

The Sunday Missive -- October 9, 2022
The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Blessing of the Animals

Hymn 551 Rise up ye saints of God

Rise up, ye saints of God! Have done with lesser things,
Give heart and soul and mind and strength
To serve the King of kings.

Rise up, ye saints of God! His kingdom tarries long:
Lord, bring the day of truth and love
And end the night of wrong.

Lift high the cross of Christ! Tread where his feet have trod;
And quickened by the Spirit's power,
Rise up, ye saints of God!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTp0jb70LSk>

Collect for The Animals

Let us pray. O Lord God, king of heaven and earth, by whom all things were made and given to us: We entreat you mercifully to look upon us, your servants. As you give us your help in our daily lives and work, so grant of your loving kindness and mercy to bless, keep, and protect these animals with your heavenly benediction, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7

These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take husbands and

wives; have daughters and sons; give your daughters and sons in marriage, that they may bear daughters and sons; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Psalm 66:1-11

Be joyful in the Lord, all you lands* ***Sing the glory of God's Name.***

Cry aloud to God, how awesome are your deeds* ***Sing the glory of God's praise.***

All the earth bows down before you, O God* ***Sings to you, sings out your Name.***

Come now and see the works of God* ***What wonderful deeds toward all people.***

Who turned the sea into dry land, so that they went through the water on foot* ***And there we rejoiced in the Lord.***

Bless the Lord, O you peoples* ***Make the voice of praise to be heard.***

Who holds our souls in life* ***And will not allow our feet to slip.***

For you, O God, have proved us* ***You have tried us as silver is tried.***

You brought us into the snare* ***You laid heavy burdens upon our backs.***

You let enemies ride over our heads* ***We went through fire and water.***

But then you brought us out into a place of refreshment* ***Your eyes keep watch over the nations; let no rebel rise up against the Lord.***

2 Timothy 2:8-15

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David-- that is my gospel, for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained.

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. The saying is sure:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;
if we endure, we will also reign with him;
if we deny him, he will also deny us;
if we are faithless, he remains faithful--
for he cannot deny himself.

Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

LEVAS Hymn 141 Shall we gather at the river

Shall we gather at the river, where bright angel feet have trod;
With its crystal tide forever flowing by the throne of God?

Yes, we'll gather at the river, the beautiful, the beautiful river;
Gather with the saints at the river that flows by the throne of God.

Soon we'll reach the shining river, soon our pilgrimage will cease.

Soon our happy hearts will quiver with the melody of peace.

Yes, we'll gather at the river, the beautiful, the beautiful river;
Gather with the saints at the river that flows by the throne of God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UyOZ7pDYNc&t=125s>

Luke 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show

yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

Mystery and Work – Proper 23C

Our readings today portray a simple but challenging framework for a successful life. All is within our reach, just as long as our context for success is a godly one. Jesus restores ten people to health, but only one of them considers the healing itself to be sufficient to warrant thanks and praise. Presumably the other nine hurry off into the world to seek their fortunes, to see how well they do. They consider their healed state to be one of getting back to square one in the game of life, with the outcome still to be determined. Only the Samaritan realizes the wondrous miracle of healing and offers thanks and praise therefore. His state of peace is his success. "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well," says Jesus.

Likewise, Jeremiah admonishes the leaders among his exiled people, instead of considering themselves to be paralyzed and purposeless, to be grateful; to fulfil themselves in the context in which they find themselves: You elders, priests, prophets, and all people in exile in Babylon, the success of your lives depends on how you relate to the context in which you live it. So, instead of spending your lives in lament for what was or what might be, build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take husbands and wives; have daughters and sons; give your daughters and sons in marriage, that they may bear daughters and sons; multiply, and do not decrease. Seek the welfare of the place where life has put you, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. God will take care of history. Your faith will make you well -- in the present.

For we do not know the plans of God or the arc of the future. As much as we grow in knowledge, the most significant thing to understand is how little we understand when it comes to God's plans. Learning to acknowledge this is foundation of a successful life in the Spirit of God. It is humility. Saint Augustine famously called humility the foundation of all other virtues. In our more contemporary context, the way to humility is to challenge our certainties about what is and what should be; this has been called

“Intellectual Humility.” And as society moves further and further into controlled, electronic exchanges as the ground of our interactions, it becomes ever more important. As St. Paul says in his letter to Timothy, ‘Don’t spend all your energies quibbling about what God has in mind, do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed.’ Your success will come in the faithful words of your mouth, the selfless meditations of your heart, the kind works of your hands. Your faith will make you well and good.

The John Templeton Foundation is funding work in the area of Intellectual Humility that echoes these scriptural signposts. They write: “It is a mindset that guides our intellectual conduct. In particular, it involves recognizing and owning our limitations in the service of pursuing deeper knowledge, truth, and understanding. Such a mindset appears to be valuable in many domains of life — from education to interreligious dialogue to public discourse. It promises to help us avoid headstrong decisions and erroneous opinions, and allows us to engage more constructively with our fellow citizens.”

Whereas in scripture, Intellectual Humility is gathered under the tent of faithful righteousness, today’s scientists from the wide array of disciplines that study the subject must seek to define it. “Surveying the definitions offered in the literature, certain common features emerge. Intellectual Humility speaks to people’s willingness to reconsider their views, to avoid defensiveness when challenged, and to moderate their own need to appear ‘right.’ It is sensitive to counter-evidence, realistic in outlook, strives for accuracy, shows little concern for self-importance, and is corrective of the natural tendency to strongly prioritize one’s own needs.

“Humility helps us overcome responses to evidence that are self centered or that outstrip the strength of that evidence. This mindset encourages us to seek out and evaluate ideas and information in such a way that we are less influenced by our own motives and more oriented toward discovery of the truth. When we discuss important, controversial issues with others, our initial responses to their arguments tend to be shaped by our preferences, identities, and prior opinions. Humility buffers against those responses so that we can become more ‘truth-oriented.’ It helps us overcome our self-centered inclinations in discussion and learning, making us more likely to follow the evidence where it leads and positioning us to better understand the truth.”

When it comes to the vast mystery we call Creation and the bottomless well we know as Love, to say nothing of the inestimable cosmos, what would

Jesus have us do that is more significant than seeking to possess this virtue? In the great mysteries, we never know when we might be proven wrong about something and have to change our tune, so truly only faith can keep us well; faith manifested as humility.

Richard Rohr reflects: "I believe in mystery. To religious believers this may sound almost pagan. But I don't think so. My very belief and experience of a loving and endlessly creative God has led me to love mystery, and not feel the need to change it or make it un-mysterious. This puts me at odds with many other believers I know who seem to need explanations for everything. But religious belief has made me comfortable with ambiguity. 'Hints and guesses,' as T.S. Eliot would say. The more I am alone with the 'Great Alone,' the more I surrender to ambivalence, to happy contradictions and seeming inconsistencies in myself and almost everything else, including God. Paradoxes don't scare me anymore. When I was young, I couldn't tolerate such ambiguity. My education had trained me to have a lust for answers and explanations. Now in 'older adulthood,' it's all quite different. I no longer believe this is a quid pro quo universe – I've counselled too many prisoners, worked with too many failing marriages, faced my own dilemmas too many times, and been loved gratuitously after too many failures. Whenever I think there's a perfect pattern, further reading and study reveal an exception. Whenever I want to say 'only' or 'always' or 'never,' someone or something proves me wrong. My scientist friends have come up with things like 'principles of uncertainty' and dark holes. They are willing to live inside imagined hypotheses and theories. But many religious folks insist on answers that are always true. We love closure, resolution, and clarity, while claiming we are people of 'faith'! How strange that the very word 'faith' for so many has come to mean its exact opposite. People who have really met the Holy are always humble. People who've had any genuine spiritual experience always know that they don't know. They are utterly humbled before mystery. They are in awe before the abyss of it all, in wonder at eternity and depth, and a Love that is incomprehensible to the mind. It is a litmus test for authentic God experience, and is – quite sadly – absent from much of religious conversation today. My belief and comfort are in the depths of Mystery, which should be the very task of religion."

The Summer just passed seemed particularly beautiful and mysterious this year. The moon put on a show that made one laugh out loud at its brilliance and variety and sheer beauty. Allowing ourselves to be humbled by such majesty – and looking into the eyes of these our beloved creatures -- are good ways of silently praying for that humble awareness that just might enable us to escape the fowler's snare of our fears and our conflictedness. We might

learn to accept grace, live in paradox and uncertainty, and love mystery. May God grant us such serenity.

This state of hunger for humility and grace is the only sure way to hear God's voice. Here, the poet Kate Farrell describes it in *The Search*:

But then the moon comes up after all and with
a glow bright enough to wake you through the bedroom
curtains:

The night outside, one vast luminous room beside which
indoor rooms seem to belong to a preliminary, rudimentary
dimension,

And her there shining – mother daughter friend anima mundi
– so still and low that it's almost as though you hadn't broken
every vow you ever
made in the wayside tabernacles of the universe.

This time you go back to bed, close your eyes and set out into
the dark, hunting a state in which
things are seen and known in the light love throws, doing
away with mental fuss.

Soon you're walking down an unfamiliar road in a nighttime
countryside, hoping to come across a local acquainted with the
lesser known
lunar writings.

Houses are few; everyone is asleep; the air suffused
with a beautiful half-light whose source you can't place. You're
strangely unafraid and in no hurry.

The Prayers of the People

Most gracious God, wondrous Creator, source and inspiration for all living creatures, we beseech thee to hear our heartfelt prayers, as we cherish and bless the animals who bring joy into our lives. By the power of Your love, enable them to live according to your goodness and freedom. Enable us to treat them with the honor, respect, compassion and wonderment that they, and all your works deserve.

May we always praise You for all Your beauty in Creation, and may we always remain aware of the great responsibility we have to care gently for all those over whom we have power. Blessed are You, O God, in all Your precious creatures!

The Confession

O God the Source of life; enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all the living things, our little brothers and sisters, to whom you have given this earth as their home in common with us. We remember with shame that we have exercised high dominion with ruthless cruelty, so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to you in song, has been a groan of travail. May we realize that they live, not for us alone, but for themselves and for you, and that they love the sweetness of life even as we, and serve you in their place better than we in ours; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Hymn 541 Come, labor on

Come, labor on. Who dares stand idle on the harvest plain
While all around us waves the golden grain?
And to each servant does the Master say, "Go work today."

Come, labor on. Claim the high calling angels cannot share;
To young and old the gospel gladness bear.
Redeem the time; its hours too swiftly fly; the night draws nigh.

Come, labor on. Cast off all gloomy doubt and faithless fear!
No arm so weak but may do service here.
Though feeble agents, may we all fulfil God's righteous will.

Come, labor on. No time for rest, till glows the western sky,
Till the long shadows o'er our pathway lie,
And a glad sound comes with the setting sun, "Well done, well done!"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xI-TD4p-9I>

The Animals

At night, alone, the animals came and shone.
The darkness whirled but silent shone the animals:
The lion the man the calf the eagle saying
Sanctus which was and is and is to come.

The sleeper watched the people at the waterless wilderness' edge;
The wilderness was made of granite, of thorn, of death,
It was the goat which lightened the people praying.
The goat went out with sin on its sunken head.

On the sleeper's midnight and the smaller after hours
From above below elsewhere there shone the animals
Through the circular dark; the cock appeared in light
Crying three times, for tears for tears for tears.

High in the frozen tree the sparrow sat. At three o'clock
The luminous thunder of its fall fractured the earth.
The somber serpent looped its coils to write
In scales the slow snake-music of the red ripe globe.

To the sleeper, alone, the animals came and shone,
The darkness whirled but silent shone the animals.
Just before dawn the dove flew out of the dark
Flying with green in her beak; the dove also had come.

Josephine Jacobsen