

The Sunday Missive – September 29, 2024
The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 546 Awake my soul, stretch every nerve

Awake, my soul, stretch every nerve, and press with vigor on;
A heavenly race demands thy zeal, and an immortal crown,

A cloud of witnesses around hold thee in full survey;
Forget the steps already trod, and onward urge your way,

'Tis God's all-animating voice that calls thee from on high;
'Tis his own hand presents the prize to thine aspiring eye,

Then wake, my soul, stretch every nerve, and press with vigor on;
A heavenly race demands thy zeal, and an immortal crown

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wb6RzZyaxWI&t=57s>

The Collect of the Day

O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Grant us the fullness of your grace, that we, running to obtain your promises, may become partakers of your heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Ruth 1: 1-18

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But

Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had considered his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband." Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. They said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me." Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die— there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!" When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

Psalm 124

If the Lord had not been on our side* *Let Israel now say*

If the Lord had not been on our side* ***When enemies rose up against us***

Then would they have swallowed us alive* ***In their fierce anger toward us***

Then would the waters have overwhelmed us* ***And the torrent gone over us***

Then would the raging waters* ***Have gone right over our heads.***

Blessed be the Lord!* ***Who has not given us as prey for their teeth.***

We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowler* ***The snare is broken, and we are escaped.***

Our help is in the Name of the Lord* ***The maker of heaven and earth.***

James 5:13-20

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Hymn 488 Be thou my vision

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
All else be nought to me, save that thou art—
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father; thine own may I be;
Thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

High King of heaven, when victory is won,
May I reach heaven's joys, bright heaven's Sun!
Heart of my heart, whatever befall,
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwwWMWTpp-U>

Matthew 19:13-22

Then children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them, but Jesus said, "Suffer the little children come to me, and forbid them not, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And he laid his hands on them and blessed them and went on his way. Someone came to him and said, "Teacher, what good deeds must I do to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is already one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother. Also, you shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to him, "I have kept all these; what do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Wisdom on Suffering

If we were to describe the meaning of prayer, we might consider it as an offering of our truest self in thought, word and deed. Jesus' true self is different from ours. Jesus is pure; we are not. So, our efforts will never be perfect, but in any situation, we can try to make ourselves – to the best of our ability -- part of the solution, not the problem. And we may do some good. Knowing this is not only faith, it is also wisdom; the wisdom of the ages. Jesus advises the young man to obey the commandments; it is, after all, all that any of us can do. But the young man wants more; his many possessions have convinced him that he is entitled to the secret formula, the fast track to salvation and prominent citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven. But the response to that strategy brings only grief to him whose reason for being seems primarily to be his possessions.

Wisdom places a high value on one's ability to reason. But the mind is not the only human element that knows. The heart has its own knowledge as well. It is in this sense that knowledge is always something more than belief, something more than what the intellect can affirm. the heart has its reasons the mind cannot fathom.

In a romp through Webster's Dictionary, we find the verb, To Suffer. Suffer; 3rd person: suffers; past tense;suffered; participle: suffering.

Definition 1A: Experience or be subjected to something bad or unpleasant. The people of Phoenix recently suffered 100 straight days of 100 degrees or more.

Definition1B: Be affected by or subject to, as in an illness or ailment. I suffer from the rheumatism. Ok, similar.

Definition 1C: Become or appear worse in quality. The team suffered when she broke her thumb and had to sit out the rest of the season.
Reputation, Trust Level, Product Consistency

Definition 1D: (*archaic*) undergo martyrdom or execution. Ok, oww.

Definition 2A: (*archaic*) tolerate. The people will no longer suffer the existing government.

And finally Definition 2B: (listed as *dated*) to allow someone to do something. Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." It's a complicated word.

Isaiah's prophecy talks about a figure known as "the suffering servant." The text implies that each of us can become a suffering servant ourselves in our lifetime. Although there may well be plenty A, B, C or even D suffering along the way: illness, crime, loss, and failure, to suffer by allowing others room to grow into relationship with us is our primary objective. Beyond tolerance, we are to welcome, encourage, even embrace.

When Jesus says pick up your cross, it doesn't mean he wants anyone else to be crucified, let alone all of us. Our cross is simply whatever life hands us. Suffering means picking it up by fully engaging with whatever we encounter in life, by allowing life to happen. God will be with us and strengthen us as long as we engage the world by means of love; God will be with us and strengthen us when our suffering is painful; God will be with us too when our government – or our family -- is insufferable.

The Hebrew *Baal teshuvah* translates literally as "a master of return." Traditionally, the term *baal teshuvah* meant someone who had done wrong, regretted the behavior, and then turned around, resolving never to do the same again. But in the widest, most definitive sense, a *baal teshuvah* is anyone who seeks to be in a constant state of return to their essential true self, the inner soul that connects them to the divine through studying scripture – *lahag*, and doing good works -- *mitzvot*.

In this sense, every person is capable of being a *baal teshuvah* and should strive to be one. After all, God is infinite, and the journey of faith is endless. As long as we are traveling in the right direction, we are bound up with that infiniteness. Yom Kippur is the great Day of

Atonement, just as Lent is the great Season of Self-examination, but these states must be in some sense continuous. If we are to follow Wisdom, every day is Yom Kippur; every season is Lenten, just as every day can be joyful and every season blissful (one way or t'other).

Thus we come to understand the inseparability of worship and discipleship, of theology and ethics., of faith and life. Worship and discipleship are distinct, but they are also inseparable. Wisdom has long told us that how one lives in relation to God is inseparable from how one lives with one's neighbor: 'Hallowed Be,' 'Kingdom Come,' and 'Will be Done' are inseparable from bread, forgiveness, and the strength to resist temptation.

How we become *ba'alei teshuva* is by allowing our lives to be lived in charity to the best of our ability. Perhaps it is impossible for anyone to seek God, but it is inarguable that God is seeking to bestow unlimited life upon each of us, by giving us this precept: "Do not do anything to anyone else you wouldn't want them to do to you." The gospel teaches that we are not the ones who know, but the ones who are known. And whatever we do know comes from the experience of being known by someone other than ourself.

Back from a visit to the monastery, a man decided to see his friend the parish priest to talk about the experience. The hour was late. He knocked on the door, and a voice responded, "Who is it?" "It is I," replies the man, sure that his own pastor would know him. The clergyman knew him all right, he responded, "God alone has the right to say I. Earth is too small to contain two I's. Didn't you learn that in the monastery?"

The man knew his pastor was right; he returned to the monastery that same night to learn more. The next day, he sat listening while an old monk answered the novices' curious questions. Though he was usually shy, the man felt so comfortable in the old monk's presence that he found himself raising his hand. "Brother, could you tell us a little about yourself?" The monk leaned back, "Myself? Hmmm." There was a long pause. "My name used to be 'Me,' but now it's 'You.'

God will live in us as we open the door in invitation to the deity in the form of our neighbor. The issue is in letting this power change us

and make us willing. Having God dwell in our hearts is like having a new person move into your household. If they're just visiting, it's easy. We simply offer hospitality and try to practice good manners. But if someone moves in to stay, everything changes. At first we might try to hold onto our familiar patterns and routines, but eventually they will make their mark and we will have to start making adjustments.

Wisdom of heart; wisdom of mind; wisdom of body. Wisdom is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the thought of God, an image of cosmic goodness. Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things. In every generation, she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets. She is as beautiful as the sun and every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light of day she is found to be superior, for the day is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil will never prevail. Nothing will ever succeed Wisdom.

The true pilgrimage walk is across the undiscovered land of your own heart and imagination, which cannot be explored any other way than through intention, with gratitude in your knapsack and compassion for all you see as your staff.

Lift Every Voice and Sing Hymn 60 How great thou art

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds thy hands have made,
I see the stars I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy pow'r throughout the universe displayed.

Then sings my soul, my Savior, God, to Thee;
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

When through the woods and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees,
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze.

And when I think that God, his Son not sparing,
Send him to die, I scarce can take it in,

That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin.

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration,
And there proclaim, my God how great thou art.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkJVQN9pK1k>

Teach Your Children

You who are on the road
Must have a code that you can live by
And so become yourself
Because the past is just a good-bye.
Teach your children well,
Their father's hell did slowly go by,
And feed them on your dreams
The one they pick's the one you'll know by.
Don't you ever ask them why, if they told you, you will cry,
So just look at them and sigh
And know they love you.

And you, of tender years,
Can't know the fears that your elders grew by,
And so please help them with your youth,
They seek the truth before they can die.
Teach your parents well,
Their children's hell will slowly go by,
And feed them on your dreams
The one they pick's the one you'll know by.
Don't you ever ask them why, if they told you, you will cry,
So just look at them and sigh and know they love you.

Graham Nash
