

The Sunday Missive – May 28, 2023 Whitsunday – The Day of Pentecost

Hymn 372 Praise to the living God!

Praise to the living God! All praised be his Name
Who was, and is, and is to be, for ay the same.
The one eternal God ere aught that now appears:
The first, the last, beyond all thought his timeless years!

Formless, all lovely forms declare his loveliness;
Holy, no holiness of earth can his express.
Lo, he is Lord of all. Creation speaks his praise,
And everywhere above, below, his will obeys.

His Spirit floweth free, high surging where it will:
In prophet's word he spake of old: he speaketh still.
Established is his law, and changeless it shall stand,
Deep writ upon the human heart, on sea, on land.

Eternal life hath he implanted in the soul;
His love shall be our strength and stay while ages roll.
Praise to the living God! All praised be his Name
Who was, and is, and is to be, for ay the same.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IjvNFygxfq4>

The Collect of the Day

O God, who on this day taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit: Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. *Amen.*

The First Lesson Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs-- in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' "

Psalm 104:25-37

O Lord, how manifold are your works* ***The earth is full of your creatures.***

Yonder is the great and wide sea with its living things too many to number* ***Creatures both small and great.***

There move the ships, and there is that Leviathan* ***Which you have made for the sport of it.***

All of them look to you* ***To give them their food in due season.***

You give it to them; they gather it* ***You open your hand, and they are filled with good things.***

When you hide your face, they are terrified* ***You take away their breath, and they return to the dust.***

You send forth your Spirit, and they are created* ***And so you renew the face of the earth.***

May the glory of the Lord endure forever* ***May the Lord rejoice in all his works.***

Who looks at the earth and it trembles* ***Who touches the mountains and they smoke.***

I will sing to the Lord as long as I live* ***I will praise my God while I have my being.***

May these words of mine please God* ***That I may rejoice in the Lord, Hallelujah!***

Second Lesson 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

No one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given

the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free-- and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Hymn 508 Breathe on me breath of God

Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew,
That I may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, until my heart is pure,
Until with thee I will one will, to do or to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, till I am wholly thine,
Till all this earthly part of me glows with thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, so shall I never die;
But live with thee the perfect life of thine eternity.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IU7cgDOaOUE>

John 20:19-23

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them

again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Life Itself is Grace – Pentecost A

50 days, or seven weeks after Passover comes *Shavuos* -- The Feast of Weeks – a Spring harvest festival celebrating the first fruits of the land, the first harvest of grain. In Polish the word for grain or cereal is *zboże*, "from God." Likened to Pentecost because of the 50, our observation of the day has added significance because of the disciples' experience as chronicled in the story from the book of Acts we just heard. The Day of Pentecost comes 50 days after Easter. The day most certainly continues to echo the earlier celebrations. Just as the wondrous phenomenon of grain is 'from God,' likewise comes the Holy Spirit; the Holy Ghost Power.

Shavuos – or *Shavuot* – also commemorates the giving of Torah to Moses in 1312 BCE. On *Pesach*, the Israelites received the law; on *Shavuos* they received the Torah, establishing them forever as God's people.

In English culture, this day, known as Whitsunday for reasons that are still debated, evolved from the ancient feast of *Beltane*, a pagan celebration of the Summer Solstice, when all farmworkers got a weeklong reprieve from their labors. People broke out new sets of clothes, danced and revelled in the glory of the Summer sun.

The Israelites take a tradition of celebrating the wonder of grain, of what the body needs and combine it with a celebration of spiritual food – the Torah. Thus, body and spirit are both fully nourished; and for that grace bestowed, the only sensible response is thanks and praise, worship and celebration

The Christian tradition of Pentecost evolved from the same beginnings. On the Jewish feast day of Pentecost, the disciples were gathered, following their custom. In John's gospel, Jesus appears and breathes on them – the way God first breathed life into Creation – providing the spiritual nourishment they need to bear witness to their overwhelming experience of him.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do.

Earlier, Jesus has told them about the quintessence of the law and the prophets: Neighbor Love. And he has told them that the only thing God doesn't know how to forgive is the denial of God's own power. Now Jesus gives them an action to go along with their attitude.

Jesus says to them "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." What greater manifestation of love is there than forgiveness? The message for us is clear. The number one gift of the Holy Spirit is forgiveness. In leading a godly life, all else will fall into place if we make that our goal and practice. It doesn't mean we forget what has been done. History -- and Herstory -- must be told if the brokenness of the world is ever to heal. Wrongs must be enumerated and acknowledged as wrongs. Then forgiven. If wrongs go unacknowledged, they become a fatal cancer in the body of society. For example:

Almost 100 years ago, as Germany was in the tightening grip of fascism, Helen Keller wrote an open letter to students under the Nazi regime. She might have written it to Russian students of today as their regime perpetrates its crimes on the people of Ukraine for daring to hold free and fair elections. She might have written it to certain elements of our own culture; to those whose approach to national life includes banning books, whitewashing history and employing oppression, trickery and violence as the means of maintaining minority rule. Parts of her letter:

To the student body of Germany: History has taught you nothing if you think you can kill ideas. Tyrants have tried to do that often before, and the ideas have risen up in their might and destroyed them.

You can burn my books and the books of the best minds in Europe, but the ideas in them have seeped through a million channels and will continue to quicken other minds. I gave all the royalties of my books for all time to the German soldiers blinded in the World War

with no thought in my heart but love and compassion for the German people.

I acknowledge the grievous complications that have led to your intolerance; all the more do I deplore the injustice and unwisdom of passing on to unborn generations the stigma of your deeds.

Do not imagine that your barbarities to the Jews are unknown here. God sleepeth not, and He will visit His judgment upon you. Better were it for you to have a mill-stone hung around your neck and sink into the sea than to be hated and despised of all men.

Surely this is the Holy Spirit at work in the pen of Helen Keller. That millstone is the cancer that will destroy a people if left unchecked.

It is vital to bear in mind what is said in the Bible about who gets this Holy Spirit. "A tongue rested on each of them... The crowd was bewildered because each one heard their own language... God's Spirit is poured out on all flesh, Jews and Gentiles, females and males, young and old... For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free-- and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses."

Clearly, it's everyone, not just "Us," whoever we may be. As Montaigne famously wrote, "Truly man is a marvellously vain, diverse, and undulating object. It is hard to found any constant and uniform judgement on him."

Breathe on me, Breath of God, until my heart is pure, until with thee I will one will, to do or to endure.

Poor Yorick of Shakespeare fame might be remembered, along with his friend the Prince of Denmark, but you and I are likely to be forgotten in this world, joining the unknown soldiers all over the world. Perhaps someone will talk about us for three or four generations, but only rarely does someone's personality, reputation or list of accomplishments provoke thought or mention for much longer. As discomfiting as that may feel, the deeper meaning of God's love extends beyond the limits of our earthly existence. Teilhard de Chardin asserted: We are not human beings having a spiritual experience, but

the other way around, spiritual beings residing as strangers in this physical realm. We always have one foot here and one in the hereafter.

So, when the thief next to him begs, “Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom,” and hears this response, “Today, you will be with me in paradise,” Jesus is talking to each one of us. Whatever our gifts given, our accomplishments made, our sins forgiven, our dreams deferred, our bodies will return to the dust but we ourselves will return to that dimension of the Spirit that is without sorrow or boundary. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then will we see and be seen face to face. Now we know in part; then we shall know fully, even as we are fully known.

In Psalm 104, we hear: “When you send forth your Spirit they are created; and you renew the face of the earth.” These words look back to the Genesis stories of creation, when God’s Spirit hovers over the primal chaos and God’s breath gives life to all the creatures. But we’re the only ones who need ‘meaning.’ Moreover, contrary to what we might think, the rest of Creation doesn’t need human beings. It is we who need the rest of creation, to contrast ourselves with and explain the blessing and curse of our consciousness. The rest of God’s creatures have a natural understanding of the power and permanence of Spirit to the extent that they never think about it. They simply are fully in reality.

We, on the other hand go in and out of reality because we insist on comprehending the incomprehensible, on trying to effable the ineffable. That is why Jesus came, to put a face on God and breathe out the Holy Spirit upon us. Because we need meaning. And we need purpose. God’s grace is to provide that meaning and that purpose to our lives, no matter how magnificent or humble we turn out to be.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, so shall I never die; but live with thee the perfect life of thine eternity.

Here is the magnificent and humble Frederick Buechner:

“I discovered that if you really keep your eye peeled to it and your ears open, if you really pay attention to it, even such a limited and limiting life as I was living on Rupert Mountain

opened to us extraordinary vistas. Taking your children to school and kissing your spouse goodbye. Eating lunch with a friend. Trying to do a decent day's work. Hearing the rain patter against the window. There is no event so commonplace but that God is present in it, always hiddenly, always leaving you room to recognize him, but all the more fascinatingly because of that, all the more compellingly and hauntingly. If I were called upon to state in a few words the essence of everything I was trying to say, both as a novelist and as a preacher, it would be something like this: Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it no less than in the excitement and gladness; touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace."

Hymn 507 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.

Praise the Spirit, who enlightened priest and prophets with the word;
His the truth behind the wisdoms which as yet know not our Lord;
By whose love and power, in Jesus God himself was seen and heard.

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=sJ9vyVbQidA&t=14s>

Yellow Moon

I stand at my window and listen;
Only the plaintive murmur of a swarm of cicadas.
I stand on the wet grass and ponder,
And turn to the east and behold you,
Great yellow moon.
Why do you frighten me so,
You captive of the coconut glade?
I have seen you before,
Have flirted with you so many a night.

When my heart, ever throbbing, never listless,
Had pined for the moonlight to calm it.
But you were a dainty whiteness
That kissed my brow then.
A gentle, pale flutter
That touched my aching breast.

You are a lonely yellow moon now.
You are ghastly, spectral tonight,
Alone
Behind your prison bars of coconut trees.
That is why
I do not dare take you into my hand
And press you against my cheek
To feel how cold you are.
I am afraid of you, yellow moon.

Angela Manalang-Gloria