

The Sunday Missive – September 8, 2024
The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 371 Thou whose almighty word

Thou, whose almighty word chaos and darkness heard,
And took their flight; hear us, we humbly pray,
And, where the Gospel day sheds not its glorious ray,
Let there be light!

Thou who didst come to bring on thy redeeming wing
Healing and sight, health to the sick in mind,
Sight to the inly blind, now to all humankind,
Let there be light!

Spirit of truth and love, lifegiving holy Dove,
Speed forth thy flight! Move on the waters' face
Bearing the gifts of grace, and, in earth's darkest place,
Let there be light!

Holy and blessed Three, glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, love, might; boundless as ocean's tide,
Rolling in fullest pride, through the world far and wide,
Let there be light!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bs255M8e77k>

The Collect of the Day

Grant us, O Lord, to trust in you with all our hearts; for, as you always resist the proud who confide in their own strength, so you never forsake those who make their boast of your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Isaiah 35:4-7a

Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.' Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water;

Psalm 146

Hallelujah! Praise the Lord, O my soul!* ***I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.***

Put not your trust in rulers, nor in any child of earth* ***For there is no help in them.***

When they breathe their last, they return to earth* ***And in that day their thoughts perish.***

Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their help!* ***Whose hope is in the Lord their God;***

Who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them* ***Who keeps every promise forever;***

Who gives justice to those who are oppressed* ***And food to those who hunger.***

The Lord sets the prisoners free, and opens the eyes of the blind* ***The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;***

The Lord loves the righteous, and cares for the stranger* ***Sustains the orphan and widow, but frustrates the way of the wicked.***

The Lord shall reign forever* ***Your God, O Zion, throughout all generations. Hallelujah!***

James 2:1-17

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Hymn 324 Let all mortal flesh keep silence

Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly minded, for with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descendeth, our full homage to demand.

Rank on rank the host of heaven spreads its vanguard on the way,
As the Light of Light descendeth from the realms of endless day,
That the powers of hell may vanish as the darkness clears away.

At his feet the six-winged seraph; cherubim, with sleepless eye
Veil their faces to the Presence, as with ceaseless voice they cry,
"Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia, Lord Most High!"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWTdLD5w92c>

Mark 7:24-37

Jesus set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

Bad Information – Proper 18B

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert... “I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.”

Happy are those whose hope is in the Lord their God, who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry and sets the prisoners free... “I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.”

The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down They shall see the majesty of our God strengthen the weak hands, make firm the feeble knees, and say to those who are of a fearful heart, “Be strong, do not fear.” “I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’”

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy... “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

The prophecy of Isaiah, was delivered to his people in their exile in a foreign land, some 2500 years ago, when all the goodness and mercy in the universe was for them but a vision, resting far off in days to come. The dream described by Martin Luther King in his prophetic speech some 62 years ago last week also describes a vision of a time not yet realized, when goodness and mercy would come to God’s people who lack them sorely to this day. We latter people are also in a kind of exile, and although ours is no longer the same kind of enslavement of the Israelites, it is no less a bitter, vicious and devastating affliction. The songs and stories of the American history of resisting white privilege: Abolitionism, The Civil War, and the Civil Rights movement tell a powerful story of wondrous resistance,

defiance and change, but much of the injustice persists, and not just in the infamous South.

Both Isaiah and King were talking about physical bondage, economic deprivation and political emasculation. But they were also calling out to a people under another terrible, crippling, immeasurable burden: of bad information. Like addicts, whose most pernicious symptom is the denial of their addiction, these people suffered from the cunning, baffling and powerful effects of ignorance. Isaiah's people thought they could praise the Lord with their lips, but not follow the Lord's precepts in their hearts or with their hands. Likewise, many people today seem to think we can praise freedom and equality with our lips, but not lift every paralyzing ordinance and virulent practice that keeps oppression, inequality and cycles of poverty, violence and crime in place. Too many of us still think this way; 41 percent according to the latest figures. It is what keeps us an enslaved people. We are in bondage to wrongheaded information, to ignorance and mendacity.

Listen again to the words of James: "You do well if you fulfill the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you show any partiality, you are convicted by the law as transgressors. Judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy."

A great leader once described patriotism as more than pageantry and the scarfing of hot dogs, more even than wartime sacrifice. "When our laws, our leaders, or our government are out of alignment with our ideals, it is the dissent of ordinary Americans that is one of the truest expressions of patriotism. Love of country, like all other forms of love, requires that we tell those we care about not simply what they want to hear but what they need to hear."

This is not about making criminals of anybody or even about laying blame. The courts should take care of that. It is about saving lives from lies; the physical and spiritual lives of those who suffer from the effects of bad information, and also the moral and spiritual lives of those who allow – and therefore perpetuate -- bad information and its devastation of our society.

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters,” asks James, “if you say you have faith but do not have works? Do you with your acts of favoritism really follow Christ? Are you not making distinctions among yourselves, and judging one another?” We can legislate all we want, but if a brother or sister is naked and lacks food, and we say to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ but do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be heirs of the kingdom? But you have dishonored the poor. Therefore, it is the rich who oppress you.” It’s right here in the book.

Even Jesus struggled with this same bad information, that’s how deep the infection runs. A woman whose little daughter was sick came and bowed down at his feet. But she was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin (horrors!). When she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter, he said, “Let the children be fed first, it is not right to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” Gosh, it’s right here in the book: him likening her to a mangy cur. Thank God she was quick enough to talk him out of such a disingenuous mistake, but Jesus’ initial cultural reaction was to withhold his blessing on account of her ethnicity. There is no greater proof of Jesus humanity than this example of wrongheadedness -- of bad information at work, even in a good man.

It is a black and white issue, but the black and white of it is just this: There is no black and white. The awful truth is that we must learn to live with racial uncertainty. Biological races do not exist—and never have. This view is shared by every scientist who studies human populations. (Here, from the film *Race: The Power of an Illusion*) “There is no question that individual human beings are different, one from the other. We have a notion of race as comprising the differences among people that are somehow genetic and in unchanging, clear-cut categories. You can identify the “other” on sight by skin color or eye shape or hair. The idea of race also assumes that those simple, superficial differences, are indicative of more complex internal differences, like athletic ability, musical aptitude, natural rhythm, intelligence, and character. But all our genetic research now tells us that’s not the case. Nobody can find any genetic markers that are in everybody of a particular race and in nobody of some other race, yet

racial prejudice and intolerances based on the myth of race remain deeply ingrained in our society.

[Ta-Nehisi Coates](#) writes “Racism is not merely a simplistic hatred. It is more often, broad sympathy toward some and broader skepticism toward others, based on a myth. Black America lives under that skeptical eye; hence the old admonition that blacks must be twice as good as whites to get ahead. Hence the tragic need for a ‘special talk’ administered to young black boys about how to be extra careful when relating to the police. There is no benefit of any doubt if you are colored.”

If we would thrive, our nation is being summoned by God to shed our ignorance and denial, to be our true selves, to grow up and live in the bright warm sunshine of our own professed ideals and drink from the cool, fresh, clear wellspring of good information, of the deepest truth, that all of us are created equal. For us Bible students, it has a familiar ring, and it is the truth that will make us or break us as a people.

Hymn 423 Immortal, invisible God only wise

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, thy great Name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
Nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above
Thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life thou givest, to both great and small;
In all life thou livest, the true life of all;
We blossom and flourish, like leaves on the tree,
Then wither and perish; but nought changeth thee.

Thou reignest in glory, thou rulest in light,
Thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;

All laud we would render: O help us to see
'Tis only the splendor of light hideth thee.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmefJS09fKE>

Love's Growth

I scarce believe my love to be so pure

As I had thought it was,

Because it doth endure

Vicissitude, and season, as the grasse;

Methinks I lied all winter, when I swore,

My love was infinite, if spring make't more.

But if this medicine, love, which cures all sorrow

With more, not onely bee no quintessence,

But mixt of all stufes, paining soule, or sense,

And of the Sunne his working vigour borrow,

Love's not so pure, and abstract, as they use

To say, which have no Mistresse but their Muse,

But as all else, being elemented too,

Love sometimes would contemplate, sometimes do

And yet no greater, but more eminent,

Love by the spring is grown;

As, in the firmament,

Starres by the Sunne are not inlarg'd, but showne,

Gentle love deeds, as blossomes on a bough,

From love's awakened root do bud out now.

If, as in water stir'd more circles bee

Produc'd by one, love such additions take,

Those like so many spheares, but one heaven make,

For, they are all concentrique unto thee,
And though each spring doe adde to love new heate,
As princes do in times of action get
New taxes, and remit them not in peace,
No winter shall abate the spring's encrease.

John Donne