a heart that does not feel.” We may convince ourselves that our so-called ‘gut reactions’ are good indicators of what we ought to be doing, but without an open channel to the greater good of God, we are gambling with our very lives and, all too often with the well-being of those around us. Anger here is getting a bit of a bad rap. Self-righteous anger

is a luxury we cannot afford, it's true, but any emotion – even otherwise good ones -- can wreak havoc if un-reflected-upon, unfiltered, unchecked by prayerful consideration before consequent action. Random acts of kindness are wonderful, but not when they are invasive and unwanted.

The truth of this has not been shaken through the millennia. Time and again God has called us in this way. The words of the Book of Deuteronomy, probably set down in the 6th century BCE, two-and-a-half millennia ago, are attributed to Moses himself: “So now, Israel, just as God has instructed me, I teach you statutes. Observe them diligently to show your wisdom, so everyone will say, ‘What a discerning people!’ But take care and watch yourselves closely; don’t let the things your eyes have seen slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children’s children.”

Because we are inclined to point our accusing fingers at all the circumstances, institutions and individuals that make it difficult, if not impossible for us to act self-reflectively – all the things that force us to behave “off-line” where God’s Word is concerned, Jesus pre-empts the discussion: They asked him, “Why don’t your people live according to tradition? They’re eating with defiled hands!”

He said to them: “Nothing has changed since Isaiah. God is still crying out, ‘You people honor me with your lips, but your hearts are far from me. You’re teaching human precepts as sacred doctrines.’ You abandon the commandments of God and hold to human traditions instead. In other words, this part of your religion is worthless. There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what betray defilement. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come. All evil things come from within. They are what defile a person.”

Of course, nowadays our self-reflection also includes thanking God for the gifts of scientific discovery, and also paying attention to God’s greater purpose. So, for example, we now know that it’s an exceedingly good idea to wash our hands before eating – or doing surgery; cups and bronze kettles too. And if Jesus came today, he’d say so.

As we heard from James, Jesus' message is both an invitation and an obligation: "In fulfilment of God's purpose we have been born by the word of truth. My beloved, be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Those who look into the perfect law of liberty and persevere will be blessed in their doing. But those who think they are religious, but do not bridle their tongues but rather deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless; they are defiled. Religion that is undefiled before God is this: to care for the needy and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

If we are paying attention to the mirror of God's purpose and the multitude of subtle and not-so-subtle veerings away therefrom that fragile, fearful, foolish creatures such as ourselves can make: if we are trying, our goal and our reward is hope. The hope that Jesus promises is the very same that James and the prophets of old have been holding up to us as the most desirable and lasting of treasures, indeed as the meaning of life. It is the hope that, because Creation is good, we might be good too. It is the hope that we are moving in the direction of goodness despite all our fragility, fearfulness and foolery. It is the hope that, little by little -- with all our missteps and false conclusions and reservations -- little by little, if we pay attention to the mirror and glorify the one who made it, who graciously inclines it to our faces -- we might come to recognize ourselves in its reflected light and be glad of what we see there.

Hymn 556 Rejoice ye pure in heart

Rejoice, ye pure in heart! Rejoice, give thanks and sing!
Your glorious banner wave on high, the cross of Christ your King.
Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, give thanks, and sing.

With all the angel choirs, with all the saints of earth,
Pour out the strains of joy and bliss, true rapture, noblest mirth.

Your clear hosannas raise and alleluias loud;
While answering echoes upward float, like wreaths of incense cloud.

Yes, on through life's long path, still chanting as ye go,
From youth to age, by night and day, in gladness and in woe.

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

To a Tree in Bloom

There is no silence lovelier than the one
That flowers upon a flowering tree at night.
There is no silence known beneath the sun
That is so strange to bear, nor half so white.
If I had all that silence in my heart,
What yet unfinished heavens I could sing!
My words lift up and tremble to depart,
Then die in air, from too much uttering.
It must have been beneath a tree like this
An angel sought a girl in Galilee,
While she looked up and pondered how the kiss
Of God had come with wings and mystery.
It may be that a single petal fell.
Heavy with sorrow that it could not tell.

Hildegarde Flanner