

**The Sunday Missive – August 27, 2023**  
**The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Hymn 555 Lead on, O King eternal**

Lead on, O King eternal, the day of march has come;  
Henceforth in fields of conquest thy tents shall be our home:  
Through days of preparation thy grace has made us strong,  
And now, O King eternal, we lift our battle song.

Lead on, O King eternal, till sin's fierce war shall cease,  
And holiness shall whisper the sweet amen of peace;  
For not with swords loud clashing, nor roll of stirring drums,  
But deeds of love and mercy, the heavenly kingdom comes.

Lead on, O King eternal: we follow, not with fears;  
For gladness breaks like morning where'er thy face appears.  
Thy cross is lifted o'er us; we journey in its light:  
The crown awaits the conquest; lead on, O God of might!

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7wd2\\_shSNw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7wd2_shSNw)

**The Collect of the Day**

Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in unity by your Holy Spirit, may show forth your power among all peoples, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**Exodus 1:8-2:10**

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor.

They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him, "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said. Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the

Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

## **Psalm 124**

If the Lord had not been on our side\* ***Let Israel now say;***

If the Lord had not been on our side\* ***When enemies rose up against us;***

Then would they have swallowed us up alive\* ***In their fierce anger toward us;***

Then would the waters have overwhelmed us\* ***And the torrent gone over us;***

Then would the raging waters\* ***Have gone right over our heads.***

Blessed be the Lord\* ***Who has not given us as prey for their teeth.***

We have escaped\* ***Like a bird from the snare of the fowler.***

The snare is broken\* ***And we have escaped.***

Our help is in the Name of the Lord\* ***The maker of heaven and earth.***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLyDwflb4Q8>

## **Romans 12:1-8**

I appeal to you therefore, sisters and brothers, by the mercies of God, to present yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God-- what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

### **Hymn 383 Fairest Lord Jesus**

Fairest Lord Jesus, ruler of all nature,  
O thou of God and man the Son; thee will I cherish,  
Thee will I honor, thou, my soul's glory, joy and crown.

Fair are the meadows, fairer still the woodlands,  
Robed in the blooming garb of spring; Jesus is fairer,  
Jesus is purer, who makes the woeful heart to sing.

Fair is the sunshine, fairer still the moonlight,  
And all the twinkling, starry host: Jesus shines brighter,  
Jesus shines purer, than all the angels heaven can boast.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBH8mhHSNWo>

## **Matthew 16:13-20**

When Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

### **Enough Already -- Proper 16A**

The world is not an easy place. Hurricanes, floods and fires; powermongers, liars and damaged people who betray us by abandonment and theft and all kinds of violence threaten to get in the way of our peace. Thou shalt not steal says the Commandment, or bear false witness, or kill. But someone who betrays your trust is stealing from you just as much as someone who takes money from your wallet or as a liar is lying or a killer kills. It's a jungle out there. Evil is.

And the concept of what is evil develops in concert with human history. For example, there was a time, not so long ago when human slavery was not only tolerated but embraced by many people from whom lots of us in this room are descended. Now we know it's just plain evil. In other news, nutrition scientists and food researchers have discovered compounds that enable us to make miracle burgers that have the taste, texture and cooking qualities of meat. They even bleed, for goodness' sake. Check out Impossible Foods dot com. How long will it be before

we will have to explain to our grandchildren about the old days when people actually killed and ate animals, evil as that will sound? All sorts of horrors are supposed!

Or what about the progress of medical science, which is nothing less than astonishing – seemingly miraculous – affording quality and extension of life to humanity in stunning ways. With every discovery, the frontiers of mortality are pushed back, but they are never eliminated. Every medical discovery only points up what hasn't yet been discovered. And for everyone whose life is saved from some condition that once was invariably fatal, the condition we all have is only postponed. The loved ones of those who die too young of diseases or injuries have new, but no less devastating thresholds of suffering to confront. Who here has not lost a loved one or friend to cancer?

The biggest question for those who would lead lives of fulfillment, accomplishment, charity and peace is of course, “So, what about the horrors of uncontrollable evil?” We conceive of God as omnipotent, all-powerful; we also conceive of God as benevolent, all good. Yet terrible things happen. Those three statements are difficult, if not impossible to hold in the same worldview. Every faith tradition tries to address this conundrum, but none do a very impressive job of it. The Buddhists will tell us that bad things happen in this life to folks who deserve them because of things they did in past lives. The Christian Scientists will tell us that evil is just a figment of our collective imagination. Neither of these helps much. Christianity, on the other hand, “ultimately offers no theological solution at all. Christianity merely points to the cross and says that, practically speaking, there is no evil so dark and obscene – not even this – but that God can turn it to good.” Frederick Buechner

The agnostic and the cynic will assert that the stories we tell one another of God's influence on our lives are the stuff of desperation. In order to avoid accepting our fragility, impermanence, insignificance and tragic fate, it is in desperation

that we kid one another about the existence and benevolence of a power greater than ourselves. No, the message Jesus brings is not one of desperation, but of inspiration. Whether or not the existence of a dimension of cosmic goodness – a presence we choose to call God – can be logically or physically proven to exist, believing in such a thing is a means of bettering ourselves, of freeing ourselves for whatever we have to offer Creation. Life is too short to worry about death. The life lived in faith is all the proof we need of that. Far from being the opiate of the people, faith is the food of souls.

Thoreau, on the other hand famously said that the mass of us lead lives of quiet desperation, which is to say, petrified enough by the prospect of life's end to regret its beginning and miss out on its middle. There is another way. Jesus suggests that we instead lead lives of quiet inspiration, celebrating its beginning and embracing its middle by contemplating its better end. The result is what we call the peace that passes all understanding. It is a peace that remains with us – as they say, *nunc et in hora mortis*: now and at the hour of our death. The result is a transformation of the nature of evil. No longer does the reality of our fragility, impermanence and insignificance constitute a tragic fate. On the contrary, mysteriously, magnificently, miraculously, each of us is given unlimited power to love. Unlimited power – imagine such a thing. Will we be able, at the moment of their crimes, to forgive those whose deeds are evil, like Jesus did? Maybe not. OK probably not. But since we know that there are no limits on what our lives can be; 'there is no evil so dark and so obscene but that it can be turned to good.'

The great preacher and writer Frederick Buechner tells of the time he and his wife were grocery shopping in the little Vermont town where they live. Across a couple of aisles, he calls to her: "Don't forget the cream!" To which she replies, "Don't forget you're trying to lose weight." "You only live once," he says. Buechner's waggish reply is loud enough to be heard by the harried checkout lady who, on that very hot and muggy summer

day has worked hard all day. She is plenty tired and flushed with the press of customers and feels it is time to interject, "Don't you think once is enough?"

Whether the woman's response was by way of indicating she had had enough for one day, for one lifetime; or she was pointing out to him that 'You only live once' is not a phrase to be tossed out lightly -- that one lifetime is more than plenty -- we can't know. That was all she said: "Don't you think once is enough?" We do know -- most of us from one or more personal connections with lives all too short -- of lives that ended when they had much more becoming to do. We survivors carry the sorrow of those loves through our lives if we're paying attention. But the truth persists; reality insists: we do only get one life. Whatever its duration, character, flourishing and fortune, one is all we get, so it better be enough for us; it must be enough for us.

"Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" asks Mary Oliver. And how can we go about it in the face of all the adversity, futility and mortality we encounter? These have long been justifications for selfishness and violence. How can we pursue lives of peace and charity instead? How can we break the snare of the fowler who seeks to destroy us? The birds are mortal too, but meanwhile, they fly.

Is one life enough? It is: if, and only if it is conducted as a celebration and convocation and correlation of good, whatever we go through. If it is not these things, a thousand lifetimes will never be enough for us. Joseph knew this when he forgave his brothers. Jesus preached this to all who would listen, and lived it out with his last breath, so that all who contemplate his existence might embrace its truth. We too can claim knowledge and complete ownership of the sufficiency of our lives. All we have to do is accept the complete freedom that a life of faith can bring. And we can do it now.



## **Wonder, Love and Praise Hymn 778 We all are 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.

We all behold one vision, a stark reality;  
The steward of salvation was nailed upon a tree.  
Yet resurrected Justice gives rise that we may share  
Free reconciliation and hope amid despair.

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=w0AmVKrX6xg>

## After the Disaster

A picnic in the sequoias, light filtered into planes, and the canopy cut through. Fire raged in that place one month ago. Since I'd been there, I'd have to see it burning. Nature of events to brush against us like the leaves of aspens brush against each other in a grove full of them carved with the initials of people from the small weird town hikers only like for gas. Messages get past borders—water across the cut stem of the sent sunflower alive with good intentions.

People who mistake clarity for certainty haven't learned that listening isn't taking a transcript, it's not speech the voice longs for, it's something deeper inside the throat. Now, from the beginning, recite the alphabet of everything you should have wanted, silverware, a husband, a house to live in like a castle, *but I wanted fame among the brave.*

A winter night in desert light: trucks carving out air-corridors of headlight on the interstate at intervals only a vigil could keep. Constellations so clean you can see the possibilities denied.

Talking about philosophy might never be dinner but can return your body to a state of wonder before sleep. The night reduced us to our elements. I wanted water, and whatever found itself unborn in me to stay alive.

Katie Peterson