

## **The Sunday Missive – June 9, 2024**

### **The Third Sunday after Pentecost**

#### **Hymn 533 How wondrous and great, thy works God of praise**

How wondrous and great thy works, God of praise!  
How just, King of saints, and true are thy ways!  
O who shall not fear thee, and honor thy Name?  
Thou only art holy, thou only supreme.

To nations of earth thy light shall be shown;  
their worship and vows shall come to thy throne:  
thy truth and thy judgments shall spread all abroad,  
till earth's every people confess thee their God.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e3P0rNOqhLE>

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

O God, from whom all good proceeds: Grant that by your inspiration we may think those things that are right, and by your merciful guiding may do them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

#### **1 Samuel 8:4-11:15**

All the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, “You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.” But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to govern us.” Samuel prayed to the Lord, and the Lord said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.”

So Samuel reported all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, “These will be the ways of the king who

will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; [and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers.] He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day.”

But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, “No! but we are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.” Samuel said to the people, “Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship.” So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal. There they sacrificed offerings of well-being before the Lord, and there Saul and all the Israelites rejoiced greatly.

### **Psalm 130**

Out of the depths have I called to you, O Lord; hear my voice\* ***Let your ears consider the voice of my supplication.***

If you, Lord, were to note all that is done amiss\* ***O Lord, who among us could stand upright?***

But there is forgiveness with you\* ***Therefore you shall be held in awe.***

I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for the Lord\* ***In the Word of God lies all my hope.***

My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning\* ***More than watchmen for the morning, my soul waits for the Lord***

O you people, wait for the Lord\* *For with the Lord there is mercy;*

With the Lord there is plenteous redemption\* *And God shall redeem us from all our transgressions.*

## **2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1**

Just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—"I believed, and so I spoke"—we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

### **Lift Every Voice and Sing Hymn 189 Great is thy faithfulness**

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,  
There is no shadow of turning with thee;  
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not,  
As thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

Refrain:

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
All I have needed thy hand hath provided,  
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;  
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,  
Blessings all mine with ten thousand beside:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NT0HcAr9ael>

### **Mark 3:20-35**

The crowd came together again, so that Jesus and his disciples could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

“Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

**Who is My Family? Proper 5B**

As Juan Luis Segundo put it, "The real sin against the Holy Spirit is refusing to recognize, with 'theological' joy, some concrete liberation that is taking place before one's very eyes." God will not approach us as long as we insist on digging-into the positions and policies, the power structures and proclivities that have possessed us to this point. Jesus even goes so far as to say that our very families must be restructured to include only relationships that are based on compassion and charity towards ourselves and others. Jesus understands that in order to weave an alternative social fabric, the most basic conventions and constraints of kinship must be questioned by redefining family as "whoever does the will of God," a radical proposition in any cultural system.

Writes Ched Myers: "Radical is as unfashionable a word today as it was trendy back in the 1960s, but its etymology (from the Latin *radix*, "root") shows why we must not concede it to nostalgia. As Gore Vidal has said, 'If you want to get to the root of anything, by definition you must get radical. It is no accident that the word has been totally demonized by those in power; no one in politics dares even to use the word favorably, much less track any problem to its root.' In an age when the people to whom we have given power so often behave, not like leaders, but like self-righteous kings and despoilers of the land, we must expose the roots of our socio-political and historical pathologies and rediscover the roots of our tradition of discipleship."

However unsettling Jesus' metaphor of criminal breaking-and-entering may seem, the metaphorical tradition comparing the Lord's advent to a thief in the night was one of the most enduring in the early church, emerging as one of the gospels' master metaphors. Later, Jesus will break into the Jerusalem temple, cast out the true thieves, and put a ban on the selling of goods in that house. He will insist it cannot stand, and exhort his disciples to keep watch over the house as it awaits its true Lord.

For us this means refusing to be ground down by the insistent posturing of those who would comfort and aide the powerful and frighten and abuse the already-afflicted. It means refusing to be bullied or taken in by those who claim to be defending free speech and open discussion, but who aren't sincere, who don't really want the truth to be told, who don't really want ideas to be evaluated on their merits,

regardless of politics, but who instead want ideas convenient to their side to receive (at least) equal time regardless of their veracity. We have to keep in mind that these claims are made, not just in bad faith, but in the active pursuit of undue power. Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God challenges both the domesticating family and the dominating state. No wonder radical discipleship remains marginal in our churches.

So who is our Strong Man? Whom must we bind? "Attribution biases" is Professor Jennifer Herdt's candidate. This is a social-scientific term for finger-pointing. Psychotherapists call it Co-Dependency. One of these biases is this: we have the tendency to attribute our successes to our own virtue and our failures to others' behavior or the situation itself. When our team wins, it's because we're good; when we lose, it's because of bad refereeing or our list of injuries.

This proclivity of ours, to externalize our disappointment and failure and internalize our successes and good luck, is a quality, not only of individuals, but of groups as well. Once we are part of a power structure, and our group is "in," we make broad generalizations about "out" groups, based on very few observations, while avoiding such generalizations about ourselves.

This tendency should be discomfiting to us, it should pull us up short and lead us to question the confidence with which we pass judgements on ourselves and others. It should lead us to the self-observation and strength we need to arrest such behaviors in ourselves and lead our communities away from the "Strong Men" of prejudice and punishing discrimination, scapegoating and oppression. This is the only way we can become able to enter upon the quest for neighbor love, when the Strong Man is tied up, our hearts and homes will be plunderable by love.

As in the story we just heard from the Book of Samuel, as long as we espouse any other cause and serve any other king, we will remain enslaved. If we are to survive, we must learn from our ancestors to direct our attention and allegiance only to true righteousness. We have seen how kings behave, both crowned and self-styled ones, without concern for the people: they become

tyrannical. They must be bound up and silenced. It isn't easy to accept our part in the making of false kings. It is often painful. It may even be costly to open one's heart and community to transformation and dialogue amongst those who disagree. But it is worthwhile.

As Paul so beautifully explains, "every slight affliction is preparing us for glory beyond all measure. We look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; the earthly tent we live in may be destroyed, but we have a building from God, a house not made with hands; so we do not lose heart."

And it follows that the only thing God doesn't know how to forgive is the denial of the possibility of forgiveness, transformation and spiritual accountability. In contrast, we must return again and again to the rigorous, joyful terrifying practice of naming and repenting of our biases if we would embrace the discipline of loving our enemies as Jesus admonishes.

There is a marvelous film series called *800 Words*, wherein a man moves his teenager daughter and son off on a seemingly foolhardy adventure, in order to bind the Strong Man of grief that has gripped them since his wife's, their mother's sudden death. The story takes place in an absolutely beautiful setting, and there is much hilarity in the family's interactions with their new neighbors, but the poignancy of their struggle to reinvent themselves in the face of mistakes, failures and loss is the real story.

Our own struggles with our own Strong Men, whether they be personal shortcomings or communal pathologies, is full of beauty too, along with the trouble and anguish. There's no reason not to whistle while we work, nothing stopping us from liking what we do. There's plenty of hilarity if we are aware of it. But the real story, the concrete liberation taking place before our very eyes, the real thriller is beneath the surface, in the hearts of those of us who would love abundantly.

### **Hymn 569 God the omnipotent**

God the Omnipotent! King, who ordainest  
Thunder thy clarion, the lightning thy sword;  
Show forth thy pity on high where thou reignest:  
Give to us peace in our time, O Lord.

God the All-merciful! Earth hath forsaken  
Thy ways all holy, and slighted thy word;  
Bid not thy wrath in its terrors awaken:  
Give to us peace in our time, O Lord.

God the All-provident! earth by thy chastening  
Yet shall to freedom and truth be restored;  
Through the thick darkness thy kingdom is hastening:  
Thou wilt give peace in our time, O Lord.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aryo3cgn5Uo>

## **Peaches**

I pick through April's shrunken woodpile,  
throw chips and divots of winter's wood-splitting  
in the wheelbarrow: box elder chips,  
chunks of half-rotted, bone-dry elm,  
popple splinters, an odd pine block or two?  
all too small or fast-burning  
to sate the woodstove's January appetite,  
but enough to re-ignite a little sunlight,  
released in a small fire on a cool morning,  
the same way a jar of home-canned peaches releases  
the buzz of honey bees on peach blossoms when opened.  
I re-pile oak logs, save them for next winter's cold nights  
like jars of sweet peaches, stored on the pantry shelves,  
saved for cobbler and pies when the trees are bare.  
The thought creeps into my head  
that a lot of folks won't see another harvest, another winter.  
I hope it's not us, honey; but just in case it is,  
let's open a jar of peaches for breakfast,  
savor a hint of summer as we huddle before the fireplace.

Larry Schug