

The Sunday Missive – July 2, 2023 The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

518 Christ is made the sure foundation

Christ is made the sure foundation, Christ the head and cornerstone,
Chosen of the Lord, and precious, binding all the Church in one;
Holy Zion's help for ever, and her confidence alone.

All that dedicated city, dearly loved of God on high,
In exultant jubilation pours perpetual melody;
God the One in Three adoring in glad hymns eternally.

To this temple, where we call thee, come, O Lord of Hosts, today;
With thy wonted lovingkindness hear thy servants as they pray,
And thy fullest benediction shed within its walls away.

Here vouchsafe to all thy servants what they ask of thee to gain;
What they gain from thee, for ever with the blessed to retain,
And hereafter in thy glory evermore with thee to reign.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cR9NHXnbxIU&t=87s>

The Collect of the Day

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of
the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief
cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by
their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to
you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Genesis 22:1-14

God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you." So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood

for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

Psalm 89

1 Your love, O Lord, for ever will I sing; *
from age to age my mouth will proclaim your faithfulness.

2 For I am persuaded that your love is established for ever; *
you have set your faithfulness firmly in the heavens.

3 "I have made a covenant with my chosen one; *
I have sworn an oath to David my servant:

4 'I will establish your line for ever, *
and preserve your throne for all generations.'"

15 Happy are the people who know the festal shout! *
they walk, O Lord, in the light of your presence.

16 They rejoice daily in your Name; *
they are jubilant in your righteousness.

17 For you are the glory of their strength, *
and by your favor our might is exalted.

18 Truly, the Lord is our ruler; *
the Holy One of Israel is our King.

Romans 6:12-23

Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.

When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

324 Let all mortal flesh keep silence

Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly minded, for with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descendeth, our full homage to demand.

King of kings, yet born of Mary, as of old on earth he stood,
Lord of lords, in human vesture, in the Body and the Blood
He will give to all the faithful his own self for heavenly food.

Rank on rank the host of heaven spreads its vanguard on the way,
As the Light of Light descendeth from the realms of endless day,
That the powers of hell may vanish as the darkness clears away.

At his feet the six-winged seraph; cherubim, with sleepless eye
Veil their faces to the Presence, as with ceaseless voice they cry,
"Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia, Lord Most High!"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWTdLD5w92c>

Matthew 5: 13-20

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

How Full is Full? -- Proper8A

Love for one's immediate family – as we know -- is a biological and anthropological imperative, a fundamental dimension of the struggle for survival. The family that stays together is more likely to be the family that keeps it together. Allegiance, obedience and love for Jesus (who is described as love itself), on the other hand is a spiritual and voluntary characteristic. Even as children, we instinctively defend our family against all threats, unless some trauma has broken the family bond. But our appetite for mystical contemplation, that is thinking about the wonders of Creation and of human sense, thought, imagination, love and evil develops over time.

Reading away at a massive biography of Albert Einstein someone thoughtfully left in our book exchange, one learns how his appreciation of music, especially Mozart reflected his feel for the harmonies of the universe. “Music, Nature and God became intermingled in him in a complex of feeling, a moral unity.... He never lost his sense of wonder at the magic of Nature's phenomena that grownups find so commonplace: magnetic fields, gravity, inertia, acceleration, light beams. ‘People like you and me never grow old;’ he wrote a friend late in life, ‘we never cease to stand like children before the great mystery into which we were born.’”

For those of us who consider ourselves fans and followers of Jesus, hearing these matters discussed in the context of stories about the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, is one sure way we tune in to WGOD. And as we get older, our response to deep concerns and bright joys tends only to increase in gratitude and humility. As time goes on, where once we saw the prospect of faith as an activity subordinate to family life, slowly we begin to see our families through the lens of our faith. This might sound like that Fifth Commandment, "Honor thy Father and thy Mother," had been vacated. But since Jesus claims not to have come to abolish the law but to fulfill it, we have to contemplate this idea a bit more to get the jist of it.

Truly this movement -- from being part of a family who follow The Way to being a follower of The Way who's in a family -- is one of the greatest gifts of God in Christ. With this change comes our ability to part from one another and from this life in peace. Death no longer has dominion over us because our families are continuous over time; those who have died are not absent but transformed. Those who are yet to come are already here in the stories that will one day be theirs to tell. With this change comes the certain knowledge that our own dying will never be a tragedy; always a transformation.

One of the beautiful parts of our language is the way we compound words -- words like compound, for example -- taking elements from older words and putting them together to make new ones. These new words express ideas; they help us articulate the complexities of the human existence; they allow us to (verbally speaking) 'boldly go where nobody has gone before.' That Shakespeare was Shakespeare -- which is to say a ground-breaking genius -- is due in no small part to the thousands of words he invented for his characters. If a word did not exist for what he wanted them to express, he made one up.

Another example is the King James Bible, whose enormous and lasting impact comes partly from the richness of the language it employs. Compound words are articulated metaphors. If you are

making a special mixture of medicinal powders, perhaps you put them in a big bowl or mortar and pound away with your pestle until they are thoroughly blended. You com-pound them; you together-pound them. This may seem like a simple and obvious idea, but when we try to understand the teachings of Jesus, the simplest and most obvious ideas are often the ones we struggle with, even to the point of missing them entirely.

Thus is the case with Jesus' announcement that he has come to fulfill the law. He doesn't say he's going to carry it out, or enforce it. Fulfill implies carrying out to completion; it means that whatever law there is, whatever righteousness is possible for humankind to attain, whatever potential there is for the human race to flourish, Jesus has come to identify for us. And he will not only identify the frontiers of spiritual possibility; he promises to encourage and empower us to help move our lives in their direction.

That's why it's not called fillment, but fulfillment. And it's fulfillment that requires radical behavior; that is, behavior that gets to the root of things. So, as for that Fifth Commandment, of course honoring one's family connections and allegiances and obligations is important. Two thousand years later, we still need each other. The state of our family love still profoundly effects our ability to form relationships and make commitments, our value to the communities we live in and our inner peace. But if our families make demands on us or inflict wounds on us that turn us from paths of love and peacefulness, they can turn us into part of the problem; bad eggs; toxic avengers. This is why following Jesus is the greater priority.

The story of Abraham and Isaac surely represents more than a legend about the time the Israelites quit doing human sacrifices. Such a fundamental choice on his part, to follow the instructions of God, prioritizing them over his own deepest familial instincts, can't be advice about how to worship. If it were, this grisly tale of allegiance versus discernment would paint the deity as a cruel, bullying teaser.

No, this story, however it came about in the first place is useful to us now as an allegory, a parable. Abraham's ill-considered conception of God brings him close to irreversible tragedy. Likewise, blind allegiance to some destructive idea can surely lead us to disaster. Our kids and our democracy are at risk. History, both ancient and contemporary is full of examples of decent people following indecent ideas to horrific ends. Abraham is willing to lose his worldly life – surely our children are that to us – because doing so is what he thinks God requires. But God requires no such thing; instead calling upon us to be just and humble and merciful. It follows that our eagerness to pursue those qualities – justice, humility, mercy -- is our sacrifice, our ram in the thicket. The angel promises “offspring numerous as the stars,” as the consequence of Abraham's cooperation; likewise our earnest attempts at godliness will have untold beneficiaries.

“Whoever does not take up the cross is not worthy of me.” In fulfilling the law, Jesus great act was to put others' flourishing ahead of his own, by choice. This is the cross: to look at life as a boundless field of opportunity for selfless love. Certainly, it's possible that in setting such a priority, one's own physical life will be cut short, by violence or otherwise – God knows that has happened all too often – nobody is being asked to make that a goal. When Jesus says willingness to lose one's life is central to the enterprise, he means two things: If that's what it takes, then that's what we'll do; if we have to die to allow another to live, we can be willing to do that. This is the life-losing Jesus is calling us to; this is the voice of God. Will it involve some hardship on occasion? Certainly.

Jesus is also talking about losing in the sense of not finding. Because if what we prioritize above all is finding our life, finding our bliss, so to speak, fulfilling ourselves personally, then whatever it is we accomplish will most likely end at the moment of our death. But if what we do is oriented towards the development of others, towards conservation of the planet and

peace among the peoples, there is a far more permanent satisfaction in the offing. Perhaps the life-losing is as simple a thing as setting aside my priorities, my preferences, my agenda on a given occasion and saying, "I want whatever you want today my love," and meaning it.

And so, we can live in the just belief that every selfless act of ours will resonate to eternity. We are called to be prophets, not profiteers. Likewise, on this eve of our 147th birthday, we do well to demand of ourselves and of all who would establish and enforce policies the answer to the question: Is the nation here to serve me or vice-versa?

Certainly, this question is painfully evident possibility here at home today as our precious experiment in democracy struggles to complete a quarter millennium of life. That is why we must know that "God shed his grace on thee, and crown thy good with brotherhood cannot be a proud congratulation, nor can it be a confident prediction, but always and only a humble petition for the present help we sorely need.

719 O Beautiful for spacious skies

O beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain;
For purple mountain majesties above the fruited plain!
America! America! God shed his grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea.

O beautiful for heroes proved in liberating strife,
Who more than self their country loved, and mercy more than life!
America! America! God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control, thy liberty in law.

O beautiful for patriot dream that sees beyond the years
Thine alabaster cities gleam, undimmed by human tears!
America! America! God shed his grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TR9HYwz4N6M>

Backlit by the Glitter-Chopped Horizon

Backlit by the glitter-chopped horizon,
Each of these 17 Marbled Godwits poking at the tideline
Must have a heartbeat; every living, perfect Whimbrel.
The surf is stacked, tilted,
As if it were higher than the beach.
There is an urgency to turn home,
Get this assignment of pleasure done,
Strike it off the list
Where *vanish* will be the last task,
And then there is the thought of those 17 hearts.
Less rain means more salt, anchovies, more whales;
A ferment to savor
Against a distant cloud of Shearwaters
Above the incessant upwelling.

Killarney Clary