

The Sunday Missive – June 18, 2023

The Third Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 11 Awake my soul and with the sun

Awake, my soul, and with the sun thy daily stage of duty run;
Shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise to pay thy morning sacrifice.

Lord, I my vows to thee renew; disperse my sins as morning dew.
Guard my first springs of thought and will,
And with thyself my spirit fill.

Direct, control, suggest, this day, all I design, or do, or say;
That all my powers, with all their might,
In thy sole glory may unite.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnJW9GohDrw>

The Collect of the Day

Keep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Genesis 18:1-15, (21:1-7)

The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said,

“Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.” Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

They said to him, “Where is your wife Sarah?” And he said, “There, in the tent.” Then one said, “I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?” The Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.” But Sarah denied, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. He said, “Oh yes, you did laugh.”

[The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Now Sarah said, “God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.” And she said, “Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”]

Psalm 116

I love the Lord, who has heard the voice of my supplication*
Who has inclined an ear to me whenever I called upon God's name.

How shall I repay the Lord* ***For all the good things God has done for me?***

I will lift up the cup of salvation* ***And call upon the Name of the Lord.***

I will fulfill my vows to the Lord* ***In the presence of all God's people.***

O Lord, I am your servant and the child of your handmaid* ***You have freed me from my bonds.***

I will offer up the sacrifice of thanksgiving* ***And call upon the Name of the Lord.***

I will fulfill my vows to the Lord* ***In the presence of all God's people***

In the courts of the house of the Lord* ***In the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Hallelujah!***

Romans 5:1-8

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.

686 Come, thou font 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.

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=XKOoeTbjSeI>

The Gospel Matthew 9:35-10:8(9-23)

Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and

Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. [Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

“See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”

All My Eggs in One Basket – Proper 6A

This Fathers' Day it might be useful to look at some of the parallels between the role "Our Father," the heavenly one plays in our lives and the roles of our earthly parents. In the gospels, Jesus refers again and again to the benevolent higher power in the universe as his father. So consistently is this word used that instead of just thinking of it as an analogy, it might be helpful instead to consider the Godliness of parenthood.

And, make no mistake -- despite the desperate, cliff-hanging, antiquated and all-too-often brutal convictions of all-too-many folks from Kabul to Kampala to New Orleans -- although God may be our parent, God isn't a man. And the Word of God is in no way the exclusive property of men to interpret and disseminate. You and I may not be around when it happens, but sooner or later, everyone will pray, "Our Creator, who art in Heaven," or they won't pray at all. However painfully, human history does move forward.

The parallels between God's love and human parenting are inescapable, strikingly relatable and most instructive indeed. And if we believe there is such thing as goodness in the cosmos -- a benevolent higher power, the one we call God -- parents must listen for our cues from that very voice.

Whether our careers begin with a perfectly orchestrated series of life choices or not, becoming a parent is at once a unique and miraculous, life changing cataclysm and also among the most normal and unremarkable things a human can do. Once the decision is made to be a parent, we'd better not try and take it back. That's why the right to choose is so important.

Fred Astaire sang, "I'm puttin' all my eggs in one basket; I'm betting everything I have on you... I'm giving all my love to one baby; Lord help me if my baby don't come true." Likewise, God in Christ died once for us and rose again, that we might learn to die

ourselves in sure and certain hope of rising. Regardless of when, whether or how many our offspring, we too get one season as potential parents, one basket to put our eggs in, one opportunity to participate in the big show. And most of us want to “get it right.” We want our babies to come true. The problem is: that means something different for each of us.

The American Fatherhood Project collects stories from all kinds of people about their experiences of childhood. For example:

"My father has given me so much. It's difficult to pick just one memory. I remember when he teared up during my bat mitzvah rehearsal. I remember when he brought a miniature horse into the house when we all had chicken pox at the same time. I remember when he coached my soccer team, even though he didn't know the first thing about soccer. I remember a lot of different things. He's so consistently giving and generous that a lot of memories mesh together.

Just as did God in Christ, parents give this way – die this way – for their children without the slightest guarantee of the outcome. Some kids are no picnic. Dying for someone known to be just or good can be defended. Such a death has clear value: One life given up so that another worthy life might be spared or extended. To die for an idea or a friend may be an act of bravery, but to commit one's life for a morally penniless unknown quantity can only be an act of love.

God is if anything a realist, and seems to like keeping covenant with us even if we don't reciprocate. God's grace is, as Calvin put it, prevenient, anticipatory. That grace reaches out to encompass us before we're worthy, before we deserve it. God didn't wait until we became holy people; didn't even wait until we became nice, civil, generous or any of the things culture can condone. “While we were still weak, Christ died for the ungodly.

Umberto Eco notes that, sure, at the Exodus God wanted a kingdom of priests and a holy nation but got a bunch of desperadoes instead. If God had waited for Israel to be what they were called to be, she'd still be waiting. Likewise, the parental covenant with our kids. Teenagers can be very far from our ideals. They require the benefit of the doubt. Just as we require it ourselves when we set out to become parents. We are unproven, yet we have faith in one another; we may even develop faith in ourselves.

Today's verses from Matthew suggest that Jesus' teaching, preaching and healings are all motivated by compassion. He sees the people's plight and responds. His compassion is deeply embodied, rising out of his innermost being, according to the word that is used. This response is so critical because it leads him to action on their behalf. Compassion must always be the motivation for the work of ministry. Jesus reminds the apostles that they freely received God's deliverance and that they should freely offer it to others. And so it is for parents. Parents may see needs in front of them, but their compassionate response is what matters. Often it is despite their own experience. How much more miraculous when those who have not received good parenting give it anyway, breaking chains of dysfunction.

Fr. Gregory Boyle tells the story of Anthony, a trainee at Homeboy Industries who has three daughters:

Half of Anthony's life had been spent in jails and detention facilities. Before coming to us, a meth addiction crippled him surely as much as his earlier gang allegiance did. We're speaking in my office one day and he tells me that he and his twin brother, at nine years old, were taken from their parents and a house filled with violence and abuse and sent to live with their grandmother. "She was the meanest human being I've ever known," Anthony says. Every day after school, every weekend, and all summer long, for the entire year Anthony and his twin lived with her (until they ran away),

they were forced to strip down ... sit in this lonely hallway ... and not move. "She would put duct tape over our mouths ... cuz ... she said, 'I hate the sound of your voices.'" Then Anthony quakes as the emotion of this memory reverberates. "This is why," he says, holding a finger to his mouth, "I never shush my girls." He pauses and restores what he needs to continue. "I love the sound ... of their voices. In fact, when the oldest one grabs a crayon and draws wildly on the living room wall and my wife says, 'DO something! Aren't ya gonna TELL her something?' I crouch down, put my arm around my daughter, and the two of us stare at the wall, my cheek resting on hers, and I point and say, 'Now, *that's* the most magnificent work of art ... I have ever seen.'"

It can be tough, growing up. Thanksgiving rituals in ancient Israel, as in most cultures were intent on celebration of the new or renewed status of the person, group or community that had been in flux or in trouble, or both. Likewise, the birthday party. At the very least, the condition of trouble or the state of distress is childhood itself, even for the fortunate and privileged. The milestone is another year of life, whether we have thrived or just survived, and we think of the ritual as a time of happiness and celebration.

There certainly must be scars from such a past, but they are trophies of past triumphs and the residues of God's grace, to be cherished and celebrated, not embarrassedly hidden. Friends and family come to the party to feast, drink and dance to mark the end of a former state and the beginning of a new state of living: I was five, but now I'm six! There is a hostility that exists between humanity and the world, both because of sin, and because of the inherent precariousness of life itself. Birthdays are an acknowledgement of the resolution of that hostility, at least for another year. We're still here. God and human are reconciled with the help of Mom and Dad.

This story is told by one Harold Wilke, who was born with no arms:

I was two or three years old, sitting on the floor of my bedroom in our home, trying to get a shirt on over my head and around my shoulders, and having an extraordinarily difficult time. I was grunting and sweating and my mother just stood there and watched. Looking back on this from hearing about it a long time later, I realized that her arms must have been held rigidly at her sides, every instinct in her wanted to reach out and do it for me. Finally, her neighbour, a woman friend turned to her and said in exasperation, "Ida, why don't you help that child?" My mother responded through gritted teeth: "I am helping him."

Using the terms from Paul's letter to the Romans, theologians talk about the rule of grace under which we live now, and the kingdom of glory under the future reign of Christ. The rule of grace in this world is powered by God, but it is delivered – or not -- by parents. Parenting is the most important job in the human experience, and when we manage to do well at it, the best.

It's a unique opportunity and a unique responsibility. And sometimes we "honor" our parents by not being them.

I am ten years old. I am playing a video game on a GameCube that my mother doesn't know I own. That she expressly forbade. My dad still lives with us. When my mom isn't around, we play video games together on the console he hides in his bedroom. I don't know it, but I'm hanging out with Peter Pan. I don't know better. He should. He is the cool dad, the friend, the one who lets me do what I want to do. He is the financial trainwreck, the friend, the one who can't do what he knows he has to do. He is my father and if you ask me I'll tell you I love him. He is my father and if you ask me I'll tell you I will never let myself become him."

Or this:

My dad rarely surprises me because he is usually just reaffirming how good he already is. He's the guy that gives money to homeless people when he walks down the street. He's the guy who helps you when you're down and inspires you to get back up. I go to him for calming reassurance. When he tells me everything is going to be okay, I believe him because I know he will always try to make sure I'm happy. He has five kids and to all of us, he's our anchor and source of stability. No matter how much I despise some of his politics or the way he leaves pistachio nuts on the kitchen counter, he's my best friend and most trusted confidant. He's usually the first person I go to for advice. I might not tell my dad about who I have a crush on or other personal details, but I tell him about goals, aspirations, and fears. The stuff that makes me feel the most vulnerable, that's what I go with to him. I know who my dad is and that helps me grasp who I am.

For it is while we were yet helpless and brimming with iniquity -- and with unrealized potential -- incapable of living by ourselves in faith toward God -- or anything else for that matter -- that they came to our undeserved rescue and loved us as their own.

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=233EE1w83oc&t=24s>

Forever

I had not known before
Forever was so long a word.
The slow stroke of the clock of time
I had not heard.

'Tis hard to learn so late;
It seems no sad heart really learns,
But hopes and trusts and doubts and fears,
And bleeds and burns.

The night is not all dark,
Nor is the day all it seems,
But each may bring me this relief—
My dreams and dreams.

I had not known before
That Never was so sad a word,
So wrap me in forgetfulness—
I have not heard.

Paul Laurence Dunbar