

The Sunday Missive – May 21, 2023

The Seventh Sunday of Easter

Hymn 481 Rejoice the Lord is King

Rejoice, the Lord is King: your Lord and King adore!
Rejoice, give thanks and sing, and triumph evermore.
Lift up your heart; lift up your voice!
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

Jesus, the Savior, reigns, the God of truth and love;
When He has purged our stains, he took his seat above;
Lift up your heart; lift up your voice!
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

His kingdom cannot fail, he rules o'er earth and heav'n;
The keys of death and hell are to our Jesus giv'n:
Lift up your heart; lift up your voice!
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

Rejoice in glorious hope! Our Lord and judge shall come
And take His servants up to their eternal home:
Lift up your heart; lift up your voice!
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhEUCSzaU8M>

The Collect of the Day

O God, the King of glory, you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven: Do not leave us comfortless, but send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us, and exalt us to that place where our Savior Christ has gone before; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting.

The First Lesson Acts 1:6-14

When the apostles had come together, they asked Jesus, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It

is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Psalm 68

Sing to God, sing praises to his Name* ***Exalt the one who rides upon the heavens***

God gives the solitary a home* ***And brings forth prisoners into freedom.***

O God, when you went forth before your people* ***When you marched through the wilderness***

The earth shook, and the skies poured down rain* ***At the presence of God, the God of Israel.***

You sent a gracious rain, O God, upon your inheritance* ***You refreshed the land when it was weary.***

It was there your people found their home* ***For in your goodness, you have made provision for the poor.***

Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth* ***Sing your praises to the Lord.***

Who rides in the heavens, the ancient heavens* ***And sends forth a voice, a mighty voice.***

Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel* ***Whose strength is in the skies.***

How wonderful is God in all the holy places* Giving strength and power to his people!

The Second Lesson 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

Wonder, Love and Praise Hymn 778 We are all one in mission

We all are one in mission, we all are one in call,
Our varied gifts united by Christ, the Lord of all.
A single, great commission compels us from above
To plan and work together that all may know Christ's love.

We all are called for service to witness in God's name.
Our ministries are different, our purpose is the same:

To touch the lives of others by God's surprising grace,
So people of all nations may feel God's warm embrace.

Now let us be united and let our song be heard.
Now let us be a vessel for God's redeeming Word.
We all are one in mission, we all are one in call,
Our varied gifts united by Christ, the Lord of all.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G78gwFgIghs>

The Gospel John 17:1-11

Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one."

He'll be Back -- Easter 7A

"It is not for you to know the time or the period when everything will be perfect," says Jesus, to his disappointed followers, "your job is to be my witnesses, in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth

– and you will have the power to do it!” Then he just disappeared, old style like Elijah before him. He just flew up into the sky is how the story goes: The Ascension! It comes right before the last Sunday of Easter. Which is today.

Jesus lived and while he lived he did such things that the people who knew him best were pretty darn convinced that he was uniquely virtuous, wise, and powerful beyond comprehension. Then he died a human death, but in such a way that the people around him were further convinced that they had been in the presence of a being who was a unique, divine being, however human in his physicality. Even people who knew little of him were convinced of his glorious nature when they observed his death. And then Jesus burst the bonds of death, left his grave, and appeared to his friends convincingly enough to establish the conviction that persists in the Church: *Christos Anesti; Alethos Anesti!* The Lord is risen; is risen indeed!

Despite the drama and wonder of the Ascension event, it is followed immediately by a cold, hard truth: he’s gone. We may have a great story to tell, lots of them in fact, but the man himself is gone. Our leader – J the C -- has left the building; has left the planet. All we can do is gaze upward at where he disappeared. It’s not a nice feeling to be left alone. And as if that’s not bad enough, suddenly a couple of mysterious strangers appear: “Why are you lookin up to heaven, folks?” Like in New York: somebody stops and looks up and pretty soon you have a crowd, all craning their necks skyward, waiting for whatever it is to fall or fly. Now the fact that these two characters magically appear to the disciples, coupled with their awareness of the future, plus their great white outfits clues us in to the possibility that they’re not just passers-by. Don’t forget a similar pair – maybe these same two – were seen at the empty tomb 40 days ago, and they knew what was up, so to speak.

On the other hand, since our biblical texts are notoriously spotty when it comes to full sets of facts – forensically challenged, shall we say – maybe something was left out, or added. Maybe there were just two fellas walking by who happened to be wearing light-colored robes; who stopped and saw people looking up and naturally asked what everybody was looking at. And when they heard what had happened, one of them wisecracked, “Aww, he’ll be back,” as they went on their merry way.

It really doesn’t matter whether we envision a great divine display of magic that sends angels down to deliver ironic messages – I mean if they were

Angels, these Angels only showed up because they knew the disciples were standing there looking up. They didn't really need to ask, "What are you people of Galilee looking at?" if they were angels. On the other hand, if they were a couple of local smart alecks heckling those nutty "Followers of the Way," it doesn't change things. Either way, the disciples are at once mildly humiliated and joyfully reassured. They've been teased for staring up into the empty sky, but they've also received vital information, information that will make sense of the difficult, wonderful, tragic experiences they had just come through, that will make their whole story come together, and will validate forever their faith in a loving God: "He'll be back."

Meanwhile, they went home and prayed. Maybe they prayed Psalm 68, like we just did. Let God rise up, let his enemies be scattered; let those who hate him flee before him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; as wax melts before the fire, let the wicked perish before God. But let the righteous be joyful; let them exult before God; let them be jubilant with joy.

They prayed, and then they went out to do the work of God, while they waited for the words of those angels (or knuckleheads) to come true: "He'll be back." In one sense, we are still waiting. Yes. And we're still praying. Amen. And praise God we're still going out to fight the good fight when and where we can. It's not – pick your cliché – a stroll in the park, a bed of roses, a bowl of cherries however. Because, as Peter wrote, "Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil is prowling around, looking for someone to devour." And don't let's kid ourselves. Yes, Satan, like God, works through other people, and them hurting us feels like him devouring us, quite a lot of the time. But Satan also devours us from within, working fifty ways from Sunday to keep us from the work of God. Satan is forever trying to convince us that, despite the toll we take on others, despite the violence and inequity and injustice our activities entail, the best criteria for determining the godliness of a feeling or action is our own interest. That is the lie that devours us.

Recall Aesop's Four Oxen and the Lion: ... At last, however, they fell quarrelling among themselves, and each went off to pasture alone in a separate corner of the field. Then the Lion attacked them one by one and soon made an end of all four.

In a recent TED talk, Adam Leipzig talked about a survey he conducted at his 25th college reunion. He discovered that 80% of his classmates were at least partially unhappy, because they felt their lives were not meaningful. The 20% who claimed happiness shared one important characteristic that the other 80 largely lacked: Their meaningful lives were conducted with a greater awareness of and orientation towards the interests, needs and development of others, the people they lived with and served: By love given, not by anything received or achieved. The desire to fulfill, enrich or aggrandize themselves was secondary in the happy 20. “This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent,” and glorify you on earth by doing the work that you give them to do, to love.

It is important to bear in mind that this kind of love Jesus represents extends far beyond mere kindness to the weak and unfortunate. As Richard Rohr points out, evil, and disorder included and forgiven are part of the divine order, as the absolute centrality of forgiveness in Jesus’ teaching makes clear. Forgiveness doesn’t nullify or eliminate offensive actions. It acknowledges and radically names and exposes that sin, evil, and fault do indeed happen and must indeed be arrested. Forgiveness does not, cannot and must not pretend to undo them. God does not undo the sins of humans or of history, nor can we, but from an infinite source, forgives them in favour of new life.

“We shall never in this life be simply creative, loving and free. The old opposites will still be with us as long as we live. However, if we look upon them now with more tolerance of ourselves and one another, with less fret and self-hatred and self-punishment, we die to the old pattern of living in the past and for the past, and we increasingly live toward the future and for the future. We trust in a deeper way and we risk in new ways as we lay claim to our essential selves, and become what we are.” So writes Jesse Trotter. The other way is what one wag describes as ‘looking forward to the past and regretting the future.’ In other words, always maintaining reasons for not loving, reasons in a past that cannot be changed, and thus, dictate a future wherein love must be carefully dispensed because it is in limited supply.

Jesus himself prays for us in today's Gospel. He knows that Satan prowls in the darkness. He knows it is in encountering Satan in the darkness that we learn and grow. Jesus knows we need protection and prays to God for our sake: "Holy One, this is eternal life: That they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. That's me. And now I am no longer going to be in the world, but they are in the world, and so, as I leave them to come be with you, protect them in my name so that they may be one as you and I are one." He knows we need help in freeing ourselves for love.

When struggling through encounters with Satan in the dark, these things will help us: Humility, a true belief that we are all indeed one, which means that nobody is singled out for better treatment by God than anybody else, neither are they more likely to be doomed. Stuff happens. Peter expounds: "All of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.".

Marilyn Chandler McEntyre's poem What to Do in the Darkness adds these tips:

Go slowly – Consent to it -- But don't wallow in it
Know it as a place of germination -- And growth
Remember the light – Take an outstretched hand if you find one
Exercise unused senses -- Find the path by walking it
Practice trust -- Watch for dawn. Trust love

Hymn 484 Praise the Lord through every nation

Praise the Lord through every nation;
His holy arm hath wrought salvation;
Exalt him on his Father's throne.
Praise your King, ye Christian legions,
Who now prepares in heavenly regions
Unfailing mansions for his own: with voice and minstrelsy
Extol his majesty: Alleluia!
His praise shall sound all nature round,
And hymns on every tongue abound.

Jesus, Lord, our Captain glorious,
O'er sin, and death, and hell victorious,
Wisdom and might to thee belong:
We confess, proclaim, adore thee;
We bow the knee, we fall before thee;
Thy love henceforth shall be our song.
The cross meanwhile we bear,
the crown ere-long to wear:
Alleluia!
Thy reign extend world without end;
let praise from all to thee ascend.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZfzeonjJcc&t=48s>

Sonnet

I had no thought of violets of late,
The wild, shy kind that spring beneath your feet
In wistful April days, when lovers mate
And wander through the fields in raptures sweet.
The thought of violets meant florists' shops,
And bows and pins, and perfumed papers fine;
And garish lights, and mincing little fops
And cabarets and songs, and deadening wine.
So far from sweet real things my thoughts had strayed,
I had forgot wide fields, and clear brown streams;
The perfect loveliness that God has made,—
Wild violets shy and Heaven-mounting dreams.
And now—unwittingly, you've made me dream
Of violets, and my soul's forgotten gleam.

Alice Dunbar Nelson

Editor's Note: Your faithful preacher neglected to mention that last week's poem about persistence by Ada Limón was suggested by persistently benevolent Morro Bay Living Treasure Nancy Castle!