

The Sunday Missive – August 7, 2022
The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 533 How wondrous and great

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=bGgwSzGgU-Y>

The Collect of the Day

Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Isaiah 1:10-20

Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom* Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!

What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord* I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of beasts;

I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats*
When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand?

Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile* Incense is an abomination to me.

New moon and sabbath and all your convocations* I cannot endure your solemn assemblies with iniquity.

Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates* They have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them.

When you stretch out your hands* I will hide my eyes from you.

Though you make many prayers, I will not listen* For your hands are full of blood.

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean* Remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes.

Cease to do evil, learn to do good* Seek justice and rescue the oppressed.

If you are willing and obedient* You shall eat the good of the land;

But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured* For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Psalm 50

The Lord, the God of gods, has spoken* ***God has called the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.***

Out of Zion, perfect in its beauty* ***God is revealed in glory.***

Our God will come and will not keep silence* ***There is a consuming fire, and a raging storm.***

Who calls the heavens and the earth from above* ***To witness the judgment of God's people.***

Let the heavens declare the rightness of his cause* ***For God will judge.***

Hear, O my people, and I will speak* ***"O Israel, I will bear witness for or against you"***

Consider this well, you who forget God* ***Lest I rend you and there be none to deliver you.***

Whoever offers me a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors me* ***And to those who keep in my way will I show the salvation of God."***

Hebrews 11:1-16

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old-- and Sarah herself was barren-- because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, "as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore."

All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.

If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

LEVAS Hymn 175 Nobody knows the trouble I've seen

Nobody knows the trouble I've seen; nobody knows but Jesus,
Nobody knows the trouble I've seen, Glory, halleluj.

Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down, oh, yes, Lord,
Sometimes I'm almost to the ground, oh, yes, Lord. [Refrain]

Although you see me going 'long so, oh, yes, Lord,
I have my troubles here below, oh, yes, Lord. [Refrain]

Luke 12:32-40

Jesus said to his disciples, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

"Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

"But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

Take Care of the Children – Proper14C

The great text we call Isaiah, a compilation of the works of a number of prophets, commences with this operatic – not to say histrionic – denunciation of all that has been taking place among the people in their religious sacrifices. "There is blood on your hands!" cries the voice of God. But it is their behavior outside the realm of worship that is really at issue, because they aren't living out the values they profess.

Make yourselves clean; cease to do evil.
Learn to do good; rescue the oppressed.
Plead for the widow; defend every orphan.
Come says the Lord; let's argue it out.
Though your sins are scarlet, they shall be snow.
They are like crimson, they shall be like wool.
If you are willing, you shall eat your fill.
But if you refuse, you shall be eaten.
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Jesus offers the same choice to his followers: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Jesus is often observed telling us that the Kingdom of God is at hand. When the Christian movement began, his followers interpreted this to mean that the end was coming soon. But after two thousand-plus years, a disconnect has developed. Some folks philosophically consider this to be unimportant; the kingdom will come soon all right, but God's idea of soon and ours are just different. '2 Peter 3:8' read a button folks wore at the turn of the millennium, referring to the verse: "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

When Jesus tells us to keep watch because we don't know when a thief might come or the boss might get home, at first it seems like a challenging commission: I can do that! All I need is a little more intestinal fortitude and I will be able to keep watch with the best of 'em. But even the most enthusiastic and virtuous sentry has to get a nap in from time to time. Eventually to retire. Eventually to die.

So what is going on here; is this just a trick on Jesus' part to get us to behave? He hints that the end is coming any minute, so we'd better just stay ready. That sounds like Threat Level Orange at the airport. It seems hard to remember a time when it wasn't Threat Level Orange. Sounds almost like The Boy who Cried Wolf. Doesn't sound much like Jesus. What is Jesus saying? Is this another version of last week's warning to the Prosperous Farmer – you might die tonight, so you'd better start behaving fast – the end is relatively near for all of us? Perhaps. But it's not like Luke to move from explicit teaching towards analogy – from 'don't do that, do this' to 'there once was someone who did something like what you're doing, and that was a problem.' Luke would have moved in the other direction, from story towards explication.

There must be something else that Jesus has in mind when he says "be dressed for action...the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour." After all, he is the Son of Man, right? So if he's not talking about the Judgment Day, when he will come back in glory; and he's not talking about the fact that we all are going to die relatively soon, big picture-wise; and he doesn't suffer from short-term memory loss, then he must be saying something else.

Here in America, effectively saving money is increasingly both difficult and uncommon. Savings are at an all-time low. Some wag might say we're just doing as we're told – not storing up our treasures. But I daresay prudent long-term savings are less what's meant by treasure than bigger cars, houses, tv's, and all kinds of other stuff. My grandparents set aside some money for

each of their thirteen great-grandkids to give them a start on paying tuition, and am I ever grateful. Because even living simply, the cost of education is daunting, and I was not prepared to pay it all for my three.

It isn't savings accounts for the great-grandchildren that are cautioned about, it's buying stuff for oneself. Children and grandchildren are part of the kingdom I believe in. They are the future and they are here. Taking care of them is very much godly business. Perhaps this will give us a clue as to what Jesus would have us understand. That phrase 'son of man' is part of the problem. If we were to say 'child of humanity' we might get a better understanding of his meaning. Not just my particular individual children or yours, but all children. Suffer the little children to come unto me, says Jesus; and if we are the body of Christ, then we must suffer the little children to come unto us. Don't forget Luke is the story that begins with the son of man – the child of us – coming into the world from scratch.

As he does so often, Jesus is ironically pointing out that there is not exactly a shortage of children of ours who want helping. If we have the wherewithal to take care of our own biological children, we are obligated to expand our spheres of compassionate care. The master coming home unexpectedly and the thief in the night are both figures of speech for what we all encounter daily. We find a world full of opportunities to direct our efforts to offering lovingkindness to whomever might cross our path – especially the young and vulnerable – today.

In the modern world, we have developed an extraordinarily precarious and godless character of overconfidence mixed with incapacity. We insist that we are able to do whatever it is we want to boast of having done, but with each new day's insistence there is a steady erosion of our ability to actually do the deeds. The choice to live as a just, responsible and godly people demands persistent sacrifice on the road to happy destiny.

Once upon a time there was an old rabbi who had served the Lord faithfully for many years. He had an anointed ministry, and his prayers were always effective. Whenever he prayed for the sick, they were healed. But in spite of his powerful ministry, he was extremely poor; he and his wife struggled to get by on almost nothing.

One day, after they had seen yet another person healed, his wife said to him, "God certainly must have prepared a rich reward for all of your years of work when we get to heaven, and he always seems to listen to your prayers. Why don't you ask the Lord to give us just a tiny bit of our heavenly reward here on earth so that we don't have to live in such terrible poverty?" So right there the two of them asked the Lord to give them a little something out of what was in store for them ahead of time, while they were still alive. Immediately the sky opened, and a table leg made out of gold fell on the ground in front of them, and their problems were solved.

The next morning, the pastor looked very troubled. When his wife asked him what was wrong, the pastor said, "Last night I had a dream that we were sitting at the great banquet in heaven the prophet Isaiah talks about and every family had its own golden table to sit around. But our table was missing a leg, and that it tilted and wobbled terribly, so we couldn't even eat out soup.

His wife sat down and considered this. Finally she rose and said, "We must go quickly and ask the Lord to take back the gift he gave us yesterday." So they prayed, and immediately the heavens opened, and the table leg rose back up into heaven. And this was the most wonderfully answered prayer of all.

Jesus is not demanding that we change everything; he only demands that we change one thing: our attitude toward life: From "what's in it for me," to "how can I help?" Of course, once this becomes habitual, each of us will have been cared for by those who went before. The Promised Land of Sarah and Abraham and

each of us their descendants is wherever this cycle of care perpetuates. When in his Parables, Jesus talks about the Kingdom of Heaven, it is this place, where each of us is eager to take the risk of caring for others because we have ourselves been cared for.

Keeping watch, making purses, lighting lamps and being dressed for action are all ways of saying, 'adopt the habit of preparedness to be of help.' Bonus question: Whom should we be prepared to help? Anybody who knocks at the door. And by the way, he is suggesting that we make this happen now, today, as soon as we hear it. He is 'suggesting' now, in the sense that when you jump out of an airplane, it is suggested that you pull your parachute's ripcord.

As always with Jesus' most fundamental admonitions, there's an annoyingly inescapable paradox. If we really do what Jesus is suggesting we do in order to prepare for the Judgement Day, then the Judgment Day will already have arrived. When the Word of Love becomes the law of human activity, the Kingdom will have already come about here but nobody will notice; we'll all be busy taking care of each other's children, and fixing each other's wobbly tables.

Hymn 542 Christ is the world's true Light

Christ is the world's true light, its Captain of salvation,
The Day-star clear and bright of every one and nation;
New life, new hope awakes, whene'er we own his sway;
Freedom her bondage breaks, and night is turned to day.

In Christ all races meet, their ancient feuds forgetting,
The whole round world complete, from sunrise to its setting:
When Christ is throned as Lord, we shall forsake our fear,
To ploughshare beat the sword, to pruning-hook the spear.

One Lord, in one great Name unite us all who own thee;
Cast out our pride and shame that hinder to enthrone thee;
The world has waited long, has travailed long in pain;
To heal its ancient wrong, come, Prince of Peace, and reign.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-RRcVCweM1I&t=23s>

Dancing Adairs

Behold me, in my chiffon, gauze, and tinsel,
Flitting out of the shadow into the spotlight,
And into the shadow again, without a whisper!—
Firefly's my name, I am evanescent.

Firefly's your name. You are evanescent.
But I follow you as remorselessly as darkness,
And shut you in and enclose you, at last, and always,
Till you are lost,—as a voice is lost in silence.
Till I am lost, as a voice is lost in silence. . .
Are you the one who would close so cool about me?
My fire sheds into and through you and beyond you:
How can your fingers hold me? I am elusive.

How can my fingers hold you? You are elusive?
Yes, you are flame, but I surround and love you,
Always extend beyond you, cool, eternal,
To take you into my heart's great void of silence.

You shut me into your heart's great void of silence. . .
O sweet and soothing end for a life of whirling!
Now I am still, whose life was mazed with motion.
Now I sink into you, for love of sleep.

Conrad Aiken