

**The Sunday Missive -- July 23, 2023,
The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost**

Lift Every Voice and Sing Hymn 54 Nearer my God to thee

Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me;
Still all my song would be

Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee.

Though like the wanderer, the sun goes down,
Darkness be over me, my rest a stone;
Yet in my dreams I'd be [Refrain]

Then, with my waking thoughts, bright with Thy praise,
Out of my stony griefs, Bethel I'll raise;
So by my woes to be [Refrain]

Or if on joyful wing, cleaving the sky,
Sun, moon and stars forgot, upwards I fly,
Still all my song shall be [Refrain]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1mQT1u_45I

The Collect of the Day

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask; through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Genesis 28:10-19a

Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the Lord stood beside him and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac your father; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!" And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel.

Psalm 139

O Lord, you search me and you know me; you know my resting and my rising* ***You discern my purpose from afar.***

You mark where I walk and where I lie down* ***All my ways lie open to you.***

Before ever a word is on my tongue* ***You know it, O Lord, through and through.***

Behind and before you besiege me* ***Your hand ever laid upon me.***

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me* ***Too high; beyond my reach.***

O where can I go from your Spirit* ***And where can I flee from your face?***

If I climb the heavens, you are there* ***If I lie in my grave, you are there.***

If I take the wings of the dawn* ***And dwell at the sea's furthest end,***

Even there your hand would lead me* ***Your right hand would hold me fast.***

If I say, "Let the darkness cover me* ***And the light around me be night,***"

Darkness is not dark to you* ***And night is clear as the day.***

O search me, God, and know my heart* ***Test me and know my thoughts.***

See that I follow not the wrong path* ***But lead me in the ways of life eternal.***

Romans 8:12-25

Brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh-- for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ-- if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory

of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Hymn 693 Just as I am, without one plea

Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidd'st me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt;
Fightings and fears within, without, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind; sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need, in thee to find, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, thou wilt receive; wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve,
Because thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, thy love unknown has broken every barrier down;
Now to be thine, yea, thine alone, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxA0TFe3-Uo>

Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

Jesus put before the crowd another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow

together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!”

Breaking News -- Proper11A

The so-called “News” from Ukraine and Sudan and Mexico and Greece and all kinds of places in the USA: People killing each other, people turning their backs on refugees and children, people refusing each other succor. Sadly, none of it seems very new in the big picture. Though of course it’s exceedingly immediate to those involved, the compulsion of human beings to violent conflict and callousness is anything but new. The only thing that really qualifies as true news manifests in individual stories: the transformation of individual hearts when people stop doing violent, callous things and begin to live the way Jesus describes as “The Kingdom of Heaven.”

The good news of Jesus’ witness, literally ‘the gospel,’ consists of individual transformations, when people turn away from ingrained, inbred, habitual selfishness and violent conflict. When this happens, it really is news. As long as we remain complicit, even if only by way of complacency in the ways of the world, the ways of the flesh as St. Paul repeatedly calls them, there’s no news; there are no surprises; it’s the same old story. But when we develop a sudden appetite for

forbearance; for moderation, compromise and self-effacing cooperation, that's a big change.

There may not be any visible sign of glory, but as Caryl Houselander suggests, "Because in every town and village and hamlet of the world there are those who have surrendered their lives -- those who make their offerings daily from the small grains of their common lives -- miracles of Love are happening all the time, everywhere. The Holy Spirit is continually descending upon the world."

The quality and character of every occurrence of this kind of change is unique and colorful, even as the result of individual transformation is a common tolerance for- and involvement with the rest of humankind. There are innumerable ways in which a change of heart can be manifested in a change of life. The community of peacemakers that Jesus calls the Kingdom of Heaven grows in population and strengthens in popularity whenever this happens, but the changes themselves, the turnings and healings of which Jesus speaks are very much individual. As such, we can't judge each other's spiritual development. Well, we can judge each other; in fact we do it all the time, but we can't judge each other accurately, successfully or to any good purpose.

Jesus' parable tells us that these changes of heart matter. Just because we live in a world with many dangers, toils and snares, our individual transformations will take effect and bear fruit. The result of one life lived with compassion may not be a wholesale change in the human condition, but just as one tiny seed of a notion or realization can lead to a change of heart, so one changed heart or transformed life can result in a wide and welcoming shady home for many others to share. Likewise, the small measure of leaven that each of us becomes when we decide to work for peace and justice, can affect a whole batch of flour children. Each little deed and modest witness can aid the transformation of countless others: by association and by momentum.

When Jacob, in his dream observes the comings and going of the angels, up and down the ladder to heaven, he is undergoing the kind of transformation Jesus comes to talk about. Jacob is transformed when he commits to an ongoing exchange of energy with God. The angels come down the ladder with the presence and power of Heaven,

affording Jacob a glimpse of glory. With this newfound power, Jacob and those he influences adopt attitudes and take actions that glorify God: back up the ladder. Following such examples, we ourselves send God's power back up the ladder through the prayer and praise and peacemaking we do down here in the flesh.

The Sufis address the same phenomenon of human potential: They say there is a light within every soul. It only needs the clouds that hide it to shift for the light to shine through. This is the light of revelation. It is like a lantern to us, it lights up every dark corner we wish to examine, and gives an answer to every question we would ask. For Jacob that night, the clouds shifted. It is said that there is a certain kind of cobra with a diamond in its head. When it goes into the jungle, the cobra takes out the diamond, places it on a tree and by means of its light, it can see throughout the forest. When it is finished, it puts the diamond back in its head until it is needed again. From the moment of his revelatory dream, Jacob possessed his own diamond. He renamed the place Beth-El, the house of God, but it can hardly be a coincidence that the place was already called Luz, the place of light, the foundation of life.

Where Jacob is when this happens is significant. He's out in the scrub, in the wilderness, alone and cut off from his party, neither at his own home nor at his brother's. Neither here nor there. In a liminal state. On a threshold. He is headed to a difficult encounter with his brother whom he tricked, and also trying to achieve for himself an auspicious wife. What's important is that Jacob pays attention; he wakes up and smells the chai: "Surely God is in this place and I didn't know it."

The story says Jacob was using a stone as a pillow that night. This is not as nutty as we might think. Wherever we try to sleep, for most of us, something to raise our head off the ground a bit makes sleeping – and especially waking up -- a lot more pleasant. In any museum of ancient art for example, you can see objects labeled 'head rest' that don't look too comfy but must do the trick. Likewise Jacob, although he might have preferred something softer, uses a (presumably smooth) rock for his pillow out in the wilds. Furthermore, Jacob is on his way from one tough assignment to another -- transitioning between dependency on others and leadership in his own right -- when he is

transformed and awoken. He thought he was on his own, but he suddenly realizes that God is with him. Indeed, wherever he is, God is in that place, and the angels will be descending and ascending for him, as long as he has ears to hear and a heart to feel. When he wakes up, this newly transformed Jacob makes a shrine to commemorate the great good news: "Surely God is in this place."

As shrines go, this had to be a pretty modest one; the stone was small enough to be a pillow after all. What Jacob is really commemorating is his own newfound awareness. As such, his life will become the real monument. His attitude towards God and his actions based on God's instructions are what become memorable, not the dusty clearing near the little Canaanite town of Luz. The future Jacob represents because of this transformation is part of the dream: "Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land." Which is to say I will bring you back to this state of transformation, anytime you like.

Jacob's experience of revelation, his breaking news, like the parable of the weeds sown among the wheat crop makes it clear that God alone, the great instigator, the great harvester, the true soul of history; only God is capable of fully assessing and judging the transformations we undergo and the actions those transformations propel us to undertake. We do have criteria, especially the question of whether we would like to have those things said and done to us. But even if we are indeed fortunate enough to have ears to hear and are blessed enough to be listening, our own transformation will be an ongoing process, subject to arrested development and distractions, and requiring the regular exchange of cosmic energy – the Holy Spirit at work -- with a power greater than ourselves.

We do not have the capacity to purify ourselves by ourselves; and we are certainly not capable of deciding who else is pure and holy. We can't make it our business to purify the wheat crop by weeding out portions of humanity, though many have tried. But if we cooperate humbly and seek to maintain our awareness that God is surely in this and every other place, our offspring will be as numerous as the dust,

our love will echo to the ends of the earth and we can hope someday to leaven the whole barrel.

Meanwhile, our responsibility, our control, our authority is only for our own attitude and actions towards ongoing lives of love. We must let go of our failures to achieve perfection.

Here is Marianne Moore's poem, *Appellate Jurisdiction*:

Fragments of sin are a part of me.
New brooms shall sweep clean the heart of me.
Shall they? Shall they?

When this light life shall have passed away,
God shall redeem me, a castaway.
Shall He? Shall She?

The Good News is, they shall.

Hymn 530 Spread, O spread, thou mighty word

Spread, O spread, thou mighty word, Spread the kingdom of the Lord,
That to earth's remotest bound all may heed the joyful sound:

Word of how the Father's will made the world, and keeps it, still;
How his only Son he gave, earth from sin and death to save;

Word of how the Savior's love earth's sore burden doth remove;
How forever, in its need, through his death the world is freed;

Word of how the Spirit came bringing peace in Jesus' name,
How his never failing love guides us on the heaven above.

Word of life, most pure and strong, word for which the nations long,
Spread abroad, until from night all the world awakes to light.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AiBKY6DfGuw>

Three Months Since

My father's last breath is still the blade
that pares and cleaves me open.
From the wound I cradle every beautiful thing:
my friends' laughter havocking the moonless night
cricket song spilling from an unfinished building.
In my hands the pastel rind of a grapefruit
plucked from the neighbor's tree
sour blush of its fruit plush beneath my nail's parting.
How to live knowing all of this will one day join him in the dirt
and he will never see me beneath palm and palo verde:
my fingers long and lithe as his
ripping pith from fruit.
I slurp the good and bitter juice,
drinking enough for both of us.
Each night I'll tell him what he's missed:
The tree's golden litter of leaves
the mourning doves' daily song
rung from branches thrust against the winter sky
too blue and too bright to bear.

Jade Cho