

## **The Sunday Missive, July 9, 2023 The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost**

### **Hymn 657 Love divine, all loves excelling**

Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven, to earth come down,  
Fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown.  
Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love thou art;  
Visit us with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver, let us all thy life receive;  
Suddenly return, and never, nevermore thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing, serve thee as thy hosts above,  
Pray, and praise thee without ceasing, glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be;  
Let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee:  
Changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place,  
Till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrNz9zC9XHE>

### **The Collect of the Day**

O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

### **Genesis 24.1-28**

Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh and I will make you swear by the Lord, the

God of heaven and earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, but will go to my country and to my kindred and get a wife for my son Isaac.” The servant said to him, “Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land; must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?” Abraham said to him, “See to it that you do not take my son back there. The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and swore to me, ‘To your offspring I will give this land,’ he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there.” So, the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

Then the servant took ten of his master’s camels and departed, taking all kinds of choice gifts from his master; and he set out and went to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor. He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water; it was toward evening, the time when women go out to draw water. And he said, “O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. I am standing here by the spring of water, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. Let the girl to whom I shall say, ‘Please offer your jar that I may drink,’ and who shall say, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels’ —let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.” Before he had finished speaking, there was Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother, coming out with her water jar on her shoulder. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up. Then the servant ran to meet her and said, “Please let me sip a little water from your jar.” “Drink, my lord,” she said, and quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, “I will draw for your camels also, until they have

finished drinking.” So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether or not the Lord had made his journey successful. When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold nose-ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels, and said, “Tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father’s house for us to spend the night?” She said to him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor.” She added, “We have plenty of straw and fodder and a place to spend the night.” The man bowed his head and worshiped the Lord and said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the way to the house of my master’s kin.” Then the girl ran and told her mother’s household about these things.

## **Psalm 145**

The Lord is gracious and full of compassion,\* ***Slow to anger and of great kindness.***

The Lord is loving to all people\* ***With compassion over all Creation.***

All your works praise you, O Lord\* ***And your faithful servants bless you.***

They make known the glory of your kingdom\* ***And speak of your mighty power;***

That the peoples may know of your greatness\* ***And the splendor of your kingdom.***

It is an everlasting kingdom\* ***And your dominion endures throughout all ages.***

The Lord is faithful in every word\* *And merciful in every deed.*

The Lord upholds all those who fall\* *And lifts up those who are bowed down.*

### **Romans 7:15-25**

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

### **S 213 Come away to the skies**

Come away to the skies, my beloved, arise  
And rejoice in the day thou wast born;  
On this festival day, come exulting away,  
And with singing to Zion return.

For the glory we were first created to share,  
Both the nature and kingdom divine!  
Now created again that our lives may remain,  
Throughout time and eternity thine.

We with thanks do approve the design of that love  
Which hath joined us to Jesus' Name;  
So united in heart, let us nevermore part,  
Till we meet at the feast of the Lamb.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7HQeT5ZKLk>

### **Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

Jesus said to the crowd, “To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by you; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

### **Back to Basics -- Proper9A**

Our story from Genesis today begins with Abraham old: “well advanced in years...” (which carries the same meaning, but

indicates they really want to make the point: he was very old indeed) "...and already blessed in all things." Imagine being blessed in all things! It is at the very least, difficult. Most of us can think of something in our lives that we would fix, or change, or do over. All of us are wounded or broken in one way or another. But Abraham is said to be blessed in all things. God knew he was, so we hear he was, but did Abraham know it? He had his share of difficulties. Perhaps the characterization is made so that we, who along with the Jews and the Muslims are all spiritual descendants of Abraham will be forced to a greater awareness of our blessings. And as we grow older, if we would grow wiser we must consider how our spiritual ancestors learned to age, and how they came to see themselves as blessed in all things.

In this story, Abraham shows us how to be a parent. Well, technically, he shows us how to go about arranging a marriage, but that specific skillset isn't too popular anymore. We can however take insight about how to be a parent -- how to conduct family affairs and nurture our progeny and thus our legacy -- from Abraham's adventures. Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and earth."

Someone once asked the anthropologist Margaret Mead what she considered to be the first evidence of civilization. She answered: a human thigh bone with a healed fracture found in an archaeological site 15,000 years old. She pointed out that for a person to survive a broken femur the individual had to have been cared for long enough for that bone to heal. Others must have provided shelter, protection, food and drink over an extended period of time for this kind of healing to be possible.

Because the thigh is the most powerful limb of the body, without which the ancients could not last very long without help, only the most trusted of friends was allowed to put a hand under it. It was a time-honored way of expressing the utmost loyalty.

So this is not just any old messenger, this is the “A” team. What’s interesting is that the servant is unnamed. Scholars have guessed that the servant making the deal was Eliezer, the same slave who would have inherited everything had it not been for Hagar’s son Ishmael and then his miraculously born half-brother Isaac, but that was nine chapters ago. In this story, the servant has no name. He is loyal, capable and trusted, but anonymous. In a sense, he is what we count on but cannot ever fully know. The servant is a force for goodness that operates outside ourselves and our ego. He is an arm of God.

This tells us that Abe has achieved blessedness in all things by leaving the important stuff to God, God in the form of this unnamed servant – marginalized and faceless – in whose hands lies the whole future. Jewish culture includes the concept of destiny (*Bashert*) to express the seeming fate or rightness of an auspicious event or relationship. It is especially used to refer to one's divinely foreordained spouse or soulmate. So to have this unnamed servant making the deal for the future of the family is tantamount to putting the project in the hands of God.

If it was indeed Eliezer, that slave who would have inherited had it not been for Isaac, the story gets even better. St. Paul says today, “I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.” Left to my own devices, I will not do the right thing, let alone flourish. I must invoke and employ powers greater than myself, like *Bashert*, and the will of God as mediated through the marginalized if I want to live anything like a godly life.

Listen to Jesus again: “I thank you, oh God, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants, for such was your gracious will.” It’s hard to deny the irony here: the best thinking of the self-styled wise and intelligent gets us in the most trouble. Unless we ‘let go and let God’ as the saying goes, we will not only fail, our family will cease to be. Left to purely human decisionmaking, Ishmael would already be dead of thirst, Isaac

would already be dead on a pile of burning sticks; no Rebekah, no nose rings, no inheritors; and mos def no offspring as numerous as the stars.

Abraham tells the servant to go get his son Isaac a wife. (Actually he says “my son, my only son,” which isn’t even vaguely true, so we definitely know which side of this family has maintained control of the official story in this canon. Try reading the Qu’ran if you want to see how half the world tells this tale.) Nevertheless, Abraham says, ‘I want a wife for my son from the old country.’ So either he’s a bigot, which doesn’t help us much, or this is a way of saying he wants to get back to his roots. If Isaac marries a girl from the old country, then Abraham’s grandchildren will be connected to his history, and have access to the wisdom of the generations of his people, the people of God.

The man tries to talk him out of it. ‘What if she won’t come all the way out here to Canaan? Then I’m going to have to take Isaac all the way to her house and leave him. You don’t want me to do that, do you?’ No. But Abe is certain that God is directing and protecting his interests as he decides and acts; he knows he is blessed in all things. If the plan doesn’t work, he promises not to hold the man responsible. So off the fellow goes back to the old country, where he hangs around the oasis and prays to God for success.

Although we sometimes have people to help us, most of us today don’t have servants. Which means if we’re going to enjoy and benefit from this story, we have to relate to it in a different way. We could approach the problem the same way the Jungians treat dreams, wherein the different characters in the story are just different aspects of ourselves. That way everybody is us – and who doesn’t like being the center of attention? In such a scenario, Abraham is seen to choose the most trustworthy, integral parts of himself to look more deeply than ever before into the wisdom of the deity; to avail himself of its power, and to bear witness to this through his children.



His best self, the servant, goes back to arrange the marriage of his greatest gift, Isaac, to the most sublime and beautiful cultural wellspring, Rachel. This is sounding more and more like Anglican theology all the time: Reason, Scripture, and Tradition! But what does it have to do with parenting? Perhaps it is as simple (as simple and as profound) as this: whatever we seek for our children, whatever we recommend they pay attention to, whatever we try to convince them of, let it be a product of the life we have lived, the faith we possess and the wisdom we have gained. Let it not be a reflection of our frustrations and fears. If we do our own growing up and resist the urge to push the tough questions onto the next generation, then we are being nurturing parents. If we try to convince our children that our curses have defined us more than our blessings, then we harm and handicap the very ones through whom we would live and be remembered.

Old Abe wants a good relationship for Isaac; he wants to establish a precedent for good relationships in his family, which, don't forget, stands to number as numerous as the stars in the heavens. Good relationships start at home. Actually, on the Jungian dream theory, good relationships start with trying to help the several voices in our own heads get along with each other. As the chosen one of God, the one who is blessed by God in all things, if Abraham is going to, as the saying goes, 'clean house and let the grace come in,' he has to start with himself, with his very own life. That's why he returns to his roots to find the mother of his grandchildren, to establish the foundation of his new family. He gets back to basics.

We say that Jesus has come to initiate a transformation of human history characterized by justice and peacemaking instead of domination and power. God knows, as well as you and I, that humankind have slowed and obstructed this project in innumerable, stunning and awful ways. But equally clear is the reason, the commission and the vocation we have, to live our lives in resistance to injustice, to call out misuses of power, and put a name on desperate greed and violence wherever and whenever

we encounter them: to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. The process, of course has to begin between our own ears; ours is the first house we have to clean.

The childlike understanding Jesus talks about is one of faith, courage and commitment, not of intellectual discernment and wile. Organized grownups in charge of things tend to want to get all our ducks in a row before fooling around with letting go of power for others' sake, or making justice our primary goal, with faith that order will follow. Doing the right thing can seem so foolish, irresponsible, and unacceptably risky. But only such a childlike faith and confidence, a humble, unencumbered kind of understanding will enable us to act as our best selves and ever be truly free.

### **Hymn 544 Jesus shall reign, where'er the sun**

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun  
Doth his successive journeys run;  
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,  
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

To him shall endless prayer be made,  
And praises throng to crown his head;  
His Name like sweet perfume shall rise  
With every morning sacrifice.

People and realms of every tongue  
Dwell on his love with sweetest song;  
And infant voices shall proclaim  
Their early blessings on his Name.

Blessings abound where'er he reigns:  
The prisoners leap to lose their chains,  
The weary find eternal rest,  
And all who suffer want are blest.

Let every creature rise and bring  
Peculiar honors to our King;  
Angels descend with songs again,  
And earth repeat the loud amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5U4IMtvp6bg>

**Correction: The sermon in last week's *Missive* noted our nation's birthday. Of course, the Declaration of Independence was 247 years ago, not 147. Wise observers also pointed out that, because of the persistence of injustice, we continue to have ample reason for the rebirth of our democratic experiment.**

**Also Note: No *Missive* on July 16 – Summer hiatus – See you July 23**

### **A Sick-Room Idyll**

When Nellie sits beside my bed,  
She thinks, to please a Poet,  
Her talk must be of books,  
Although I'd rather she'd forego it.

For oft she makes such queer mistakes  
I must break out in laughter,  
And then she looks so grieved, that I  
Repent the minute after.

Yet though she talks of Ruskin's plays,  
Of Dickens' *Tristram Shandy*,  
There's none can clearer jellies make,  
Or match with her in candy.

What though she strays from Pope to Poe  
With fancy wild and vagrant,  
There's none brings oranges so big  
Or apples half so fragrant.

And then her eyes are clear and kind,  
Her mouth is sweet and rosy,  
She brings me now chrysanthemums,  
Now violets in a posy.

Her pastry, too, is always crisp,  
Her sweets are never gritty,  
Her frocks are always neat and fine,  
Her face is good and pretty.

So while in kindness she is rich,  
What though her lore be scanty?  
What though she talk of Homer's *Faust*,  
Or *Don Quixote* by Dante?

What though she asks what Jane Eyre wrote?  
If Wordsworth still be living?  
O, I forgive her all, for she  
Herself is so forgiving.

William Gay