

The Sunday Missive – November 19, 2023
The Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 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>

The Collect of the Day

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning:
Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that
we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life,
which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Zephaniah 1:7,12-18

Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is at hand; the Lord has prepared a sacrifice, he has consecrated his guests. At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the people who rest complacently on their dregs, those who say in their hearts, "The Lord will not do good, nor will he do harm." Their wealth shall be plundered, and their houses laid waste. Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them; though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them.

The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter, the warrior cries aloud there. That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements. I will bring such distress upon people that they shall walk like the blind; because they have sinned against the Lord, their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath; in the fire of his passion the whole earth shall be consumed; for a full, a terrible end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Psalm 90

Lord, you have been our refuge* ***From one generation to another.***

Before the mountains were brought forth, or the land and the earth were born* ***From age to age you are God.***

You turn us back to the dust and say* ***"Go back, O child of earth."***

For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it has passed* ***They are like a watch in the night.***

You sweep us away like a dream* ***We fade away suddenly like the grass.***

In the morning it is green and flourishes* ***In the evening it dries up and is withered.***

For we fade away in your displeasure* ***We are made afraid of your wrathful indignation.***

Our iniquities you have set before you* ***Our secret sins in the light of your countenance.***

When you are angry, all our days are gone* ***We bring our years to an end like a sigh.***

The span of our life is seventy years, perhaps in strength, eighty* ***Yet the sum of them is but labor and sorrow, for they pass away quickly and we are gone.***

Who can regard the power of your wrath* ***Who can rightly fear your indignation?***

So teach us to number our days* ***That we may apply our hearts to wisdom.***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sdcgZ70ggI>

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Hymn 490 I want to walk as a child of the light

I want to walk as a child of the light. I want to follow Jesus.
God set the stars to give light to the world. The star of my life is Jesus.

In him there is no darkness at all. The night and the day are both alike.
The Lamb is the light of the city of God. Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.

I want to see the brightness of God. I want to look at Jesus.
Clear sun of righteousness, shine on my path,
And show me the way to the Father.

I'm looking for the coming of Christ. I want to be with Jesus.
When we have run with patience the race, we shall know the joy of Jesus.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lmcz2T5hCsY>

Matthew 25:14-30

Jesus said, "It is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

Stop, Look and Listen -- Proper 28A

"Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is at hand," cries the prophet Zephaniah. What a contrast to the many admonitions we hear in Hebrew Scripture to make a joyful noise unto the Lord, to sing, shout, dance and play music. Yet the theme of silence is a frequent and important one in the continuous desire and struggle to determine how to act towards God, and in the effort to express our experience with the Ancient of Days.

“Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord’s wrath; in the fire of God’s passion the whole earth shall be consumed; for a full, a terrible end the Lord will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.” If!

The prophecy of such a dark day is akin to that of what we heard from Amos last week. Although composed in the 7th century BCE, this prophecy has eerie significance in the light of what eventually happened to Jerusalem when the Romans arrived. And in today’s light as well. The collaboration between leaders and aristocracy among the Israelites with the Roman overlords drove a wedge into the heart of Jewish society, splitting the interests of an increasing number of working poor and those of the elite. It’s as if you had a group of people today who wanted the government’s main concern to be the protection and enrichment of the wealthy over working people, the poor, the natural world and peaceful relations with other countries.

Such a modern government would of course, be like the Romans, who were not interested in the integrity of Jewish culture; they just wanted control and money. Whenever anyone objected to Roman excesses, the reaction of the Romans was to make them worse. This divided the society further against itself, with those who collaborated distancing themselves as much as possible from the objectors and forcing the latter to bear every increase in burdens. Thus, when the burdens upon them got so excessive that even the collaborators had to object, it was too late. Jerusalem’s society was so splintered as to pose little common resistance or purpose. Roman soldiers destroyed Jerusalem entirely in 70 CE – it would not be a Jewish political entity again until 1948 – not quite 2000 years later and it is still agonizingly problematic. Clearly Zephaniah knew whereof he spake.

A nation today whose governing powers fail to heed such lessons of history aren’t fooling anyone but themselves. The so-called negative actions of God can be more realistically understood as the results of human arrogance in the face of experience. This is ungodliness; this is idolatry; this is what sickens nations unto death. The nature of the action of God is not to interfere. Don’t let’s kid ourselves, such a nation either divides and destroys itself, or invites others to destroy it. “For we ourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When we say, ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon us, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape!”

So much of human cultural history has consisted of trying to figure things out, nail things down, delineate parameters, specifications, the truths of the

time. And even when we're not doing that so avidly, so many of us are in the habit of letting ideas, images, and voices hold our attention all the time we're awake. The more technologically advanced we are, the truer this seems to be. We're very proud of, fascinated by and occupied with our machines, our latest electronic doo-dads. They are all supposed to be time- and labor-saving: faster chips, lighter platforms, easier navigation – ha! Whatever time and labor we save is inevitably gobbled up by more time with the machines, and more labor expended in trying to pay for them. They are our wealth, but they will separate us from our spirits if we let them.

Nowadays, many of us are too busy to allow ourselves to be affected by the pain and suffering of others. Too busy to be addressed personally by the social, political or ecological disasters occurring in the world. Too busy to listen to our own feelings or those of others. So much busyness tends to insulate us from simple care and compassion.

The labor we save in rapid connectivity and fingertip facts and figures can drive us unwittingly further and further into mental, intellectual and spiritual debt to our ever-more sophisticated machinery, and further and further away from the fundamentally vital appetite for seeking; from the patiently developed facility in finding; from the healthy habit of following ways and means that really matter and last: interpersonal relationality, ecological accountability, and spiritual connectivity. Our ceaseless pursuit of analysis, description and invention has always occupied human consciousness; nowadays our doo-dads have become our gods. And they leave us lonely. As Al Green says, "I'm so tired of being alone."

With, for and because of these gods, we are always making noise. The noise separates us from one another and prevents our hearing God's voice. It creates a din, under cover of which unprincipled and ruthless people – let's face it, mostly men -- Modern-day Romans -- come to control and enslave us. The means used are mostly fear, the fear of not having as much wealth or doo-dads as our neighbors. As Mark Twain observed of us, more than 100 years ago: "Each man is afraid of his neighbor's disapproval, a thing which, to the general run of the human race is more dreaded than wolves and death."

Not long ago, Nicholas Kristoff offered an opinion that might bring the matter into sharper focus. He wrote, "Let me toss out a verbal hand grenade: To some degree, liberals practice the values that conservatives preach. Of course, this is complicated terrain with lots of exceptions; liberals can be creeps as much as anyone else. Yet if one looks at the

population as a whole, it is striking that red states have higher rates of teenage births, divorce and prostitution. In contrast, people in blue states don't trumpet these family values but often seem to do a better job living them. For example, nine of the 10 states with the highest teen birthrates were red in 2016. And nine of the 10 states with the lowest teen birthrates were blue." Presumably, no pun intended.

Divorce rates show a similar pattern: higher in red states than in blue: "Individual religious conservatism is positively related to individual divorce risk," according to [a 50-state study](#) reported in the American Journal of Sociology. One large international survey found that the largest group of customers on Ashley Madison, a dating website -- for married people -- were self-styled evangelical Christians. A major study found that men in the Houston and Kansas City metro areas were the most likely to call sex ads, while men in San Francisco and Baltimore were the least likely to. Go figure.

The liberal impulse may be to gloat: *Those conservatives thunder about "family values" but don't practice them.* 'Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.' Blue family values bristle at restrictions on sexuality, insistence on marriage or the stigmatization of single parents. But they encourage *their* children to combine public tolerance with private discipline. And they overwhelmingly choose to raise their own children within two-parent families, in the context of which their values are passed on. The deeper problem seems to be political choices, underinvesting in public education social services, and economic opportunity for the ill-advantaged. This underinvestment leaves red states poorer and less educated — and thus more prone to fraying of the social fabric.

If we were to stop for a moment to ask each other how this situation is accepted by so many, the answer might be something like: "Well, we have to keep plugging away like this until we get it right. Once we get it right, then we can stop, look and listen for the higher, purer, more ineffable things." Somewhere between that and, "We can't be silent before the Lord God, Zephaniah, we might miss the latest episode of *The Golden Bachelor*; we might forget to download the latest Operating System 3.86.825 ZJQ Meerkat Glacier update!" The still, small voice of God can be pretty hard to hear these days.

There is another way of being. "God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through Christ; whether we are awake or asleep we may abide in God. We may encourage and build up one another." Practicing Christians are not uniquely the ones who are awake, but we do identify as the ones who would always like to be awakened some more. We can be glad

of any eagerness we may have to be made aware of our sleepiness. This waking up is what Karl Barth called continuous conversion, it was there in the dawn of a new day for humankind when God entered the world in the form of Jesus, and it is here in the awakening of Jesus from the dead, each new day of whose reality we can celebrate and share.

Here is Mother Theresa – “Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours; yours are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion now looks out upon the world; yours are the feet on which he is to go about doing good; and yours are the only hands with which he can bless us now.”

Hymn 427 When morning gilds the skies

When morning gilds the skies, my heart, awaking, cries,
May Jesus Christ be praised!

When evening shadows fall, this rings my curfew call,
May Jesus Christ be praised!

When mirth for music longs, this is my song of songs:
May Jesus Christ be praised!
God's holy house of prayer hath none that can compare
With: Jesus Christ be praised!

No lovelier antiphon in all high heaven is known
Than, Jesus Christ be praised!
There to the eternal Word the eternal psalm is heard:
May Jesus Christ be praised!

Ye nations of mankind, in this your concord find:
May Jesus Christ be praised!
Let all the earth around ring joyous with the sound:
May Jesus Christ be praised!

Sing, suns and stars of space, sing, ye that see his face,
Sing, Jesus Christ be praised!
God's whole creation o'er, both now and evermore
Shall Jesus Christ be praised!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUX15UyUCNk>

A Dream of Autumn

Mellow hazes, lowly trailing
Over wood and meadow, veiling
Somber skies, with wild fowl
Sailing sailor-like to foreign lands;
And the north-wind overleaping
Summer's brink, and floodlike sweeping
Wrecks of roses where the weeping
Willows wring their helpless hands.

Flared, like Titan torches flinging
Flakes of flame and embers, springing
From the vale the trees stand swinging
In the moaning atmosphere;
While in dead'ning-lands the lowing
Of the cattle, sadder growing,
Fills the sense to overflowing
With the sorrow of the year.

Sorrowfully, yet the sweeter
Sings the brook in rippled meter
Under boughs that lithely teeter
Lorn birds, answering from the shores
Through the viny, shady-shiny
Interspaces, shot with tiny
Flying motes that fleck
The winy wave-engraven sycamores.

Fields of ragged stubble, wrangled
With rank weeds, and shocks of tangled
Corn, with crests like rent plumes dangled
Over Harvest's battle-plain;
And the sudden whir and whistle
Of the quail that, like a missile,
Whizzes over thorn and thistle,
And, a missile, drops again.

Muffled voices, hid in thickets
Where the redbird stops to stick its
Ruddy beak betwixt
The pickets of the truant's rustic trap;
And the sound of laughter ringing
Where, within the wild-vine swinging,
Climb Bacchante's schoolmates, flinging
Purple clusters in her lap.

Rich as wine, the sunset flashes
Round the tilted world, and dashes
Up the sloping west and splashes
Red foam over sky and sea —
Till my dream of Autumn, paling
In the splendor all-prevailing,
Like a sallow leaf goes sailing
Down the silence solemnly.

James Whitcomb Riley