

## **The Sunday Missive – March 19, 2023**

### **The Fourth Sunday in Lent**

#### **Hymn 9 Not here for high and holy things**

Not here for high and holy things we render thanks to thee,  
But for the common things of earth, the purple pageantry  
Of dawning and of dying days, the splendor of the sea,

The royal robes of autumn moors, the golden gates of spring,  
The velvet of soft summer nights, the silver glistening  
Of all the million million stars, the silent song they sing,

Of faith and hope and love undimmed, undying still through death,  
The resurrection of the world, what time there comes the breath  
Of dawn that rustles through the trees, and that clear voice that saith:

Awake, awake to love and work! The lark is in the sky,  
The fields are wet with diamond dew, the worlds awake to cry  
Their blessings on the Lord of life, as he goes meekly by.

Come, let thy voice be one with theirs, shout with their shout of praise;  
See how the giant sun soars up, great lord of years and days!  
So let the love of Jesus come and set thy soul ablaze,

To give and give, and give again, what God hath given thee;  
To spend thyself nor count the cost; to serve right gloriously  
The God who gave all worlds that are, and all that are to be.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G\\_fcx98\\_Uq0&t=42s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_fcx98_Uq0&t=42s)

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

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

## **1 Samuel 16:1-13**

The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

## **Psalm 23**

The Lord is my shepherd; \* I shall not want.

Who maketh me to lie down in green pastures \* Who leadeth me beside the still waters.

Who restoreth my soul\* Who leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for God's name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; \* For thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies\* Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life\* And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

## **Ephesians 5:8-14**

Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

### **Lift Every Voice and Sing Hymn 162 Come by here**

Come by here my Lord; come by here  
Come by here my Lord; come by here  
Come by here my Lord; come by here. O Lord come by here

Someone needs you Lord; come by here

Send a blessing Lord; come by here

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qeC\\_UrrCzo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qeC_UrrCzo)

## **John 9:1-41**

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone

who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

### **Out of the Darkness Lent 4A**

This day in the Church year has been known as "Laetare Sunday," so called because of words from Isaiah: *Laetare Jerusalem, etc.*, "Rejoice, Jerusalem: and come together all you who love her: rejoice with joy, you that have been in sorrow: that you may exult, and be filled from the breast of your consolation."

Today has also been known as Mid-Lent Sunday (in French *mi-carême*), for obvious reasons, and [Rose Sunday](#), when rose-colored vestments are worn instead of purple ones to signify a reprieve from the rigors of Lent. Lots of Christians have known the fourth Sunday of Lent as Refreshment Sunday, when in recognition of the nourishment that we all need, the stories of Jesus feeding the multitudes were read in the past. The early stirrings of our contemporary Mothers' Day came in the context of this season of the year when it is considered especially appropriate to acknowledge our biological beginnings -- inside women. Acknowledging human motherhood was a direct outgrowth of the timeless awareness of our beginnings in the earth itself.

The Rabbis note: "In the Prophets, Midrash, Kabbalah, and in our prayers, we distinguish two modalities, feminine and masculine. When we refer to G-d's presence within our world, within us, and within nature, then She is the *Shechinah*, a name that carries the meaning "indwelling." The *Shekinah* dwells within our hearts and at the essence of everything that exists, generating life and nurturing it from within. Indeed, this understanding of harmony answers the toughest, most fundamental question about prayer: What is a creation doing conversing with its creator?

It's not just the absurdity of a mere creature engaging the "One who spreads out the stars like dust," who invented the atom and all the laws of nature. The Creator sustains creation in its every moment. And even as we exist in this moment, from our Creator's perspective, we might just as well never have been. Yet here we are, not simply offering praise, but, much like back seat drivers, kvetching over how the infinitely wise Creator is running the universe and suggesting alternatives that are preferential in our eyes.

The rabbis conclude there really is only one explanation: In our prayers, we become a channel through which God reflects upon Creation. We let divine prayer flow through us and into our world in order that our world may rise upward. That is why the quintessential prayer, Psalm 51 begins with the words "O Lord, open thou our lips and our mouth shall show forth thy praise. In our prayers, we are facilitating God's voice from within the creation, as She speaks to Himself. In the words of Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760,

Ukraine): “As soon as you say “G-d, open my lips,” the *Shechinah* invests Herself within you and speaks from within you all the words. If you will have faith that it is the *Shechinah* speaking, certainly a great awe will overcome you, for the Holy One has squeezed Himself into your world to dwell with you.”

Long before the development of patriarchal religious structures, people were full of desire to express gratitude, wonderment and hope when Spring comes and the ground gives birth to new and sustaining life. We still have that urge. In some French speaking communities, the custom of a *Mi Carême* festival continues, coupling the vernal urge to celebrate fecundity with the human resistance to doing anything for forty days straight. Notice how conveniently placed St. Patrick’s Day happens to be.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm has become the quintessential reminder of our need to acknowledge our reliance on the God of earth and sky for existence, for nurture and for comfort. Through its poetry, we reiterate our humble creaturehood on the planet and the arresting implications of such humility: we are but dust; we have no right to poison the dust of which we are made. Unless we lift up that reality, this miraculous experience of life under God will cease to work on and for us, will no longer transform us into sustainers of each other and of Creation. There will be no clear waters, let alone green pastures. So, we do well to humor our urges for celebration and respite from rigor, then turn our attention to the onset and origins of nourishing growth, and start asking what we can work to change. As William Sloane Coffin liked to observe, “These days, the primary religious question is not, ‘What must I do to be saved,’ but rather ‘What must we do to save Creation?’”

Darkness has such a bad reputation. The metaphor of dark equaling bad and light equaling good is so basic and instinctive that to suggest it be abandoned would be pointless. Yet, there is a senselessness to this aversion. Do we not renew ourselves by sleeping in the dark? Is not the darkest soil the most rich and productive? It is not that darkness itself is bad, it’s that we want to hide there. Our origins are in the dark: in the womb, in the earth. When God arrives on the scene, there is always a cloud, a storm, a tower of smoke or a hidden voice. All the greatest sources of nourishment and growth, both physically and spiritually are just beyond our ability to see them

perfectly, and so we must trust in the dark even while we try our best to illuminate the tasks before us. Psalm 139 declares: “If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will cover me, and the light around me be night,’ (but) darkness is not dark to you; and night is as clear as the day.”

A great mystic once said, “Of what avail is the open eye if the heart is blind?” True wisdom is en-light-enment. It can never divorce us from the travails and sorrow of the world, but will teach us to live with greater compassion in the midst of them. Wisdom reveals to us that serenity is not some lofty peak that we inhabit after transcending the world; serenity comes in learning how to respond to the challenges of this very life with greater love. Wisdom is not attainment, but a way of being, a way of responding in which we neither resist the challenges life brings to us, nor are overwhelmed by them.

In “A Grief Observed,” C.S. Lewis wrote about his bereavement, after his wife’s death nearly shattered him. He described what it was like to go to God “when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, the sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside, and after that, silence.” He went on: “Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about God. The conclusion I dread is not ‘So there’s no God after all,’ but ‘So this is what God’s really like. Deceive yourself no longer.’” But truly God is not only the terrible and unmovable reality that inflicts our loneliness and fear from beyond the locked doors – of mortality; of outrage; of betrayal; of failure; of loss. God is our wounded and shaken reality too. She stands with us, surrounding our injured hearts with love even when we are shivering in the dark alleys and valleys of our lives. God is with us as we pound on the thunderous, knuckle-cracking, heart-breaking doors of meaning and peace, trying and dying to get back into what we know we love.

Our oversimplification of the metaphor of darkness (and scripture often exacerbates the problem), moves us away from the work Jesus is talking about today, it moves us away from the work Jesus’ life and death comprise, it moves us way from the work we pray for the willingness to do: the active loving of all Creation. Darkness is not simple, and we consider it simple to the detriment, the peril of



Creation. As Einstein liked to say: “Everything should be made as simple as possible – but not more so.”

Simplification of the darkness metaphor has led to all kinds of trouble, not the least being racism. If dark is good and light is bad, then judging people by their color is too easy. But Jesus gets pretty explicit on this point: “Unless you know you are blind, you cannot see.” In other words, as much as we use the metaphor, it only points up the necessity to move beyond it. It is not about color; nor is it about physical light. As the Mandinka say, *baafĩñ fanaa ka keñe*, ‘black goats get just as fat as white ones.’

Jesus heals the blind man with the mysterious mud and spit ritual, but the kind of sight the man gains is not just physical sensitivity to photons. Immediately the man gets into all kinds of trouble: with his neighbors, the family and the heat. The gift is a mothering gift, a refreshing gift, a joyous, rosy gift indeed. But the nature of the gift, the kind of sight he receives comes from the darkest depths of Creation. It is a gift which carries the power of genesis, transformation and sustenance; and it is scary. It comes with the responsibility to see beyond every darkness and despair with the eyes of our hearts. It requires us to see and believe beyond the lightness of pleasure into the darker challenges and possibilities of love.

### **Hymn 7 Christ, whose glory fills the skies**

Christ, whose glory fills the skies; Christ, the true, the only Light,  
Sun of Righteousness, arise! Triumph over shades of night;  
Dayspring from on high, be near; Daystar, in my heart appear!

Dark and cheerless is the morn unaccompanied by thee;  
Joyless is the day's return till thy mercy's beams I see,  
As they inward light impart, glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine! Pierce the gloom of sin and grief!  
Fill me, radiancy divine; scatter all my unbelief;  
More and more thyself display, shining to the perfect day.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pGcmSB13H7Y>

## Prisms

What is beheld through glass seems glass.

The quality of what I am

Encases what I am not,

Smooths the strange world.

I perceive it slowly

In my time,

In my material,

As my pride,

As my possession:

The vision is love.

When life crashes like a cracked pane,

Still shall I love

Even the slight grass and the patient dust.

Death also sees, though darkly,

And I must trust then as now

Only another kind of prism

Through which I may not put my hands to touch.

Laura Riding Jackson