

**The Sunday Missive, October 3, 2021**  
**The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Hymn 398 I sing the almighty power of God**

I sing the almighty power of God, that made the mountains rise,  
That spread the flowing seas abroad and built the lofty skies.  
I sing the wisdom that ordained the sun to rule the day;  
The moon shines full at his command, and all the stars obey.

I sing the goodness of the Lord, that filled the earth with food;  
He formed the creatures with his Word, and then pronounced them good.  
Lord, how thy wonders are displayed, where'er I turn my eye,  
If I survey the ground I tread, or gaze upon the sky!

There's not a plant or flower below, but makes thy glories known,  
And clouds arise, and tempests blow, by order from thy throne;  
While all that borrows life from thee is ever in thy care,  
And everywhere that I could be, thou, God, art present there.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5TqHiYSN8U>

**Collect of the Day**

God of unchangeable power, when you fashioned the world the  
morning stars sang together and the host of heaven shouted for joy;  
open our eyes to the wonders of creation and teach us to use all things  
for good, to the honor of your glorious name; through Jesus Christ our  
Lord. *Amen*

**Blessing of the Animals**

Celebrant: Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

***People: And blessed be God's kingdom, now and forever. Amen.***

Celebrant: The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord;

***People: And you give them their food in due season.***

Celebrant: You open wide your hand,

***People: And fill all living things with plenteousness.***

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.

***People: And also with you.***

Celebrant: Let us pray. O Lord God, king of heaven and earth, by whom all things were made and given to us: We entreat you mercifully to look upon us, your servants. As you give us your help in our daily lives and work, so grant of your loving kindness and mercy to bless, keep, and protect the animals in our care with your heavenly benediction, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. ***Amen.***

Gracious God, you helped St. Francis reflect the image of Christ through a life of holy poverty and humility. May we also learn to follow in the footsteps of Francis of Assisi by imitating his joyful care for all your creatures. Let these animals receive your blessing O Lord for the benefit of their being and deliver them from all harm. ***Amen.***

Most gracious God, wondrous Creator, source and inspiration for all living creatures, we beseech thee to hear our heartfelt prayers, as we cherish and bless the animals who bring joy into our lives. By the power of Your love, enable them to live according to your goodness and freedom. Enable us to treat them with the honor, respect, compassion And wonderment that they, and all your works deserve. May we always praise You for all Your beauty in Creation, and may we always remain aware of the great responsibility we have to care gently for all those over whom we have power. Blessed are You, God, in all Your creatures! ***Amen.***

## **The Word of God**

### **The Book of Job, 1:1, 2:1-10**

There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord. The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the Lord, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to

destroy him for no reason.” Then Satan answered the Lord, “Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.” The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life.”

So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes. Then his wife said to him, “Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die.” But he said to her, “You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

### **Psalm 8**

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth\* You have set your glory above the heavens.

Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes\* To silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established\* What are we, mere mortals that you are mindful of us?

Yet you have made us a little lower than God\* And crowned us with glory and honor.

You have given us dominion over the works of your hands\* You have put all things under our feet.

All sheep and oxen, and the beasts of the field\* The birds of the air, the fish and all that passes along the paths of the seas.

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth\* You have set your glory above the heavens forever.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZyPEJ9MauA8>

## **The Letter to the Hebrews, 1:1-2:12**

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"? And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire." But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions." And, "In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like clothing; like a cloak you will roll them up, and like clothing they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will never end." But to which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? Are not all angels spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

Therefore we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the message declared through angels was valid, and every transgression or disobedience received a just penalty, how can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? It was declared at first through the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God added his testimony by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will.

Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. But someone has testified somewhere, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, subjecting all things under their feet." Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you."

### **Hymn 506 Praise the Spirit in Creation**

Praise the Spirit in creation, breath of God, life's origin:  
Spirit moving on the waters, quickening worlds to life within,  
Source of breath to all things breathing, life in whom all lives begin.

Praise the Spirit, close companion of our inmost thoughts and ways;  
Who, in showing us God's wonders, is himself the power to gaze;  
And God's will, to those who listen, by a still small voice conveys.

Pray we then, O Lord the Spirit, praise the Father, praise the Word,  
Source, and Truth, and Inspiration, Trinity in deep accord;  
Through your voice which speaks within us  
We, your creatures call you Lord.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yx\\_pSeU5dlc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yx_pSeU5dlc)

### **Mark 10: 2-16**

Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered them, "What did Moses

command you?” They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

### **Forget Why – Proper 22B**

Theodicy – The justice of God -- How can a benevolent Creator allow bad things to happen to good people? Some say this question is beyond our comprehension. Two basic answers are 1, that God is flippant, vindictive, cruel and unpredicable, flipping coins between Nectar Mai Tais, or whatever they drink up there in Heaven, and condemning or preserving based on random selection to teach us a lesson in acceptance, and subservience. On this view, our fate is based on God’s whims, and there is no apparent reason to pay any attention to the way of righteousness and compassion, because it won’t do us a bit of good anyway. When I served as Chaplain in big hospitals with busy Emergency rooms, it was clear to me that the last thing you should ever say to a parent in the middle of the night whose child had been in a crash was anything on the order of this theory: “It’s God’s will.”

The other answer says that all of Creation was set in motion by the Prime Mover, the original Force of Nature, The Lord of Hosts who made both Heaven and Earth, and who has vowed to interfere neither in human affairs nor in the Natural Order. Nature is what it is, and we have to deal with it. On this view, Humanity has been given consciousness in order to enjoy and engender righteousness if we will, by walking the way of truth and compassion and justice and stewardship of the Earth. God will bring about perfection someday, but Human history is about what happens in the meantime: how we relate to each other and to our environment in the context of natural forces and human violence. And God looks on and laughs or cries, comforts or condemns based on how we do and what happens to us, but does not interfere. "God is here, and she is mourning with you."

Some say the question is beyond our comprehension, because they don't like the second answer. They don't feel like walking, so they declare the path unfit. But as the Wolof say, "It's better to walk than to be angry at the road." Walking means trying to understand what God wants, then staying true to that, come what may. We can forget about our righteousness, about our payoff, our personal feelings and preferences and simply remember what it felt like not to be connected. We have no reason to do good except that having been at the crossroads, we have perceived this more gracious way to be attractive, preferable, even irresistible for those who are really listening. And we can follow it even when terrible things happen.

James Gustafson has written of the contrast between a "utilitarian" religion that justifies religious faith by its benefits for human persons and a genuinely "theocentric" orientation focused on serving God and God's purposes without reference to the self."

Some suffering is brought on ourselves, but some, if not most, is undeserved. There is only one formula for the path, and that is to persist in seeking ways to the Good, no matter what our personal circumstances. Love God by loving Neighbor and we might add, Neighborhood (as in the planet itself), and try to accept our immediate outcomes, especially when they involve suffering, as our own part of human history, subject to cosmic resolution on that great day when we all cross the Jordan together.

This is not to say that loving the Neighbor and the Neighborhood are purely mental and emotional undertakings. Loving the Neighbor also involves establishing governance and enforcing laws that seek to protect the innocent and oppressed. For example regulating and reducing the presence of guns, not because you can't handle them, but because we – as a race of people – can't handle them. God is God and will not interfere, but we must interfere, and do something different when what we're doing isn't working. Shtuff happens, it's true, but when it comes to human shtuff, we are responsible for making changes in what happens.

Maia Kotrosits and Hal Taussig have observed in their provocative book *Rereading the Gospel of Mark Amidst Loss and Trauma* "Following Jesus turns out to have a quirky mix of joy, plot twists, disturbing events, inspiring people and harrowing challenges. Mark's story especially forces unpleasant and beautiful surprises on the reader, and following Jesus entails confronting all kinds of pain, reworking one's expectations, and being ambushed by goodness."

So they asked him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered them, "The law says yes, because God knows you're going to do it anyway. But when people marry, the two are no longer two, but one flesh, and therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. Which means whoever divorces a spouse commits adultery." You don't make a commitment, then dismiss it when you feel like it. Let no one separate them. However: if after prayerful consideration, mutual admission of realities, however painful, and with a true desire on the part of each to care for the spirit of the other, two people decide to forgive each other that commitment and create space in both of their lives for newly created commitments, then no one is putting those people asunder. This is a whole lot less neat and tidy than, "No divorce, ever, period," but it is whole lot more realistic and redemptive. Perhaps God allows a do-over. God must allow do-overs, or how many of us would be sitting here.

Last week we talked about the intention and workings of God – in Nature, of Nature, indeed as Nature. Lenny has thoughtfully pointed out that the great thinker Baruch Spinoza came up with this way of thinking about God a long time ago. For his trouble, he was excommunicated from the synagogue for daring to broaden the



conversation about God beyond accepted doctrines. Spinoza was saved from ignominy and supported wholeheartedly by a new community, and of course nowadays this way of thinking about God can be very helpful. Instead of being cursed for saying these things, I personally have been rewarded by Nature in the form of a little whiskery quadruped, rescued from disease and starvation and now providing me the “quirky mix of joy and challenges” that come with canine companionship.

The dog’s name is Fulu, which I made up because I thought it would be fun to say. But further research shows that Fulu was a word already. In Chinese, in the Taoist religion, the Fulu were holy seers who could draw and write supernatural talismans that functioned as summons or instructions to deities and spirits, as tools of exorcism, and as medicinal potions. So perhaps this is a holy dog after all; I keep a close eye and ear on him and he has taught me a great deal.

Fulu, not to be confused with Zulu, the African tribe whose dispersion extends to Tanzania, where some years ago we sent a much-needed ambulance which we hope they’re still using.

Also not to be confused with Bulu, as in *Alah le bulu*, a Mandinka proverb from the other side of the African continent. *Alah le bulu* means “God disposes.” We hear Job addressing his friends and his family with this very sentiment: “The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away; blessed be the Name of the Lord. God disposes; Nature runs its course. It is truly horrifying to think of God allowing one of his minions, Satan, to goad him into endorsing Job’s torture just to prove Job’s allegiance to The Name of the Lord. It’s part of the biblical canon that we have to set aside, along with anything else that attributes intentional suffering to the deity. What can be stunning and sad and frightening, but not inexplicably horrifying, is the reality that Nature’s course involves human suffering.

That this is an unshakable truth means that we attribute to Nature’s course anything moral or situational or theological at the peril of our spiritual lives. If the presence of guns in our culture is ruining too many lives, we can’t blame God – or Nature. If our behavior is ruining our climate, we can’t blame God – or the planet. If an automobile goes into a bridge abutment, it’s because somebody did

something. And we can't expect to live without suffering and pain, despite what the hospital billboards say. Like Job, we don't have to like the pain, the tragedy, the betrayals and disappointments that life brings to us, along with our joys and pleasures, but also like Job, we can know that those agonies need not define our embrace of, and reliance upon the God of all Creation, any more than we can expect or even hope for a life free of pain. We can, instead recall that God is with us in the midst of all our sufferings, and that God's plan is for us to have hopefulness and peace in our hearts no matter what the physical world and the people in it do to us. We can, like Job, know that our redeemer lives, who will raise us up on the last day. And we can continue to try changing what we can change.

Now they say that in subjecting all things to humanity, God left nothing outside our control. But you and I both know that not everything is in subjection to us, least of all ourselves. That's what gets us so confused, that we are clearly supposed to be in charge, but there is so much we can't control. But then we consider Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, like us. God made god's self the pioneer of our salvation through suffering, and Jesus is not ashamed to call us sisters and brothers, because whether we celebrate or suffer, we too are saved by knowing we always reside in the arms of God. This gives us the freedom to do what we can while we can and to let go of the question: "Why?"

### **The Prayers of the People**

God of love, we praise and thank you for making animals as a part of your wonderful creation. Help us and all people be kind to the animals in our care. Touch our hearts with your love and increase our respect for all of your creation. All this we ask through Christ our Lord. **Amen.** Creator of the World, you have made all things for your glory. Look with kindness on all sick animals and, if it is your will, restore them to health and strength. **Amen.**

(After each of the following petitions, please respond, ***Be welcome in this world we share.***)

God said to Job, "I am the one who makes the horse so brave and covers his neck with flowing hair. I am the one who makes him leap like a grasshopper. His proud neighing spreads far and wide. Exultantly he paws the soil of the valley, and prances eagerly to meet the clash of arms. He laughs at fear, he is afraid of nothing. Quivering with impatience, he eats up the miles; when the trumpet sounds, there is no holding him. All wild and tame horses. ***Be welcome in this world we share.***

The hawk takes flight at my advice when he spreads his wings to travel south. The eagle soars at my command to make her aerie in the heights. All hawks and eagles, sparrows and robins, owls and wrens and birds of every kind: ***Be welcome in this world we share.***

Now think of the hippopotamus. What strength in those legs, what power in those muscles! The Hippo is the masterpiece of all God's work, lying beneath the lotus, and hunting among the reeds in the swamps. Should the river overflow, why should she worry? A river could pour down her throat without harm. All hippos and rhinos and elephants, and lions and tigers and bears: ***Be welcome in this world we share.***

Our storied animals, Yogi and Boo-Boo, Snoopy and Lassie, Winnie the Pooh and the Roadrunner too, and even the Wile E. Coyote: ***Be welcome in this world we share.***

Seals and Whales, Ants and Butterflies, Sows and Cows, dogs, cats, turtles, snakes, crickets; all our sisters and brothers. ***Be welcome in this world we share.***

Creator God, we are here today to remember our companion pets that have died that we now mention either silently or out loud. We thank you for creating them and blessing our homes with their companionship and love. We know that your care for every living thing extends beyond this earth, and we ask that you would comfort us. Help us to remember the times we shared and the special love that comes from animals. Strengthen us to give that same love again to those we currently care for and those who are to come. ***Amen.***

Let us pray. O merciful Creator, your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature: Make us always thankful for your loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the account we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts and the

creatures you have given into our charge; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Let us humbly confess our sins against God and our animal neighbors.

***O God the Source of life; enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all the living things to whom you have given this earth as home in common with us. We confess that we have sometimes exercised high and cruel dominion over your creatures, so that their voices, which should have gone up to you in song, have groaned in travail. May we realize that they live, not for us alone, but for themselves and for you, and that they love the sweetness of life even as do we, and serve you in their places more purely than we ever can in ours. Amen.***

## **The Peace**

### **Hymn 9 Not here for high and holy things**

Not here for high and holy things we render thanks to thee,  
But for the common things of earth, the purple pageantry  
Of dawning and of dying days, the splendor of the sea,

Awake, awake to love and work! The lark is in the sky,  
The fields are wet with diamond dew, the worlds awake to cry  
Their blessings on the Lord of life, as he goes meekly by.

So give and give, and give again, what God hath given thee;  
To spend thyself nor count the cost; to serve right gloriously  
The God who gave all worlds that are, and all that are to be.

**[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G\\_fcx98\\_Uq0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_fcx98_Uq0)**

Now let us go forth in peace to care for one another and all God's creatures with love. And let us go forth with hopeful hearts and helping hands, for the one who made us all will be our companion our inspiration and our strength, come what may. And so may the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier be with us this day and remain with us forever.