

The Sunday Missive – August 14, 2022
The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 421 All glory be to God on high

All glory be to God on high, and peace on earth from heaven,
And God's good will unflinching be to all people given.
We bless, we worship you, we raise for your great glory
Thanks and praise, O God, Almighty Father.

O Lamb of God, Lord Jesus Christ, whom God the Father gave us,
Who for the world was sacrificed up on the cross to save us;
And, as you sit at God's right hand and we for judgement
There must stand, have mercy, Lord, upon us.

You only are the Holy One, who came for our salvation,
And only you are God's true Son, who was before creation.
You, only, Christ, as Lord we own, and with the Spirit, you alone
Share in the Father's glory.

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

The Collect of the Day

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Jeremiah 23:23-29

Am I a God nearby, says the Lord, and not a God far off? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord. I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed!" How long? Will the hearts of the prophets ever turn back-- those who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart? They plan to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, just as their ancestors forgot my name for Baal. Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? says the Lord. Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?

Psalm 82

God takes his stand in the council of heaven* ***And gives judgment in the midst of the gods.***

"How long will you judge unjustly* ***And show favor to the wicked?***

Now save the weak and the orphan* ***Defend the humble and needy.***

Rescue the weak and the poor* ***Deliver them from the power of the wicked.***

They do not know, neither do they understand; they go about in darkness* ***The very foundations of the earth are shaken.***

Now I say to you, 'You are gods* ***And all of you children of the Most High.***

Nevertheless, you shall die like mortals* ***And fall like any prince.***"

Arise, O God, and rule the earth* ***For you shall take all nations for your own.***

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets-- who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented-- of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set

before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hymn 490 I want to walk as a child of the light

I want to walk as a child of the light; I want to follow Jesus
God sent the stars to give light to the world
The star of my life is Jesus

In Him, there is no darkness at all
The night and the day are both alike
The Lamb is the light of the city of God
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus

I want to see the brightness of God; I want to look at Jesus
Clear sun of righteousness, shine on my path
And show me the way to the Father

I'm looking for the coming of Christ; I want to be with Jesus
When we have run with patience the race
We shall know the joy of Jesus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmo6A86mis0&t=69s>

Luke 12:49-56

Jesus said, "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided:

father against son and son against father; mother against daughter and daughter against mother; mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

Let's Run! -- Proper 15C

Jesus is raging today. This doesn't seem much like the tender shepherd we're used to. This sounds more like an angry prophet from the Hebrew Bible, telling us about the doom and destruction of our vineyard havens, overgrown with briars and thorns.

Jesus foretells the radical division that will take place within households because of his ideas. Then he mocks his listeners, calling them hypocrites for their acute grasp of the obvious: "Looks like rain" and "Gonna be a hot one" while they meanwhile blithely ignore another truth that is just as apparent: We are not listening to the cries of the poor; we're not trying very hard to change things for the better. We must step a heckuvalot livelier on the paths of righteousness, and there will neither be justice nor peace until we do.

If you ever have the delightful pleasure of visiting the Western Isles of Scotland, you will be amazed at the sky. A continuous progression of tall cloudbanks scud by, mixing with silvery sunshine as they pass; no two minutes have the same sky. In the Hebrides, predicting the weather is pure folly for a visitor. It is almost always somehow beautiful, but you do have to be prepared to reassess your travel plans and adjust your layers of clothing by the hour.

This is the moral world Jesus is describing. There are powerful forces – of goodness and beauty, but also of selfishness, greed and violence all around us, and their arrangement changes all the time. We have to work hard to stay aware of and engaged in lives of righteousness, and not pretend that our Sunday morning prayers will carry us through a week spent out in the ever so nautical waters of our society. A case in point: Even in the lovely and placid setting of Chautauqua, where I have been blessed to spend a week for twenty summers or so, someone giving a lecture just two days ago was attacked and stabbed by a religious fanatic.

As he makes his way to Calvary, Jesus utters harsh words to the crowd of thousands he encounters. The theologian Audrey West has suggested that it might be clearer to think of these particular remarks as a description of the World after Jesus, not a prescription for any particular behavior.

After all, for thousands of years before Jesus, the prescription for a just society had already been available in Holy Scripture, but humankind failed to take the medicine. As we heard from Isaiah, God expects justice but sees bloodshed; God expects righteousness, but hears a cry. The spiritual antidote, compounded of justice, mercy and humility, is prescribed in every religion there is; the formula is older than we know, but it continues to be warped and abused by the rabid and fiendish.

Listen to the Psalmist today: “Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the rights of the lowly and the destitute; rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked; they have neither knowledge nor understanding; they walk around in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken; and God asks: ‘How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?’”

Today Jesus is not prescribing, he is describing. Often, he tells stories of the Kingdom of Heaven and the good pleasure God takes in giving us all that our hearts can imagine or desire. The

prescription is as old as the family, but today Jesus, more vehement as he gets closer to the Cross, is frustrated with our continuing refusal to do God's will.

It is vital to remember that these are words of love. God truly intends our happiness and is in perpetual unease at the many ways we hurt. Today Jesus gives a gloves-off portrayal of what we will encounter as the World is transformed: There will be division. Based on human history, our very households will contain conflict and strife. To act justly, love mercy and walk humbly are not always what we are taught by our parents, are not always modelled by our heroes or our leaders, are not always readily available for imitation.

Jesus is saying, 'Don't pretend things are good out of your own convenience. Don't maintain habits and systems that only benefit the powerful. Don't turn a blind eye to violence of any kind. Honor your elders by getting to know them well enough to decide for yourselves what to perpetuate and what to discard.' He calls us hypocrites for pretending we are righteous while passing up many a fine opportunity to improve the lot of the dispossessed. Jesus instructs us to continually refresh our awareness: of how we treat one another, of the language we use, of the policies we endorse; to look for selfishness and self-delusion.

The one thing Jesus can't stand is complacency. Sitting still is unacceptable. No matter one's circumstances, there are always paths forward. An appetite for growth of spirit is the only vital ingredient of a godly life. Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie talks about learning to write as a child, with only British books to read. All of the characters in her first stories are blonde and blue-eyed, they eat apples, play in the snow, and talk a lot about the weather. This despite that Adichie had never been outside Nigeria, where very few folks are blonde, or blue-eyed, there are no apples, or snow, and nobody talks about the weather.

Far from being trapped in that made-up world, that bore little relation to her reality however, Adichie nurtured the artist's spirit within her and found an education. When her family lost everything in Nigeria's civil war, she came to the United States to study. Described in as "the most prominent of a procession of critically acclaimed young anglophone authors who are attracting a new generation of readers to African literature" She was awarded a MacArthur Genius Grant, and her books are read all over the world. She was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters, at the age of 39. Always the path forward.

If we are not vigilant, imaginative, aware and tireless, we will continually find ourselves telling a story that someone else has crafted for us, often to help them keep us under wraps and in their control, and out of their business. Jesus knows and insists that his words and his life will propel us into the telling of our own stories, into the taking of our own actions, into the living of our own lives. And many times these lives will make others – especially those with unfairly-won power – uncomfortable and angry, but eventually, they too will become obsolete. Like Adichie, we must persist; it is an enterprise that requires both faith and a lifetime of commitment. As the letter to the Hebrews so beautifully declares, "Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, by imitating Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." All that's required is an appetite for spirit.

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,
And an immortal crown.

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wb6RzZyaxWI>

Soften Us

O living God, soften us!
Let the fire of your love
thaw the frost within us.
Let the light of your justice
sear away our blindness,
Let the grace of your compassion
heal our hardened spirits.

O living God, soften us!
That, flowing with your grace,
we be impelled to face the world
in bold compassion,
that, driven to justice,
we may dare to cry aloud
for the little ones,
the raped, the beaten
the imprisoned, and the hungry.

O living God, soften us!
Sweep us forward
in a Mighty Wave of Mercy
to heal our darkened world.

Edwina Gateley