

The Sunday Missive – September 18, 2022
The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 388 O worship the king

O worship the King, all glorious above!
O gratefully sing his power and his love!
Our shield and defender, the Ancient of Days,
Pavilioned in splendour, and girded with praise.

The earth, with its store of wonders untold,
Almighty, thy power hath founded of old,
Hath stablished it fast by a changeless decree,
And round it hath cast, like a mantle, the sea.

Thy bountiful care, what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air; it shines in the light;
It streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
And sweetly distills in the dew and the rain.

Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
In thee do we trust, nor find thee to fail;
Thy mercies how tender! how firm to the end!
Our maker, defender, redeemer, and friend!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mtiazuXVz0>

The Collect of the Day

Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Amos 8:4-7 Hear this, you that trample on the needy and bring to ruin the poor of the land saying, "When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals -- and selling the sweepings of the wheat." The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: "Surely I will never forget any of their deeds."

Psalm 113

Hallelujah! Give praise, you servants of the Lord* ***Praise the Name of the Lord.***

From the rising of the sun to its going down* ***Let the Name of the Lord be praised.***

The Lord is high above all nations* ***And God's glory above the heavens.***

Who is like the Lord our God, who sits enthroned on high* ***But stoops to behold the heavens and the earth?***

Who takes up the weak out of the dust* ***And lifts up the poor from the ashes.***

Who sets them with the princes* ***With the princes among the people.***

Who makes the woman of a childless house* ***To be a joyful mother of children.***

Let the Name of the Lord be blessed* ***From this time forth for evermore.***

1 Timothy 2:1-7 First of all, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind: Christ Jesus, himself human who gave himself, a ransom for all; and this was attested at the right time. For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Hymn 763 As we gather at your table

As we gather at your Table, as we listen to your Word,
Help us know, O God, your presence;
Let our hearts and minds be stirred.

Nourish us with sacred story till we claim it as our own;
Teach us through this holy banquet how to make Love's vict'ry known.

Turn our worship into witness in the sacrament of life;
Send us forth to love and serve you,
Bringing peace where there is strife.
Give us, Christ, your great compassion to forgive as you forgave;
May we still behold your image in the world you died to save.

Gracious Spirit, help us summon other guests to share that Feast
Where triumphant Love will welcome
Those who had been last and least.
There no more will envy blind us nor will pride our peace destroy,
As we join with saints and angels to repeat the sounding joy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VD8KwM2aOZA>

Luke 16:1-13 Jesus said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. So, he summoned him and said to him, `What is this that I hear about you? Give me an

accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.' Then the manager said to himself, 'What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.' So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He answered, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Quickly, take your bill, sit down and make it fifty.' Then he asked another, 'And how much do you owe?' He replied, 'A hundred containers of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill and make it eighty.' And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of worldly wealth so that when it is gone, you may be welcomed into the eternal homes.

"Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful with the worldly wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

Workin' for the Kingdom – Proper 20C

We talk a lot about the metaphorical meanings to be gleaned from scripture. So many of the thoughts and images and exhortations of the Bible, especially the Hebrew books of the Old Testament don't make much sense to us if taken literally. Psalm 136, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, to take just one example, echoes the cry of a conquered

people saying, “O Babylon, destroyer, happy the one who repays you the ills you have brought on Jerusalem; they shall seize, and shall dash your children against the rock.”

Whatever its origins in historical fact, this image is now useful to us only as a metaphor – and an awful one at that – for confronting enemies of the soul, things that attack us from within. I can’t imagine anyone sane promoting baby dashing.

Today’s readings, however, are different. Today we have explicit, if somewhat puzzling instructions and reflections for our own time and culture. Today we talk about Business Ethics. In Psalm 113, God is identified as the one who raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with the princes of the people. In other words, God intends for humankind to remain in motion – continually looking for ways to raise those who are literally down in the dumps. Our passions and energies must, at least partly be directed towards lifting up those who are down and helping them attain peace and well-being. This being the intention and action of God, anything we do that interferes with such movement goes against God.

The prophet Amos provides some explicit and colorful examples of the consequences, in describing the activities of those who go against God. They cheat innocent people by making their weights of measure for buying falsely small (also known as gypping, or cheating). The weights they use for measuring what they sell are falsely large (think price inflation, padding, bait and switch, or any hotel with a gorgeous lobby and crummy rooms). These are God’s enemies, who buy the poor for silver, says Amos. Think of all the luxuriously decorated goods advertised and sold to people who can’t afford them. Or how about our lotteries, whose tickets are mostly sold to the poor with patronizing and misleading alarm: ‘You can’t win if you don’t play.’ The lottery is a tax on the poor, masquerading as opportunity. “You buy the needy for a pair of sandals,” accuses Amos (corner the market, shorten supply to

increase demand, build in obsolescence). And sell the sweepings of the wheat. Ever look at the ingredient list of fast foods and mass-produced, longer shelf-life groceries? This is especially true of foods sold to the poor, where many a child will come to school clutching Cheetos and a Soda for breakfast. It seems as if the lower the price of our food items, the more ingredients they contain, few or none of which include anything nutritious. And we wonder why diabetes is on the rise.

One thing about having young people in your life is exposure to some rather more provocative (ie: raunchy) televised and recorded entertainment. One of the “highlights” for me has been increased familiarity with contemporary standup comedians who tend to be very raunchy indeed, also often very funny. One of them has a sublime bit about the breathtaking arrogance of the encounter between Europeans and the people who already lived on this continent of ours. The Europeans wanted to go to India, they had important business plans concerning India. When they got here, they thought they had reached India, and they said to the people they met, “You’re Indians, right” To which the people responded, “No, actually we’re Pequots.” (or Powhatans, or Chumash, or Seminole) “Naaah, come on, you’re Indians, right?” “No, we’re Powhatans.” “Seriously? Admit it, you got to be Indians.” “No, seriously, we’re Seminole people.” And what did the Europeans say to that? “Awww, you’re Indians.” And to most Americans they still are.

This kind of arrogance is what will get us in big trouble with God; it flies in the face of God’s purpose for us. The abuse and manipulation of others for our own gain alienates and distances us from them when, if there’s one thing God would have us do it is move towards each other in kindness. This is what Paul is asserting in his letter to Timothy: the universalism of God inevitably demands that we be open to the Other, that we accept the Other in terms broader than our own. Paul also reminds us to pray for everyone, especially kings and those in high positions. It is because they are the ones making decisions that will affect so

many people. Must we not today include fervent prayers for those in power in our businesses, Product Developers, Corporate Strategists, Advertising Directors, CEO's, that they not be arrogant or abusive, that they not mislead or manipulate, that they fill not thy chicken nuggets with floor sweepings?

Jesus, as is his habit, likes to deal more in positives than negatives. Cleverly woven into his parables are all the recipes for ethical and moral living – how to be godly, righteous and sober – that we could want. These messages presented serious challenges to the systems of both the synagogue and the Roman rulers. Jesus' parables challenged these systems so boldly that he was killed for telling them. They continue to challenge our systems too.

In Luke's gospel today we encounter a puzzling narrative about what sound like some shady characters. When it looks like the boss is going to fire a certain manager, the manager runs around to the best clients and brazenly carves off nearly half the accounts receivable for himself. And the boss says, "Wow, that was a slick move; nice going." Nobody knows whether it was a 'nice going, you can have your job back,' or 'nice going, but you're still fired;' scholars have been arguing about it for nearly two thousand years. But Jesus' point is not that these are attractive or otherwise virtuous folks. What he says is that if knuckleheads like this, who aren't necessarily concerned with being upright, can use their wits to survive and flourish and assist each other, how much more is possible for those who try to work with God, towards God's vision.

It is an odd example, but it sets the bar low enough that all of us can hop over it and get to feeling good about ourselves. Whatever environment or marketplace or milieu we operate in, our energies, our imagination and our wits can be summoned and directed towards God's purposes. We can always reduce a bill or increase compensation for someone who can benefit. And when, at the end of each day, we realize that we have been – more or less – pointed in the right direction, we can be thankful.

There is a story about a concert in Chicago by the great cellist Rostropovich, who had been stripped of his Soviet Russian citizenship for publicly advocating human rights and artistic freedom. With the orchestra, he played a Dvorak concerto last, and when they finished the crowd sat silent, mesmerized. Then Rostropovich stood up, leaned down and kissed his cello. The hall erupted with cheers. Then he hugged and kissed the surprised Conductor, followed by the entire cello section before moving on to the violins. What the great man realized was: the music they had just made was the result of many people's efforts, from the composer to the cello maker to the rest of the orchestra. It was an occasion for loving gratitude. Not many of us will be virtuosos, on the cello or otherwise, but each of us does encounter opportunities every day to do our best at whatever it is we have been given to do, to increase and broaden our charity and to celebrate gratefully when our work and our giving enhances the lives of others. Only then will we be truly and gainfully employed: working for the Kingdom instead.

Hymn 555 Lead on O king eternal

Lead on, O King eternal, the day of march has come;
Henceforth in fields of conquest thy tents shall be our home:
Through days of preparation thy grace has made us strong,
And now, O King eternal, we lift our battle song.

Lead on, O King eternal, till sin's fierce war shall cease,
And holiness shall whisper the sweet amen of peace;
For not with swords loud clashing, nor roll of stirring drums,
But deeds of love and mercy, the heavenly kingdom comes.

Lead on, O King eternal: we follow, not with fears;
For gladness breaks like morning where'er thy face appears.
Thy cross is lifted o'er us; we journey in its light:
The crown awaits the conquest; lead on, O God of might!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yNLZbcgJqW8>

What the businessman said

the businessman I shook hands with
drinking local whiskey at the
party Christmas winter I mean non
religious for the green group where
his wife donates her hours bought
just bought an old Victorian cheaper
than a Craftsman in one of Portland's
oldest best said cost the cost of doing business
one cost of doing business all of
life of costs a cost the businessman made
exercise machines in China for the bodies of
Americans to sweat upon the muscles heart
and blood vessels the lungs he said
they never even counted labor costs
the labor lives so cheap it was
the metal minerals the plastic
parts they had to calculate the labor
lives so cheap they didn't even count

Allison Cobb