

The Sunday Missive – November 6, 2022

The Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 287 For all the saints

For all the saints, who from their labors rest,
Who thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy Name, O Jesus, be forever blessed. Alleluia, Alleluia!

Thou wast their rock, their fortress, and their might:
Thou, Lord, their Captain in the well-fought fight;
Thou, in the darkness drear, the one true Light. Alleluia, Alleluia!

But lo! there breaks a yet more glorious day;
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;
The King of glory passes on his way. Alleluia, Alleluia!

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: Alleluia, Alleluia!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNmEcy6GNyA>

The Collect of the Day

O God, whose blessed Son came into the world that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life: Grant that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves as he is pure; that, when he comes again with power and great glory, we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Haggai 1:15b-2:9

In the second year of King Darius, in the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai, saying: Speak now to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,

governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, and say, Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the Lord; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear. For thus says the Lord of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts. The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the Lord of hosts.

Canticle 9 The First Song of Isaiah Hymn 679

Surely, it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and not be afraid.

For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense; and he will be my Savior.

Therefore you shall draw water with rejoicing from the springs of salvation.

And on that day you shall say, give thanks to the Lord and call upon his name;

Make his deeds known among the peoples; see that they remember that his name is exalted.

Sing the praises of the Lord, who has done great things, and this is known in all the world.

Cry aloud, inhabitants of Zion, ring out your joy, for the great one in the midst of you is the Holy One of Israel.

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

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17

As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction. He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God. Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you?

But we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth. For this purpose he called you through our proclamation of the good news, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

Hymn 293 I sing a song of the saints of God

I sing a song of the saints of God,
Patient and brave and true,
Who toiled and fought and lived and died
For the Lord they loved and knew.
And one was a doctor, and one was a queen,
And one was a shepherdess on the green:
They were all of them saints of God—and I mean,
God helping, to be one too.

They loved their Lord so dear, so dear,
And his love made them strong;
And they followed the right, for Jesus' sake,

The whole of their good lives long,
And one was a soldier, and one was a priest,
And one was slain by a fierce wild beast:
And there's not any reason, no, not the least,
Why I shouldn't be one too.

They lived not only in ages past,
There are hundreds of thousands still,
The world is bright with the joyous saints
Who love to do Jesus' will.
You can meet them in school, or in lanes, or at sea,
In church, or in trains, or in shops, or at tea,
For the saints of God are just folk like me,
And I mean to be one too.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uhjz4lyYSsU>

Luke 20:27-38

Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus and asked him a question, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; then the second and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. Finally the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her."

Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive."

Courage -- Proper 27C

Our diocesan convention was on zoom again yesterday; lots of us are thinking it's time once again to exercise our right peaceably to assemble. Thanks be to God, however, there was much to revel in, and thanks for the integrity of purpose that characterizes our response to Jesus' commission of us all as ministers. The involvement of our delegates in the practical functioning of the Episcopal Diocese of El Camino Real makes possible not only the orderly functioning of the Church, but also her character, as the extraordinarily fertile environment we inhabit, where prayer, worship and service can justify and energize each other.

It was a wonder to hear some of the stories of compassion, cooperation and transformation that emerge from congregations up and down the Central Coast. Descriptions of projects, gifts, and courageous initiatives came forth, each at once a source of humble admiration and vigorous inspiration for the possibilities of our own lives. We heard tell of the strong, effective determined efforts of individuals that have brought about real, positive, lasting change for the poor, the hungry, the disadvantaged, the confused and the desperate near and far. Good things are being done, to no small extent because we are feeling spiritually fed and humbly led. Thanks be to God for peace in our valley these days; in a zoom room full of strongminded, disparately situated, potentially argumentative Episcopalians, just about every vote was unanimous. I can tell you what you probably already know: that is not always the case.

As has been the tradition, the bishop declared a theme for this convention, a theme that will help orient our conversations and enterprises for the coming year. Our bishop chose "Courage in the Wilderness" as this year's theme, a thoughtful, provocative and deeply faithful mode of spiritual existence for individuals and communities alike in our challenging times.

On a broad canvas, we might find courage as we do in our funeral liturgy, in the words of Job: "I know that my redeemer lives, who at the last will stand upon the earth." Comforted, even determined as this testimony may make us feel, it leaves us with lots of questions: What redeemer? What about between now and 'the last day,' whatever that means? And what if I don't have the 'patience of Job?" Big questions, but not so big that they have to stop us living out our purpose as hopeful ambassadors for peace and justice.

Or if we get down to specifics, as Jesus does with the Sadducees in today's story, unanswerable questions like, 'whose wife will the seven times widowed woman be in heaven?' are set aside as entirely, not to say absurdly, unimportant. "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but in that age and in the resurrection from the dead, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage." Jesus has created – opened up to us – a revolutionary mode of being, where human legalisms and politics, no longer hold sway because they aren't necessary. The ongoing presence of the living Christ in the hearts and hands of peaceful people makes discussions about what happens after death moot. "Indeed," says Jesus, "they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection."

Does this mean we get to enjoy eternity with our beloved spouse, healthy and hearty once more, or does it mean we are off the hook -- 'rebooted,' as it were -- having done a goodly stretch? As the feller says, 'live the questions.' Jesus' response has nothing to do with answering that one, and everything to do with meanwhile: "God is not God of the dead, but of the living." We cannot possibly map the terrain, nor can we pretend to formulate an agenda for ourselves that stretches into eternity. What we can do is accept God's timeless offer to comfort, nourish and embolden us permanently. This can make for a life full of questions, lots of fascinating, even urgent questions, but also some answers.

In another passage that sounds so familiar because of 'Handel's *Messiah*', the prophet Haggai today declares Yahweh's promise: "Take courage you children of Jehozadak; take courage, all you people of the land! Yet once a little while, and I will shake the heavens, the earth, the dry land, the nations, I'll shake. And the desire of all nations shall come," saith the Lord of hosts." God promises justification to the righteous people.

In #17, the psalmist cries out for justification, for payback even: "Hear a just cause, O Lord; attend to my cry. My steps have held fast to your paths, so guard me as the apple of the eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings." Give me what I've got coming! Show me the money! I want payback! These are the answers we deserve; these are the answers we want. And they are promised to us in time: Therefore you shall draw water with rejoicing from the springs of salvation, and on that day you shall give thanks to the Lord and call upon God's name. But when? How long?

But we don't get the answers. Mostly we don't. Jesus reveals the challenge of God's promise by himself living out a whole new paradigm. In Jesus, life is revealed as a place where we can be our best selves without fear, no matter what we encounter. There is no retribution or revenge because they have become moot. Some answers are just above our pay grade.

Here is Wendell Berry's *The Wild Geese*: "Horseback on Sunday morning, harvest over, we taste persimmon and wild grape, sharp sweet of summer's end. In time's maze over fall fields, we name names that went west from here, names that rest on graves. We open a persimmon seed to find the tree that stands in promise, pale, in the seed's marrow. Geese appear high over us, pass, and the sky closes. Abandon, as in love or sleep, holds them to their way, clear in the ancient faith: what we need is here. And we pray, not for new earth or heaven, but to be quiet in heart, and in eye, clear. What we need is here."

Once we cotton to this, we realize we are subjects of eternal (which meant past, present and future to the Hebrews) life, not imminent death. Oh how we think we want those answers! But no sooner do we think we've found a concrete and irrefutable answer than we are handed a problem only faith can address. We may experience this come Tuesday. Our end time scenarios, our anxieties about what will happen in Heaven and how we're doing on Earth can paralyze us. But we are not called to run in fear, we are called to walk in faith, to be the daughters and sons of Christ. "Stand firm and hold fast to the traditions you have been taught," says Exodus 14:13, "God makes a way out of no way. We need not fear, only believe and let our hearts be strengthened in every good work and word."

The other day we talked about Yellow Brick Road theology, and it's disappointing but only fair to admit that, not only is it limited in its feasibility in a world devoid of genuine witches, it is also fundamentally flawed. For while the fellow who comes out from behind the curtain (that phony wizard) ultimately advises, "Remember, my sentimental friend, that a heart is not judged by how much you love, but by how much you are loved by others," the truth is very much the opposite. As Charlie Kaufman says, twice, in the fascinating 2002 film, *Adaptation*, "You are what you love, not what loves you."

"You are what you love, not what loves you." As excruciatingly, or annoyingly risky as it may seem, God is calling us, by virtue of Jesus, to walk in love and let go of the outcome. Walk in love; let go of the outcome.

Let's let the poet Rainer Maria Rilke have the last word, from his 1903 collection, *Letters to a Young Poet*:

...I would like to beg you dear Sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now,

because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answers.

Hymn 625 Ye holy angels bright

Ye holy angels bright, who wait at God's right hand,
Or through the realms of light fly at your Lord's command,
Assist our song, for else the theme
Too high doth seem for mortal tongue.

Ye blessed souls at rest, who ran this earthly race
And now, from sin released, behold your Savior's face,
His praises sound, as in his sight
With sweet delight ye do abound.

Ye saints, who toil below, adore your heavenly King,
And onward as ye go some joyful anthem sing;
Take what he gives and praise him still,
Through good or ill, who ever lives!

My soul, bear thou thy part, triumph in God above:
And with a well-tuned heart sing thou the songs of love!
Let all thy days till life shall end,
Whate'er he send, be filled with praise.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAwTDwbVM3o>

When the Year Grows Old

I cannot but remember
When the year grows old—
October—November—
How she disliked the cold!

She used to watch the swallows
Go down across the sky,
And turn from the window
With a little sharp sigh.

And often when the brown leaves
Were brittle on the ground,
And the wind in the chimney
Made a melancholy sound,

She had a look about her
That I wish I could forget—
The look of a scared thing
Sitting in a net!

Oh, beautiful at nightfall
The soft spitting snow!
And beautiful the bare boughs
Rubbing to and fro!

But the roaring of the fire,
And the warmth of fur,
And the boiling of the kettle
Were beautiful to her!

I cannot but remember
When the year grows old—
October—November—
How she disliked the cold!

Edna St. Vincent Millay