

The Sunday Missive – November 17, 2024 The Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 48 O day of radiant gladness

O day of radiant gladness, O day of joy and light,
O balm of care and sadness, most beautiful, most bright;
On thee the high and lowly through ages joined in tune,
Sing "Holy, holy, holy" to the great God Triune.

On thee, at the creation, the light first had its birth;
On thee, for our salvation, Christ rose from depths of earth;
On thee, our Lord victorious, the Spirit sent from heav'n;
And thus on thee, most glorious, a triple light was giv'n.

Today on weary nations the heav'nly manna falls;
To holy convocations the silver trumpet calls,
Where gospel light is glowing with pure and radiant beams,
And living water flowing with soul refreshing streams.

New graces ever gaining from this our day of rest,
We reach the rest remaining to spirits of the blest.
To Holy Ghost be praises, to Father, and to Son;
The church her voice upraises to thee, blest Three in One.

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

The Collect of the Day

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

1 Samuel 1:4-20

On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the Lord had closed her womb. Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb. So it went on year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her.

Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. Her husband Elkanah said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?"

After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the Lord. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly. She made this vow: "O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head."

As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine." But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time." Then Eli answered, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him." And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your sight." Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.

They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. In due time Hannah conceived

and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the Lord."

The Psalm: 1 Samuel 2:1-10 Hannah's Song

"My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God.

My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my victory.

"There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one beside you; there is no Rock like our God.

Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth;

for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength.

Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil.

The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn.

The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up.

The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts.

He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap,

To make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor.

For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world.

"He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might does one prevail.

The Lord! His adversaries shall be shattered; the Most High will thunder in heaven.

Hebrews 10:11-25

Every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, “he sat down at the right hand of God,” and since then has been waiting “until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.” For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.” He also adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” And where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

LEVAS Hymn 13 My Lord, what a morning

My Lord, what a morning; my Lord, what a morning;
O my Lord, what a morning, when the stars begin to fall.

You'll hear the trumpet sound, to wake the nations underground,
Looking to my God's right hand, when the stars begin to fall.

You'll hear the sinner mourn, to wake the nations underground,
Looking to my God's right hand, when the stars begin to fall.

You'll hear the Christian shout, to wake the nations underground,
Looking to my God's right hand, when the stars begin to fall.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t02NL8DVN6E>

Mark 13:1-8

As Jesus came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?" Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birthpangs."

Family History – Proper 28B

Conversations about family history hold a special fascination for lots of us. You could make a case that the entire Bible is an extended discussion of family history. The genealogies chronicled in various parts of the Bible differ widely, with generations that defy rational explanation and reported lifespans that exceed even the wildest hokum of today's political elites. But contrary to the stuff produced by contemporary hogwash spinners, the old stories can greatly improve our understanding of meaningful life. Once we recognize that individual biblical characters like Eve and Adam, Noah, Moses and David are the spiritual ancestors of all of us it becomes easier and more natural to learn from their stories.

For example, our beloved Maestro Alan Boehmer has produced an absolutely astounding autobiography. In it he points out that, despite what is taught in many a Sunday school, Moses didn't write any books. The only kind of writing there was in his part of the world at the time we're told he lived were hieroglyphics. And nobody has ever suggested that he mastered that vernacular. But he did tell stories, about his people and their relationship to the benevolent higher power of their understanding, Yahweh. And it's worth pointing out that those ancient people had sufficient self-awareness to know what they didn't know. "No-one has ever seen the face of God and lived," said Moses. Just to be on the safe side, the people interpreted this to mean they had better not even say God's name. We are much more self-confident now, and we say the name of God all the time, in vain and out.

And yet, we have grown accustomed to talking about the Israelites, the People of Israel, the Chosen Ones as our spiritual forbears. Some Bible stories seem more salient than others, more obviously relevant to our present condition. The most telling parallels, the most insistently complex and multivalent ones relate incidents and proclivities that we're not nearly so clear about admitting, nor so successful in eliminating. We're not supposed to go down a given road; we would do well to avoid a certain behavior or attitude, we should keep our hands to ourselves and love our enemies. But, St. Paul confesses, "I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing." Most of us can relate.

Other stories are clearly examples of what not to do, and we're good to go on them; we get it already. At some period or another in history, each of the biblical stories was of this latter type for its hearers. Now of course, we know better. We know "Thou shalt not kill," for example means just what it says... unless... unless there's a darn good reason. After all, we also read that God did lots of killing for good reasons: Everybody in the flood, e.g.; the Egyptian army, and lots of first-born other Egyptians, everybody in Sodom, the list goes on. That was Adonai's prerogative, not ours. If sometimes God used the "chosen" people to do the smiting and walloping, it was always clear that God endorsed and supported them. We know it was clear because they told us so. Nowadays we lean towards the view that God doesn't kill anybody anymore, and we kid ourselves if we think God wants us

to, but there are exceptions. If we really “need” a certain land of milk and honey to fulfil our manifest destiny, we aren’t too curious about whose milk, whose honey.

OK, this is sounding like a bad example. We know what’s wrong, but we sometimes do it anyway because we can’t seem to figure out, accept and carry out what’s right. Thus, all too regularly, our agreed-upon behaviors include dimensions of flat-out wrongness: Idolatry, Sabbath-breaking, Greed, Violence, Dishonor, Manipulation – as individuals, and as a society. We can’t kid ourselves that the precepts are proven wrong; it’s just that we have yet to become a people who consistently follow them. We have built the great temple of our culture: “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” But as long as we continue to dance around the truth, what can we expect but that not one stone will be left upon another, that all will be thrown down.”

Again, some Bible stories seem more salient than others, more obviously relevant to our present condition. The most insistent ones portray character traits and behaviors we’re not clear about, nor very successful in amending. One of the elements in Mark’s gospel that makes our family history at the same time more immediate and more complex is the presence of Jesus’ disciples. So, for example, we do not hear the disciples asking Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life” Presumably, they have been following him around enough and listening to what he has to say to think they know that already.

We might expect their inquiries to move to a higher plane: “We know we’ll never be perfect, Lord, but how can we move in that direction? How can we get closer to what you would have us be?” Instead, it is the strangers who seem to be doing most of the learning and developing in Mark. The Syro-Phoenician woman, Bar-Timaeus, Nicodemus, Jairus, Martha and Mary, the wealthy young man. The disciples are not in the story for comic relief, they are there to show us what it’s like to be earnest but flawed followers of Jesus. They are there to show us what we ourselves are prone to and capable of. So, when Jesus talks about the temple being thrown down, with nary a stone left upon another, instead of asking, “What can we do to help?”, they want to know how to predict the disaster, so they can get out of

the way: “They asked him privately(!) ‘Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to happen?’

But of course, Jesus doesn’t give them an answer. Knowing them and loving them, he answers the questions he wants them to be asking: “How can we be part of the solution instead of part of the problem?” “Beware no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and will lead many astray. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes and famines. This is but the beginning. Stay the course.”

As portrayed and reported by Mark, Jesus would have us recognize ourselves in the disciples. Jesus would have us – with gentleness and honesty – continually search our thoughts, our words and our deeds for evidence of ‘truth management,’ of condoning violence and oppression, of private shortcut-seeking, of tolerance or avoidance when evil erupts and stay the course instead. Jesus would have us speak out despite the discomfort, complexity and humility we are bound to encounter along the way.

Our story from the book of Samuel gives an example of what Jesus requires of us. Hannah is one of two wives of Elkanah from Ephraim. Although Elkanah likes Hannah better, she has not been able to bear any children. In the face of continuous taunting and anguish over her condition, Hannah becomes despondent and refuses to eat. But instead of trying to avoid her difficulties or giving in to the anger and despair they might provoke, Hannah goes more deeply into faith. She stays the course. Hannah goes to the temple to pray for guidance and assistance, only to have the priest mock her and fail to take her seriously. Finally, her depth of faith and seriousness of purpose becomes evident and he blesses her. Her dreams are fulfilled, and she does give birth to a son. And what a son! Samuel becomes both the last of the Hebrew Judges and the first of the major prophets to emerge in Israel. He lived on and embodies the threshold between the two eras. Some scholars identify this development as the beginnings of consciousness, when people started to realize that it isn’t the gods who make everything happen; it’s us.

According to the Books of Samuel, he came to anoint the first two kings of the Kingdom of Israel, both Saul and David, becoming a pivotal

figure in the family history of Israel. It was his mother Hannah's clarity of purpose, her eagerness to trust in God's intention and precepts, and her persistence in blocking out the bitter array of difficulties that stood to stop her. She stayed the course.

It is by no means accidental that the story of Mary, the Mother of Jesus echoes Hannah's life. Doubt, fear, societal pressure and seeming futility all conspired to keep Mary from her place in salvation history. Yet she, like Hannah, accepted the grace of God, her motherhood and the support of a loving husband too. Both women refused to rest until God's purpose had been accomplished in them. The good that God would have them do, they persisted in, despite many reasons to turn aside. God's purpose was to give life to the Judge and Prophet and Kingmaker Samuel. God's purpose was to put Jesus on the Earth. But how could those lives have come about without Hannah and Mary? It is perhaps unlikely that we will ourselves produce Judges, Prophets, or Kings – but let's not rule it out. And surely our thoughts and words and deeds can only ever be pale imitations of the Christ. But God does have work for us to do. God has given us the means to do it. Will we spend our lives of grace in determining how to make sure we don't get too involved, too vulnerable? Or will we say, with Hannah, "My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God," and with Mary, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word?"

Hymn 632 O Christ the Word Incarnate

O Christ, the Word Incarnate, O Wisdom from on high,
O Truth, unchanged, unchanging, O Light of our dark sky;
We praise thee for the radiance that from the scripture's page,
A lantern to our footsteps, shines on from age to age.

The Church from our dear Master received the word divine,
And still that light is lifted o'er all the earth to shine.
It is the chart and compass that o'er life's surging sea,
Mid mists and rocks and quicksands, still guides, O Christ, to thee.

O make thy Church, dear Savior, a lamp of purest gold,
To bear before the nations thy true light as of old;

O teach thy wandering pilgrims by this their path to trace,
Till, clouds and darkness ended, they see thee face to face.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Sd6NdHDGPA>

Earthy Anecdotes

Every time the bucks went clattering,
Over Oklahoma
A firecat bristled in the way.

Wherever they went,
They went clattering.
Until they swerved,
In a swift, circular line,
To the right,
Because of the firecat.

Or until they swerved,
In a swift, circular line,
To the left,
Because of the firecat.

The bucks clattered.
The firecat went leaping,
To the right, to the left,
And
Bristled in the way.

Later, the firecat closed his bright eyes
And slept.

Wallace Stevens