

The Sunday Missive – October 16, 2022

The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 372 Praise to the living God

Praise to the living God! All praised be his Name
Who was, and is, and is to be, for ay the same.
The one eternal God ere aught that now appears:
The first, the last, beyond all thought his timeless years!

Formless, all lovely forms declare his loveliness;
Holy, no holiness of earth can his express.
Lo, he is Lord of all; creation speaks his praise,
And everywhere above, below, his will obeys.

His Spirit floweth free, high surging where it will:
In prophet's word he spake of old: he speaketh still.
Established is his law, and changeless it shall stand,
Deep writ upon the human heart, on sea, on land.

Eternal life hath he implanted in the soul;
His love shall be our strength and stay while ages roll.
Praise to the living God! All praised be his Name
Who was, and is, and is to be, for ay the same.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4KPjUETW1vQ&list=RD4KPjUETW1vQ&start_radio=1

The Collect of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, in Christ you have revealed your glory among the nations: Preserve the works of your mercy, that your Church throughout the world may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession 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.*

Jeremiah 31:27-34

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of humans and the seed of animals. And just as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down,

to overthrow, destroy, and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord. In those days they shall no longer say:

"The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge.

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt-- a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Psalm 119

Oh, how I love your law, O Lord* All the day long it is on my mind.

Your commandment has made me wiser than my enemies* And it is always with me.

I have more understanding than all my teachers* For your decrees are my study.

I am wiser than the elders* Because I observe your commandments.

I restrain my feet from every evil way* That I may keep your word.

I do not shrink from your judgments* Because you yourself have taught me.

How sweet are your words to my taste* They are sweeter than honey to my mouth.

Through your commandments I gain understanding* Therefore I hate every lying way.

Oh, how I love your law, O Lord* All the day long it is on my mind.

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

As for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

Hymn 709 O God of Bethel by whose hand

O God of Bethel, by whose hand thy people still are fed;
Who through this earthly pilgrimage hast all our fathers led:

Our vows, our prayers, we now present before thy throne of grace:
O God of Israel, be the God of this succeeding race.

Through each perplexing path of life our wandering footsteps guide;
Give us each day our daily bread, and raiment fit provide.

O spread thy covering wings around, till all our wanderings cease,
And at our Father's loved abode our souls arrive in peace!

Such blessings from thy gracious hand our humble prayers implore;
And thou shalt be our covenant God and portion evermore.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eE8Lf4oiwtw&t=46s>

Luke 18:1-8

Jesus told his disciples a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a

while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Come The Day -- Proper 24C

Around the world yesterday, about 385,000 human beings were born. The accompanying fact that only 178,000 died is enough to give any of us pause, and indeed cause for concern. Nevertheless, a million is an awfully great number of lifetimes to end, so how can any of us kid ourselves that ours is all that important? We live in this paradox: One life means little, yet one life well-lived means everything. Or its mirror image: One death is not unusual, but every death is extraordinary. The prophets and sages, the artists and saints, even Jesus' very self, all in their extraordinary ways, spent their lives and voices convincing us that our individual lives, and each moment they occupy, not only bear but demand close examination and thoughtful attention.

We can read about one of those who died recently, a woman in Sweden, named Sara Danius. Only 57 years old. Breast Cancer. A gifted professor and original thinker, she was the first female head of the Nobel prize committee. She got a lot of heat for not responding quickly or strongly enough when another committee member was found to be a felonious sexual predator. She resigned, in a real sense taking part of the fall for his crimes. But not before she had a chance to do something else that brought her a lot of flack.

Professor Danius also led the conversation that awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature to Bob Dylan. She recognized an extraordinary life and body of work. She set aside the question of form, and instead thought of literature as content. She knew a prophetic sage when she heard one. For Dylan asks the same kinds of questions of us as did the prophets in the Hebrew Bible we read each week: Are we living as if each moment not only bears, but demands close examination and thoughtful attention? And, if not, what are we doing instead?

How many times must a man look up before he can see the sky?

How many ears must one man have before he can hear people cry?

Yes, and how many times can a man turn his head and pretend that he just

doesn't see?

The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind; the answer is blowin' in the wind.

Or this:

Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son? Oh, where have you been, my darling young one?

I've stepped in the middle of seven sad forests

I saw guns and sharp swords in the hands of young children

I met a man who was wounded with hatred

And it's a hard, it's a hard; it's a hard rain gonna fall.

“Dylan got his ideas first from reading. ‘Books gave me a way of looking at life, an understanding of human nature, and a standard to measure things by,’ he says. But he learned his own literary technique—how to wield metaphor and make simile ring, how to sew songs with rhyme and spin a whole uncanny scene from a perfectly-worded image — from the great tradition of American songwriting, a library stored not on shelves but in minds and voices and chord-picking fingers.” So wrote Alexandra Schwartz in a New Yorker profile in 2017.

The two songs quoted were written in 1962 in New York. 2700 or so years earlier, Jeremiah was delivering his prophetic thoughts – and his Jeremiads -- in Palestine. For the past several weeks, we have been hearing Jeremiah describe the causes and consequences of inattentive, unexamined, faithless living. ‘When will they ever learn’ indeed. (That one wasn’t until 1965. Pete Seeger.) Dylan the troubadour, like the prophet, would have us see ourselves in perspective, as either furthering Creation or destroying it. All of us do at least a little of the latter. The question is can we admit and accept it and turn toward the better, or do we habitually turn away, afraid of losing out, and continue the way we were? “Literature is not simply writing, or even good writing, but above all a means of examining the conditions of the human soul and trying to inform and guide one’s own,” continues Schwartz. This is why we read literature; this is why we read and think about holy scripture. This is why Bob Dylan is important.

In today’s Torah portion, the prophet takes on a more hopeful tone. “The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will sow your house with the seed of humans.” Clearly this is meant as a good thing. If ever we needed convincing that the Lord doth require that we continually reinterpret holy scripture, this makes the point: net 207,000 a day? Enough already! The prophet promises that an easier rain is gonna fall – someday. ‘I

will sow your house with seed,' says the Lord, 'And just as I have watched you pluck up and break down, destroy, and bring evil, (and blame it on me), so I will watch over you as you build and plant,' says the Lord.

"The days are surely coming, when there will be a new covenant:" 'It is the law of life within them, the one I have written on their hearts; and they shall all realize it, from the least of them to the greatest, and remember their sin no more.' 'Those days are surely coming...' What a message of hope! And how we long for such a day to come!

The prophet promises that, from now on, children will not suffer for their parents' mistakes, everyone will suffer for their own mistakes. Not only that, but we will no longer need teachers to show us what is right and wrong; the law will be written on our hearts and we will know the difference ourselves.

Jeremiah's idea of a new covenant is to steer us in the direction of spiritual focus. The New Covenant is really a sharpening and deepening of our ongoing acceptance of Faith. If we would move in the direction of the good, search history, search scripture, search our hearts and get back to what is there that always was there, the certainty that ultimately all manner of things (even death) will be well. Claim this as your God's power. Claim it, and live it out.

Or, as St. Paul says to Timothy, 'Trust and follow what you have known in your heart since childhood. For we are living in a time when people reject truth and the sound doctrine that follows from it. They having itching ears, and accumulate for themselves so-called teachers to suit their own desires. They turn away from the truth and wander into fantasy and myth.' It's as if he were writing this morning.

When we hear the stories of Jesus, we can surely see how Jeremiah's prophecy is foundational. Arguments ensue about whether Jeremiah prefigures Jesus, or Christianity supercedes Judaism. Dylan has been accused of plagiarism many times - of stealing stories. What these harangues miss is that God's way of reaching us is through these stories. As each life is extraordinary, each telling of every story is unique and full of opportunity.

God is in the storytelling, and so, developing all the time. As Gerhard von Rad put it, "The New Testament is in continuity with the Old; its emphasis is on fulfilment of the Hebrew Bible covenants, not abrogation of them." For

us, Jesus is a benchmark, a landmark, a lifemark in our formation as storytellers and story-hearers. Jesus alive on Earth was neither the beginning nor the end of storytelling. It is Christ who is the Alpha and the Omega, who was and is and is to come. Jesus is God's way of being Christ for us in real time; in people time. Henceforth we can no longer claim that God is merely absent. Jesus demonstrated how God is always present, with us and in us. And when we are compassionate, generous, creative and just, God is present as us.

“The day is surely coming;” “The Day of the Lord is coming;” yes, they mean when Jesus comes, but also every day, the Day of the Lord is coming. For that reason, since we need a faith that works under all conditions, ‘I forgot’ is no longer an option.

Our instinct is to go back to fear: to survival's necessities as we see them, and act accordingly. It's not our fault, we are animals as well as people. It's not our fault any more than it was Fulu the dog's fault the other day when I went in the store to do an errand and made the mistake of leaving a baguette on the dashboard. For a moment I got to be Godly and not get mad when I saw the little paper Eiffel Tower stuck to his thieving little whiskers because, thank God, I could see it wasn't his fault.

Not our fault, but our opportunity. God is saying ‘do better. We can. We can if we forget the guilt, forget the shame, admit the error and admit the truth into our lives. If not today, then soon, and for the rest of our days. “For the days are surely coming; I have already planted truth and love in your heart. That's how we'll find shelter from our storms. And, as Jesus says, if we persist, even the unjust and unholy will have to listen to us eventually.

Hymn 375 Give praise and glory unto God.

Give praise and glory unto God, the Father of all blessing;
His mighty wonders tell abroad; his graciousness confessing.
With balm my inmost heart he fills; his comfort all my anguish stills.
To God be praise and glory.

The host of heaven praiseth thee, O Lord of all dominions;
And mortal men, on land and sea beneath thy shadowing pinions,
Exult in thy creative might that doeth all things well and right.
To God be praise and glory.

What God hath wrought to show his power, he evermore sustaineth;
He watches o'er us ev'ry hour; his mercy never waneth.
Thro' all his kingdom's wide domain, his righteousness and justice reign,
To God be praise and glory.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUMGMQhhu7I>

Where Have All the Flowers Gone?

Where have all the flowers gone, long time passing?
Where have all the flowers gone, long time ago?
Where have all the flowers gone?
Young girls have picked them everyone
Oh, when will they ever learn?
Oh, when will they ever learn?

And where have all the young girls gone, long time passing?
Where have all the young girls gone, long time ago?
Where have all the young girls gone?
Gone to young men everyone
Oh, when will they ever learn?
Oh, when will they ever learn?

Where have all the young men gone, long time passing?
Where have all the young men gone, long time ago?
Where have all the young men gone?
Gone for soldiers everyone
Oh, when will they ever learn?
Oh, when will they ever learn?

Pete Seeger

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgXNVA9ngx8>