

The Sunday Missive – March 12, 2023

The Third Sunday in Lent

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! Oh, 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>

The Collect of the Day

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Exodus 17:1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

Psalm 95

Come, let us sing to the Lord* ***Let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.***

Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving* ***And raise a loud shout to him with psalms.***

For the Lord is a great God* ***And a great King above all gods.***

In his hand are the caverns of the earth* ***And the heights of the hills are his also.***

The sea is his, for he made it* ***And his hands have molded the dry land.***

Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee* ***And kneel before the Lord our Maker.***

For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand* ***O that today you would hearken to his voice!***

Romans 5:1-11

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Hymn 522 Glorious things of Thee are spoken

Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God;
He whose word cannot be broken formed thee for his own abode;
On the Rock of Ages founded, what can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation's walls surrounded, thou may'st smile at all thy foes.

See! the streams of living waters, springing from eternal love,
Well supply thy sons and daughters and all fear of want remove.
Who can faint, when such a river ever will their thirst assuage?
Grace which, like the Lord, the giver, never fails from age to age.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTpali6Uhi4&t=13s>

John 4:5-42

Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What

you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So

when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”

Suffer the Little Children - Lent3A

In listening to these biblical stories that embrace the metaphor of water and the centrality of water to the human experience, we here in California have a leg up on some of our fellow Americans: we know what it's like to be short of water. We also know what it's like to have too much of it at a time. Of course, our problems however pressing, don't compare with those of a multitude of others, especially in Africa, who have never known what it's like to take a cool drink of clean water, let alone a shower or a swim, or people in places like Pakistan and Bangladesh who regularly perish by the hundreds when water gets out of control.

But we do know the concept of 'parch' and we do recognize the concept of 'flood.' Today especially, our hearts are full of the plight of those in our own community whose homes are full of water. When the Egyptians get stuck in the mud and are unable to follow through with their plans, and when the Israelites complain to Moses that they are being killed with the weapon of thirst, we can at least imagine their condition better than many. I grew up near the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, which meant that all of us were mobilized on more than one occasion to go out and pile sandbags in the most vulnerable of neighborhoods.

But here, after several years of drought, we can still get excited when we read about how Moses strikes the rock with his stick and water gushes out; we can relate to the people's joy and wonderment.

After all, there are things a person needs. In our culture, it is very difficult to identify just what needs are, because so many of us are engaged in trying to blur the pertinent truth. The vast majority of things, deeds and experiences that come to our attention – that come on the market – cannot be truthfully described as necessary. We sell stuff using every available strategy to convince one another that we can't do without it; indeed that we will suffer without it.

Water, on the other hand, is a real need. Food, clothing, shelter, health care, and education, some form of all of these are also necessary to a decent, normal, whole life. But one could make a case that water is the most important of all of them. So when Jesus arrives at High Noon at a well in the desert, we can easily understand why he asks for a drink of water, and why he doesn't care about the ethnicity or back story of the person who brings it. He's just thirsty.

Quite quickly, however the scene changes from a simple one of a thirsty fellow getting a drink of well water from the nearest person with a bucket, to an opportunity for Jesus to describe his entire enterprise, to lay his entire program to this woman, saying, 'Everyone who drinks of this here well (of H₂O) will be thirsty again before tomorrow. But those who drink of the water that I am now offering you will never be thirsty again. The water that I have to give will become in you a spring that gushes up to provide eternal life.'

Jesus is talking here about the final necessary ingredient in the life of every human being who would live fully; he is talking about love. Without the experience of love, all the water in the world will not satisfy our thirst. But give a person a foundation of nurturing love and, even if things grow dry and times get tough, they will never forget it; they will have an emotional and spiritual foundation, and a shot at a full life.

This foundation must be built as a person grows. The job of trying to insert love into a life that has not known it, becomes more difficult and precarious with each passing year. How hard would it be to pour a foundation under a building that's already built?

In a recent essay, T. Robinson Ahlstrom, Director of The Center for Children and Social Responsibility at the 'Stanford of the East' (aka Harvard University) writes: "Underestimating, undervaluing and underserving children is nothing new. As Jesus went about unfolding the Kingdom of God, his disciples became more and more personally ambitious... 'They disputed among themselves, who would be the greatest.'" The King James Bible says 'Jesus was displeased.' Let's face it, he was ticked off. But his response was to reorient their attention from matters of worldly want to the real business of building the foundations of a healthy society. His response was to turn their attention back where it belonged: "Suffer the little children to come unto me," he says "and forbid them not; for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

"There is a sacredness in tears," wrote Washington Irving, "They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues." Perhaps the greatest question of our age is whether the world's grownups will ever notice the tears of the world's children. Almost one-third of the world's seven billion people are children? Of those 2.2 billion children, five hundred million have no access to sanitation. Four hundred million lack safe water. Three hundred million receive no health care. Two hundred million -- mostly girls -- receive no education. More than one hundred million children endure severe malnutrition.

The world is a tough neighborhood -- especially for children. Among the horrors perpetrated upon today's children, we note the genocidal situation in Ukraine, where in every occupied area, hundreds of local children are being kidnapped daily and forcibly sent to live with families deep inside Russia in order to exterminate their native identity. As we are only now coming to admit, this happened here in the Americas in the past; it's happening today in Eastern Europe.

While serious people may spar over the causes and cures of the world's political turmoil, social unrest and economic dislocation, one thing is certain: it is the children who suffer. Alleviating the sorrowful and outrageous trauma of children around the world surely represents a primary moral imperative of our generation.

The woman at the well is surely one of the most recognizable figures of the Gospels. With her built-in marginality as a Samaritan – foreign and unapproachable to the culture of the Jews in Palestine -- plus her automatic second class status as a woman that is only compounded by her history of multiple unconventional relationships, she represents everything that might be described as illegitimate and 'other.'

Yet she is the one Jesus chooses to engage with, to explicate his true purpose and deepest desires, and from whom to accept the mutual healing and refreshment of water. She is truly the child of God Jesus means to talk about when he says, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Jesus allows his own physical thirst to be slaked by her and makes it known that his business here on earth is to see that her spiritual thirst is quenched without hesitation or limitation. Surely those are our own vocations as well.

Hymn 690 Guide me, O thou great Jehovah

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty; hold me with thy powerful hand;
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me now and evermore,

Open now the crystal fountain, whence the healing stream doth flow;
Let the fire and cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through;
Strong deliverer, strong deliverer. be thou still my strength and shield,

When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death, and hell's destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side;
Songs of praises, songs of praises, I will ever give to thee

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lv_vzUs6i5s

Sunrise

You can die for it—
an idea, or the world. People
have done so, brilliantly,
letting their small bodies be bound
to the stake, creating
an unforgettable fury of light. But
this morning, climbing the familiar hills
in the familiar fabric of dawn, I thought
of China, and India
and Europe, and I thought how the sun
blazes for everyone just
so joyfully as it rises
under the lashes of my own eyes, and I thought
I am so many! What is my name?
What is the name of the deep breath I would take
over and over for all of us? Call it
whatever you want, it is happiness, it is another one
of the ways to enter fire.

Mary Oliver