

The Sunday Missive – August 25, 2024
The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 525 The Church's one foundation

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is his new creation by water and the word:
From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride;
With his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.

Though with a scornful wonder men see her sore oppressed,
By schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed;
Yet saints their watch are keeping, their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song.

Yet she on earth hath union with God, the Three in One,
And mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won.
O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we
Like them, the meek and lowly, on high may dwell with thee.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LZVz1guz2c>

Collect of the Day

Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in unity by your Holy Spirit, may show forth your power among all peoples, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

1 Kings 8:22-30, 41-43

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven. He said, "O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised

with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand. Therefore, O Lord, God of Israel, keep for your servant my father David that which you promised him, saying, ‘There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children look to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me.’ Therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you promised to your servant my father David.

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! Regard your servant’s prayer and his plea, O Lord my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, ‘My name shall be there,’ that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive.

“Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name—for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm—when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built.

Psalm 84

1 How dear to me is your dwelling, O Lord of hosts! *
My soul has a desire and longing for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God.

2 The sparrow has found her a house
and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young; *
by the side of your altars, O Lord of hosts,
my King and my God.

3 Happy are they who dwell in your house! *
they will always be praising you.

4 Happy are the people whose strength is in you! *
whose hearts are set on the pilgrims' way.

5 Those who go through the desolate valley will find it a place of
springs, *
for the early rains have covered it with pools of water.

6 They will climb from height to height, *
and the God of gods will reveal himself in Zion.

7 Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; *
hearken, O God of Jacob.

8 Behold our defender, O God; *
and look upon the face of your Anointed.

9 For one day in your courts is better than a thousand in my own
room, *
and to stand at the threshold of the house of my God
than to dwell in the tents of the wicked.

10 For the Lord God is both sun and shield; *
he will give grace and glory;

11 No good thing will the Lord withhold *
from those who walk with integrity.

12 O Lord of hosts, *
happy are they who put their trust in you!

Ephesians 6:10-20

Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth

around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

Wonder, Love and Praise Hymn 812 I the lord of sea and sky

I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin my hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.

I, the Lord of snow and rain. I have borne my people's pain.
I have wept for love of them. They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone, give them hearts for love alone
I will speak my words to them. Whom shall I send?

I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them. My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhTpjdrLf0s>

John 6:56-69

Jesus said, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.”

Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

It's Immaterial – Proper 16 B

“So much depends on the authority of a reality to guide me in a logic of circumstance, *to live comfortably, yet desire differently.*” So writes Douglas Piccinnini in his poem, *As If I Am Someone Else*.

The difficult – one might even say ghastly – metaphor that we have been hearing and holding in our consciousness this season as John’s gospel unfolds is a metaphor for just this: God’s ultimate gift to humankind is in Jesus the Christ. There’s a logic, and God knows we love logic: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with

God, and the Word was God. I am the way, the truth and the life; nobody comes to God but by me.” In Jesus, God is bestowing on us what we most desire: big answers to the big questions. Blessed and cursed with the consciousness of our so-called rational minds, we are convinced that we “need to know” what it is that constitutes bestness, gold-medal living, super premium platinum priority boarding into first class on the stratoliner of eternity. And God loves us boundlessly enough to give us what we want: answers.

But Oh! what answers they are. Everything comes in parables and gnarly metaphors. Eat my flesh and drink my blood? It’s a *shanda* for the neighborhood! Masochistic cannibalism. Is this really necessary? Why doesn’t John just do what so many other Biblical writers wistfully did and use camels? Whether they were historically accurate or not doesn’t matter, they make great copy: “Unless you mount and ride like the wind through desert sands and storms on this, the strongest, swiftest and most responsive of steeds, you will never enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, and I am that steed.” That sounds a lot nicer than eating flesh and drinking blood.

“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. I am the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. The one who eats this bread will live forever.” Whereupon they responded, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” And Jesus said to them, “Oh, does this offend you?” I understand it sounds shocking, but that’s exactly why I am saying it. The gift that God is giving you in me is not meant to put you to sleep, or even to facilitate your easy rest and creature comfort. This gift is one of purpose; of meaning and true understanding. This gift is not the kind that pats you on the head. No. I am here to seize you by the soul. If you want to be involved in cosmic activity and eternal living, you will have to turn your ideas and desires around completely: upside down and inside-out and round and round, as Diana Ross would say. ‘Think about it,’ Jesus demands, ‘without this kind of internal revolution, what are you going to do when I ascend to heaven?’ (now here’s his move: comfort? Fuggedaboutit.) It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. The words I have spoken to you are my flesh; the love I give is my blood. You must choose to consume them if you would live.

Jesus knew there were many who would not believe; he asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away with them?" But Simon Peter answered, "To whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

In Jesus, God seeks to infuse and inflame humanity from the inside out with a longing for immateriality, for transcendence from earthly compulsion. If our guts can become filled with this christ-ian food and drink, we shall become our 'different desire,' in the poet's words, the kind of flesh and blood we long to be. Our being shall be transformed. By our insides changing, our outsides will be prone to do differently. After all, literality is just what it says: words. True fundamentalism comes from the work of God not the work of translators, interpreters and redactors.

Jesus would have us become immaterial. Recall the sassy scandal of a lyric: "The boy with the cold hard cash is always Mister Right, 'cause we are living in a material world and I'm a material girl." She was being ironic, right?

J.B.Lightfoot asks, "Shall we be content to bound our hopes and fears by the limitations of time and space? Will it be enough to extend our scientific knowledge, to perfect our machinery, to improve our police regulations and study our sanitary conditions, shutting our eyes meanwhile to the immensity which lies above and around us? No, our spirit would lash itself into agony against the bars of such a narrow cage."

It's not that this way of being is so much superior to others; it's of another kind. Not that we're striving to do better, but that we're acknowledging, accepting, embracing, eating and drinking something other than what the world alone offers. It will encourage us in virtue, certainly, by enabling us to claim a vision of the wondrous perfection of God, that to which only love can compare: "The first time ever I saw your face, I thought the sun rose in your eyes, and the moon and the stars were the gifts you gave to the dark and the empty skies, my love.

"Our choice lies between these two: either Christ, with his claims in all their fullness, or a material universe working out its life under the influence of some inscrutable force. Difficult as it is to believe in Christ,

it is surely more difficult still to believe in the only alternative, a world wholly material, in which matter rules and spirit is a mere accident of no account," writes Robertson Nicoll. "Christ takes hold of a man at the center of his life," says Dietrich Bonhoeffer. That's fundamental.

Simon Peter answered, "We've come to believe you are the Holy One of God." What does it mean to believe? Believe comes from the German *liebe*, to love. So believing is loving. This is not to be confused with relieve, which has the Latin root *levare*, to lift or lighten. (Our language has complex and confusing roots). To believe is not just to have a light, lifting feeling, but to do something about it, to love actively. Jesus is love in action, spirit and flesh at work together; which is why he insists on acknowledgement, acceptance and embrace of the visceral, difficult metaphor of flesh and blood. It is only the dark, difficult, unfamiliar sea of grace that will at once buoy us up and require us to swim and let us transcend the fleeting, melting ice floe moments of our material lives.

And it is very much a struggle. From Paul today we have another disturbing, albeit much more common metaphor for belief in action: Paul's exhortation is to "Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." We do this by acknowledging, accepting and embracing help that comes from the Lord, who made both heaven and earth. We may not like the metaphors of warmaking, but their meaning is clear: we need help. Not to battle against other human beings, nor indeed against the dark sides of our own natures alone, but against the cosmic forces of very evil itself.

Notice the individual pieces of equipment are likened, not to regular everyday attainable virtues, like gentleness, humility, generosity and moderation (as desirable as those are.) This is the armor of God's very self: The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God.

Especially sublime is the phrase, "As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace," reminding us of the basic connection between our worldly selves and our cosmic ambitions. They say an army marches on its stomach,

which is why God wants us to eat and drink the Word. But once we're fed, we have to venture forth.

Here from *The Soldier's Foot and the Military Shoe, A HANDBOOK FOR OFFICERS* by Maj. Edward Munson M.D., President, US Army Shoe Board: "It will not be disputed that the marching powers of foot troops are a most important factor in the conduction and success of battles and campaigns, and that the army which marches best, other things being equal, is the more successful army. The effect of badly fitting shoes upon the psychology of war is very great. Even where the soldier is able to continue the march, the discomfort produced at every step soon reduces buoyancy of spirit, causes mental irritability and materially diminishes fighting capacity."

And they say there's no evangelism in the military! "As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready," says Paul. It's a long, long way to Tipperary. These metaphors, the Armor of God and the Bread of Life, and the Good Shoes are not themselves the nature of God. They are for us narrative means of comprehending God well enough to choose belief. God is not promising an absence of suffering, but compassionate companionship when suffering comes. 'But as for me, I sought the Lord who answered me, and from every terror set me free. For I know and believe the angel of the Lord is encamped near those who seek God for rescue.'

Hymn 517 How lovely is thy dwelling place

How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts, to me!
My thirsty soul desires and longs within thy courts to be;
My very heart and flesh cry out, O living God, for thee.

Beside thine altars, gracious Lord, the swallows find a nest;
How happy they who dwell with thee and praise thee without rest,
And happy they whose hearts are set upon the pilgrim's quest.

Goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me.
And in God's house forevermore my dwelling place shall be;
And in God's house forevermore, my dwelling place shall be.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6fnT4gdRfo&t=104s>

Acceptance

When the spent sun throws up its rays on cloud
And goes down burning into the gulf below,
No voice in nature is heard to cry aloud
At what has happened. Birds, at least, must know
It is the change to darkness in the sky.
Murmuring something quiet in its breast,
One bird begins to close a faded eye;
Or overtaken too far from its nest,
Hurrying low above the grove, some waif
Swoops just in time to his remembered tree.
At most he thinks or twitters softly, "Safe!
Now let the night be dark for all of me.
Let the night be too dark for me to see
Into the future. Let what will be be."

Robert Frost