

The Sunday Missive – September 17, 2023
The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Season of Creation Care

Hymn 376 Joyful, joyful we adore thee

Joyful, joyful, we adore thee, God of glory, Lord of love;
Hearts unfold like flowers before thee,
Praising thee, their sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; drive the dark of doubt away;
Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day.

All thy works with joy surround thee,
Earth and heaven reflect thy rays,
Stars and angels sing around thee, center of unbroken praise.
Field and forest, vale and mountain, blooming meadow, flashing sea,
Chanting bird and flowing fountain, call us to rejoice in thee.

Thou art giving and forgiving, ever blessing, ever blest,
Wellspring of the joy of living, ocean-depth of happy rest!
Thou our Father, Christ our Brother: all who live in love are thine;
Teach us how to love each other, lift us to the joy divine.

The Collect of the Day

O God, because without you we are not able to please you, mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaEH1e DLm0>

Exodus 14:19-31

The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

Psalm 114

When Israel came out of Egypt* ***The house of Jacob from a people of strange speech,***

Judah became God's sanctuary* ***And Israel the Lord's dominion.***

The sea beheld them and fled* ***Jordan turned and went back.***

The mountains skipped like rams* ***And the hills like young sheep.***

What ailed you, O sea, that you fled?* ***O Jordan, that you turned back?***

Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord* ***At the presence of the God of Jacob,***

Who turned the hard rock into a pool of water* ***And flint-stone into a flowing spring. Hallelujah!***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Gk-dsxyTog>

Romans 14:1-12

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to

God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written,

"As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God."

So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

Hymn 593 Lord, make us servants of your peace

Lord, make us servants of your peace:
Where there is hate, may we sow love;
Where there is hurt, may we forgive;
Where there is strife, may we make one.

Where all is doubt, may we sow faith;
Where all is gloom, may we sow hope;
Where all is night, may we sow light;
Where all is tears, may we sow joy.

Jesus, our Lord, may we not seek to be consoled, but to console,
Nor look to understanding hearts, but look for hearts to understand.

May we not look for love's return, but seek to love unselfishly,
For in our giving we receive, and in forgiving are forgiven.

Dying, we live, and are reborn
Through death's dark night to endless day;
Lord, make us servants of your peace, to wake at last in heaven's light.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFePI5ioYQo&t=26s>

Matthew 18:21-35

Peter came and said to Jesus, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Watch out for Flying Pigs – Proper 19A

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Do you pass judgment on your brother or sister?

Or do you despise your brother or sister? We will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God. So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

These wonderfully provocative questions and inescapably bracing statements from Paul's letter to the Roman church move us back into the mode of thinking of God as the inevitable force and purpose of nature, rather than as a big, strict, disorganized and often vindictive bully.

The response of the universe to the conflicted glory of human consciousness, is the miraculous Other Creation, the counter-instinctive forces of faith, hope and charity: Faith that goodness will prevail and is worth pursuing, hope for the experience and expression of goodness in one's own life via charity towards fellow creatures, which is to say the selfless, unconditional love that stems from humility and wonderment. There are many roads that lead to these gifts, lots of ways to skin this cat; who am I to judge the validity of somebody else's path?

The human world turned completely upside down, or perhaps inside out when the power of faith emerged. Matthew McConaughey's most colorful and pragmatic character in the wildly provocative series, *True Detective* observes that "our human intelligence is simply an aberrance of evolution, a creational mistake, a dead end that doesn't do anything or anybody any good. We're stuck with these incredible thought-producing machines we call our minds, but they didn't come with a manual, and left to themselves, they will cause nothing but trouble."

Maybe so, but what's exciting is that, to deal with such an aberrance as human consciousness, the universe came up with equally unprecedented responses such as the one called Israel. The universe – that is, God -- produced a force called Jesus Christ, in answer to all the troubling stuff. According to the psalmist, "

When Israel went out from Egypt -- from its bondage -- the sea looked and fled; the mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs. (Pigs flew!) Why is it, O sea, that you flee? O mountains, that you skip like rams? (O pigs, that you fly)? You tremble, at the presence of the Lord, who turns rocks into pools of water and flint into a spring.

Upon escaping bondage in Egypt, we received the Ten Commandments as our user manual. But unless we treat them as a jumping off point, a frame of reference, we cannot live together. Anybody can go out and buy a violin, and a nifty, in-depth book to go along with it; but that doesn't make them a violinist. As with travel directions about how to get to Carnegie Hall, the answer is 'practice.'

When Jesus is asked to explain the law in more depth, he notes that examples such as 'do not kill' are insufficient. If we think angrily, we are just as guilty as if we had killed. Again, "do not commit adultery" is explained by Jesus as "if you look and have lust, you are adulterous."

What Jesus does with this more rigorous formula is to steer us into a more conscious, and thus more deeply human response. If our consciousness is what gets us in trouble, it is our consciousness that has to change. Harmful actions are the result of harmful thoughts. Short of voluntary extinction – by climate change ignored or senseless wars pursued -- we are stuck with ourselves and each other. Jesus comes to change the world by providing the miraculous cosmic response to the potentially catastrophic existence of human intelligence.

If having angry thoughts is equivalent to killing, having lustful thoughts is equivalent to adultery, and having envious thoughts means we've coveted our neighbor's whatever (however passingly!), then at least two things are true: One is, we all have, to some extent and for however brief periods, broken all of the commandments. Sorry. Might as well cop to it now. We'll have to plea bargain. We're all in this together. Secondly, the answer to

harmful human behavior is to, as we hear so often, “cleanse the thoughts of our hearts...that we may more perfectly love,” and to seek help in doing so, rather than just white-knuckle it through life saying, “Phew! At least I didn’t kill anybody today!”

Our help will come in the form of empathy that leads to compassion. The more we realize the commonality of human feeling, fearing and failing, the more we become able to love our neighbors as ourselves. If we try to know what they’re going through, we can respond in ways we would like to have done to us. Of course, human consciousness can be wounded and warped to the point of burying any hunger for peace, so some people do have to be stopped. Although perfect love will indeed eventually cast out fear, fear can make a heckuva racket and cause an awful lot of trouble in the meantime. We do not have the easiest of tasks... since we’re stuck with each other.

Does our participation in this realm of empathic love mean we are entitled to make the rules for others? No. “Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. It is before their own Lord that they stand or fall.” How people come to faith is their own business. Jesus doesn’t say, ‘Love your neighbor as long as he behaves himself the way you think he ought to behave himself.’ Jesus says, ‘Love your neighbor the way you would like to be loved if you had to deal with somebody like you.’ Whenever you are upset with another’s behavior, it helps to think about the therapy others will need to get over what we’ve done to them. Be prepared to forgive, not just seven, not just seventy, but seventy times seven times; to forgive and move on with an extravagance like the ten thousand talents, which the historians have calculated to be about a hundred and sixty-thousand days’ wages; something nobody could ever repay or deserve.

Self-serving is the problem. The world will only survive human intelligence if there is mutuality. However “upright” our activities may be, when we use our consciousness to serve only ourselves,

we are part of the problem, if we use it to serve others, we are part of the solution. Simple formula.

Don't think our parts in this aren't significant either. Sister Pat Farrell writes: "We can claim the future we desire and act from it now. To do this takes the discipline of choosing where to focus our attention. If our brains, as neuroscience now suggests, take whatever we focus on as an invitation to make it happen, then the images and visions we live with matter a great deal. So, we need to actively engage our imagination in shaping visions of the future. Nothing we do is insignificant. Even a very small conscious choice of courage or of conscience can contribute to the transformation of the whole. It might be, for instance, the decision to put energy into that which seems most authentic to us, and withdraw energy and involvement from that which doesn't."

Someday we'll reach the tipping point: The "Great Come and Get It Day". The Kingdom of Heaven will come to pass, and each of us will know what it's like to cross the Jordan. But, as Sam Cooke sang, 'meanwhile, we've got to work right here,' do what we can, listen to the sea and wonder, with the psalmist, 'how long?', well knowing that our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and Earth, and who works while we sleep.

Hymn 411 O bless the Lord my soul

O bless the Lord, my soul! His grace to thee proclaim!
And all that is within me join to bless his holy Name!

O bless the Lord, my soul! His mercies bear in mind!
Forget not all his benefits! The Lord to thee is kind.

He will not always chide; he will with patience wait;
His wrath is ever slow to rise and ready to abate.

He pardons all thy sins, prolongs thy feeble breath;
He healeth thine infirmities and ransoms thee from death.

He clothes thee with his love, upholds thee with his truth;
And like the eagle he renews the vigor of thy youth.

Then bless his holy Name, whose grace hath made thee whole,
Whose loving-kindness crowns thy days: O bless the Lord, my soul!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AGKr_dNBpU

Most Beautiful

Beautiful are the youth
whose rich emotions flash and burn,
whose lithe bodies filled with energy and grace
sway in their happy dance of life;
and beautiful likewise are the mature
who have learned compassion and patience,
charity and wisdom, though they
be rarer far than beautiful youth.
But most beautiful and most rare is a gracious old age
which has drawn from life the skill to take its varied strands:
the harsh advance of age, the pang of grief,
the passing of dear friends, the loss of strength,
and with fresh insight weave them
into a rich and gracious pattern all its own.
This is the greatest skill of all,
to take the bitter with the sweet and make it beautiful,
to take the whole of life in all its moods,
its strengths and weaknesses,
and of the whole make one great and celestial harmony.

Robert Terry Weston

Please Note: *The Sunday Missive* will not appear again until October 22. Your faithful editor and publisher is on sabbatical for the month.
May the Lord bless you and keep you!