

The Sunday Missive – October 30, 2022
The Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost

546 Awake, my soul, stretch every nerve

Awake, my soul, stretch every nerve, and press with vigor on;
A heavenly race demands thy zeal, and an immortal crown,
And an immortal crown.

A cloud of witnesses around hold thee in full survey;
Forget the steps already trod, and onward urge your way,
And onward urge your way.

'Tis God's all-animating voice that calls thee from on high;
'Tis his own hand presents the prize to thine aspiring eye,
To thine aspiring eye.

Then wake, my soul, stretch every nerve, and press with vigor on;
A heavenly race demands thy zeal, and an immortal crown,
And an immortal crown.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7HmfttjUFs&t=28s>

The Collect of the Day

Almighty and merciful God, it is only by your gift that your faithful people offer you true and laudable service: Grant that we may run without stumbling to obtain your heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4

The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw:

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?

Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save?

Why do you make me see wrong-doing and look at trouble?

Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.

So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails.

The wicked surround the righteous-- therefore judgment comes forth perverted.

I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart;

I will keep watch to see what he will say to me,
and what he will answer concerning my complaint.

Then the Lord answered me and said:

Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it.

For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie.

If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.

Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.

Psalm 32

Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven* ***And whose sin is put away!***

Happy are they to whom the Lord imputes no guilt* ***And in whose spirit there is no guile!***

For your hand was heavy upon me day and night* ***My moisture was dried up as in the heat of summer.***

Then I acknowledged my sin to you* ***And did not conceal my guilt.***

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord."* ***Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.***

Therefore the faithful make their prayers to you in time of trouble* ***And when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them.***

You are my hiding-place; you preserve me from trouble* ***O Lord you surround me with shouts of deliverance.***

2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring.

To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

686 Come, thou fount of every blessing

Come, thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace!
Streams of mercy never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet, sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount! O fix me on it, mount of God's unchanging love.

Here I find my greatest treasure; hither by thy help, I've come;
And I hope, by thy good pleasure, safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger, interposed his precious blood.

Oh, to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee;
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, oh, take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.

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

Gospel Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

Make it Snappy - Proper 26C

In studying today's psalm, we note that the happiness of being forgiven was perceived and meditated upon centuries before the life and ministry of Jesus. Likewise, the celebration of those who have lived before us – *El Dia de Muertos* -- started here in the Americas far before the life of Jesus. Today the traditions are blended with 500 years of Christian culture surrounding the continuity of human existence outside our earthly tenure. Our ponderings and sensations and concerns are part of age-old human experience. The psalmist sings of the joy of those whose guilt is not counted against them, and who are set free from the deceit of self-justification. They do not have to lie anymore, to themselves nor to others. In this age of wholesale misinformation and habitual flat out lying, fomenting and fearmongering by those who wield power in our society, this song of repentance is still as radical as it was when the Israelites first sang it.

The first two verses of Psalm 32 celebrate the happy condition of those whose sins have been forgiven. Sin is a part of life and has always been so, with the process of obtaining forgiveness as its powerful antidote. We can become well, not without sin, but beyond it. In ancient Israelite theology, acknowledgement of wrong as well as restitution to injured parties were essential requirements for repentance and forgiveness.

Not only that, the association of bodily illness with sin makes the issue not only spiritual, but physical as well. As Miss Adelaide might put it,

“Psychosomatic symptoms, difficult to endure, affecting the upper respiratory tract” tend to prevail when we are in poor spiritual condition. The close connection between physical and mental health has been “discovered” in more contemporary medicine, but it’s not new. Physical unwellness is described as the result of divine action resulting from unconfessed sins. (Your hand was heavy upon me day and night). Or, as the Twelve-steppers put it, “You’re only as sick as your secrets.” But we need help in wanting redemption.

In the 4th Century, the great Church father Gregory of Nyssa wrote, “Christ has accomplished an actual fellowship with humankind; it is in baptism that a resemblance develops between those who follow and Him who leads the way. Our human minds cannot thread the maze of this life unless we pursue the same path He did. By ‘maze,’ I mean that prison of death that leaves no exit and encloses us. Nature does not allow us an exact or entire imitation of Jesus, but our sins are indeed suppressed by the sign of death that is given by water in baptism. Sin may not be completely wiped away, but there is a kind of break in the continuity of evil.”

And who doesn’t want a kind of break in the continuity of evil?

Sin is not completely wiped away. That would be an understatement. And everybody’s in on the action; sin-free living has yet to be accomplished by anybody purely human. God’s investment in this commodity called human life is a risky one – an aggressive investment I think is the term – God really wants a big profit from this venture, but won’t manipulate the market or insider-trade. If God is counting on us to work the good in the World if it is to be worked at all, then perhaps we can say that to be lifted up is to become a citizen of a different society than the one that seems the most obvious and instinctive choice. To be lifted up is to embrace another culture from the ones we so often see reported on in the news, depicted in entertainment and advertised for sale. Our desire, our longing for connection with a living Christ whose story proves beyond doubt that goodness transcends death is a point of entry to this land. Our response to God’s invitation determines our spiritual citizenship. When we say, “Yes, please, here’s what I have done,” we are ‘lifted up.’

If there’s one thing this season of Halloween, All Saints, All Souls, El Dia de Los Muertos makes us aware of, it’s that we are part of something far bigger than our careers in the Kasbah here. As they say in Tanzania, “*Ajali Muhuli*: Our fate is but an interval,” and rationality only gets us so far. Once we choose baptized life, the pursuit of goodness, we are

connected beyond space and time. If our baptism came when we were babies, a choice made by parents and elders for us, then we must choose again ourselves. But once we do, it is a permanent choice.

And resistance to goodness is strong. As the prophet Habbakuk laments: “O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not listen? Or cry to you, ‘Violence!’ and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.” This cry of outrage seems eerily appropriate to our contemporary experience. Whether in a personal plea to God for very present help with troubles in our personal lives – neglect, unfairness, mistreatment at home, in the workplace or the community – or in the news that we get in a steady stream – about oppression, irresponsibility, inequality and violence around the nation and the globe, many of us have the feeling that the wicked are winning. How can we help having some of the pessimism, even resignation we hear from many quarters?”

We can stand on the ramparts, watching and waiting; we can write the vision and make it plain. Our words can speak patience, diligence and hope. We can pray even as we wait, calling to mind the church sign spotted recently that reads, ‘Lord, give me patience, and make it snappy.’”

In our desire to make the world better, we will doubtless encounter pessimism, cynicism and grief over failed attempts at goodness. Much will be unclear and murky. So many folks don’t seem to want goodness to prevail. They can’t even tell you why, but they rail at and dismiss every compassionate, responsible, realistic suggestion. As John Calvin paraphrased Habbakuk five hundred years ago, “When all things are in disorder, when there is now no regard for equity and justice, and men abandon themselves as it were with loose reins unto all kinds of wickedness, how long, O Lord, wilt thou take no notice?”

But we can wear down evil with patience. We can continue to carry the ideals of compassion, forbearance and moderation into every conversation, every public forum, every voting booth. We can come to expect both promise and conflict. As David Bartlett writes, “We can even be glad when conflict arrives, because we know the gospel gives us both the permission and the commandment to enter difficulty with hope.”

Lydia Polgreen’s essay about her father’s character was in the paper this week. She writes, “We live in a time dominated by pessimism and cynicism. These poses are a kind of armour against the vulnerability of hope. To be

cynical is to close the door to the possibility of disappointment. To be pessimistic is to foreclose the risk of being made a fool by optimism.

“I realize now that the most precious thing my father gave me was an example of how to live a life devoid of cynicism and pessimism. He was a dreamer and an optimist, sometimes to an absurd and even dangerous degree. But a bias toward the vulnerability of hope — that is a true gift.”

As we gather to worship and celebrate the new life that this baptism represents, we can embrace and make daily use of these principles for living more fully and freely in our troubled culture on our ailing planet: We must learn to live with uncertainty. We must listen to each other’s feelings and our own without dismissing them. We must move away from regret and recrimination and towards peacemaking and tolerance.

All people have the capacity to learn and change. Until they do, “How long, O Lord” will be our cry too. And in the absence of answers, we must learn to live and love one another without them. As Polgreen concludes, “There is something so powerful about this idea, something so broadly useful to modern life. We all want to know what happens next, to fix upon some certainty as an anchor in the rough seas of our times. But to tolerate uncertainty is to become buoyant, able to bob in the waves, no matter the tide.”

436 Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates

Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates; behold, the King of glory waits!
The King of kings is drawing near; the Savior of the world is here.

O blest the land, the city blest, where Christ the ruler is confessed!
O happy hearts and happy homes to whom this King of triumph comes!

Fling wide the portals of your heart; make it a temple, set apart
From earthly use for heaven's employ, adorned with prayer and love and joy.

Redeemer, come! I open wide my heart to thee: here, Lord, abide!
Let me thy inner presence feel: thy grace and love in me reveal.

So come, my Sovereign; enter in! Let new and nobler life begin;
Thy Holy Spirit guide us on, until the glorious crown be won.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7MWROH_VOY

Where They Lived

Dishevelled leaves creep down

 Upon that bank to-day,
Some green, some yellow, and some pale brown;
 The wet bents bob and sway;
The once warm slippery turf is sodden
 Where we laughingly sat or lay.

 The summerhouse is gone,
 Leaving a weedy space;
The bushes that veiled it once have grown
 Gaunt trees that interlace,
Through whose lank limbs I see too clearly
 The nakedness of the place.

 And where were hills of blue,
 Blind drifts of vapour blow,
And the names of former dwellers few,
 If any, people know,
And instead of a voice that called, "Come in, Dears,"
 Time calls, "Pass below!"

Thomas Hardy