

The Sunday Missive – October 22, 2023
The Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 544 Jesus shall Reign where e're the sun

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun m
Doth his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

To him shall endless prayer be made,
And praises throng to crown his head;
His name like sweet perfume
Shall rise with every morning sacrifice.

People and realms of every tongue
Dwell on his love with sweetest song;
And infant voices shall proclaim
Their early blessings on his Name.

Blessings abound where'er he reigns:
The prisoners leap to loose their chains,
The weary find eternal rest, and all who suffer want are blest.

Let every creature rise and bring peculiar honors to our King;
Angels descend with songs again, and earth repeat the loud amen.

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

The Collect of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, in Christ you have revealed your glory among the nations: Preserve the works of your mercy, that your Church throughout the world may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession 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.*

Isaiah 45:1-7

Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes, to open doors before him -- and the gates shall not be closed: I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron,

I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.

For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides me there is no god. I arm you, though you do not know me, so that they may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is no one besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other.

I form light and create darkness,
I make weal and create woe;
I the Lord do all these things.

Psalm 96

Sing to the Lord a new song* ***Sing to the Lord, all the whole earth.***

Sing to the Lord and bless God's Name* ***Proclaim the good news of salvation.***

Declare God's glory among the nations* ***God's wonders among all the peoples.***

For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised* ***And more to be feared than all gods.***

As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols* ***It is the Lord who made the heavens and the earth.***

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness* ***Let the whole earth tremble before God.***

Who has made the world so firm that it cannot be moved* ***And who will judge the peoples with equity."***

Let the sea thunder and all that is in it* ***Let the field be joyful and all that is therein.***

Then shall all the trees of the wood shout for joy before the Lord* ***Who comes to judge the earth.***

Who will judge the world with righteousness* ***And the peoples with all truth. Hallelujah!***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IfkiUsk-lnM>

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not

only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead-- Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

Hymn 573 Father eternal, ruler of creation

Father eternal, Ruler of creation, Spirit of life, which moved
Ere form was made, through the thick darkness
Covering every nation, light to our blindness, O be thou our aid:
Thy kingdom come, O Lord, thy will be done.

Races and peoples, lo, we stand divided,
And, sharing not our griefs, no joy can share;
By wars and tumults, love is mocked, derided;
His conquering cross no nation wills to bear:
Thy kingdom come, O Lord, thy will be done.

How shall we love thee, holy hidden Being,
If we love not the world which thou hast made?
O give us brother-love for better seeing
Thy Word made flesh and in a manger laid:
Thy kingdom come, O Lord, thy will be done.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ns81xkzymw>

Matthew 22:15-22

The Pharisees went and plotted to entrap Jesus in what he said. So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God

in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Another New Song -- Proper 24A

As the great, old hymn goes: "My life flows on in endless song above earth's lamentation. I hear the sweet, though far-off song that hails a new creation. When tyrants tremble, sick with fear, and hear their death-knell ringing, when friends rejoice both far and near, how can I keep from singing?" What is all this talk in our scriptures about new songs; the singing of new songs?

In the very first chapter of the first book in the Hebrew Bible, The Book of Genesis (meaning 'Origin') beginning with the 26th verse: God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness. And God created humankind in God's own image, in the image of God they were created, female and male; created them, blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Everything that moves. Coupla things: Firstly, God said all this to whom? God said it to: 'Us,' that is "Let us make humankind..." scholars say that 'Us' is a holdover from the mythologies of the Ancient Near East that comprised a pantheon of gods. There were different gods for different things; individuals and communities identified with one god more or less than others. Subduing and ruling meant different things to different people, who would

naturally rationalize their own subduing and ruling over others who had orientations of their own. Nowhere does it say: "Subdue and rule other humans," but, as we have experienced, that practice is built into the system. Soon, we realized that whoever isn't doing some subduing and ruling stands to be subdued and ruled themselves. The stark and ungodly reality of the world we live in is that everyone seems to be either subdued or subduing, oppressor or rebel. And each of us considers our cause to be a righteous one.

Secondly, God created them, blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it and rule over everything that moves." How blithely the text breezes past the phrase "God said to them..." Said to whom, exactly? Well, to humankind. Howzzat? Ah but if you have already established the "Image and likeness of Us" conceit, it's easy. If I am like a god, then any idea that pops into my head will be 'like' a godly one. This is how our best thinking began to get us in trouble from the start of conscious thought. This also helps to explain how the wild overuse of the word 'like' in our own culture muddies our communication into indecipherability. But I digress.

So, the multiple god system led to some folks being subdued and ruled and other folks doing the subduing and the ruling. It became clear to the former that the system was flawed. They realized this because they were enslaved. The only answer was the awareness that there could be only one god, with whom everyone must identify and to whom everyone must have allegiance. If there were to be justice, there had to be humility and its consequent equality. If the earlier system led to enslavement, this latter realization would lead to freedom. And we had Moses and the Exodus as that realization was put into action. This time, to eliminate subjective interpretation and argument, our story has (for the one and only time) God clearing up the matter with explicit, probative communication: ten commandments etched in stone. Can't argue with that. And to their credit, the Hebrews did not include any instructions or justifications as to subduing or

ruling anyone but one's own self. When it comes to how we ought to behave towards God and other people, it's all about love. To wit: justice, mercy and humility, as the prophet Micah says.

Soon enough, however, the subduing and ruling resumed, with one group listening to the One God who told them to do it, and another group claiming that their One God had given them the go-ahead to subdue and rule at will. We know the result of this resumption; we are living it still. Each group considers itself to be justified by virtue of its God-given character and the mandate that implies.

But this cannot be what God intended, a fight to the death with whomever refuses to be subdued or dominated. Setting aside for a moment the disastrous consequences of our assumed mandate – our man-date with destiny -- to rule everything that moves, our attitude toward one another is pathologically suicidal. It can't be sustained, which means the world can't survive us without our altering our ways, with singing new songs.

A very wise man was working as a psychotherapist, when a couple came in who were having trouble in their marriage. Despite their sincere and dedicated intention to change themselves in order to get along better, there always seemed to be something in the way of their concord. At first, the therapist suggested various exercises and activities they might do separately, and especially together that would help them come back to mutuality. This included private times away from their brood of children, wading in streams, sharing picnics, doing careful self-examination and the suggestion that they renew their vows.

Instead of these activities clarifying and restoring their commitment to the marriage, apart from much better peace in their home, they also seemed to bring more evidence that neither one was able to fulfill the other in the ways that would sustain the relationship. The better they got as people, the more evident it became that they would be better people apart. Yes, but what

about the children? Surely such a drastic step as divorce had to be avoided if at all possible because of the children. Every couple is different. With some, it is a matter of compromise, education, dedication and selflessness to restore health. With others, it becomes necessary to sing a new song.

The wise therapist and the couple gradually acknowledged that separating would be best for this couple. But how to avoid hurting their children as the reality of separation unfolded? The therapist suggested they follow a formula – a commandment, so to speak – that the new song they sing be a radical departure from their instincts. She pointed out that their instinctive behaviors had not served them well; that even deeply-considered points of view -- seemingly godly points of view -- had only brought about deeper conflict and estrangement. She said the only way to avoid hurting the children was not for each of the two to make sure their own point of view was justified and understood by their kids. The only way was for each of them to make it their business to see that their children had the best possible relationship with the other parent.

That was the new song they would have to sing – not subtly but out loud – if they were to be purveyors of peace in their family. It worked. Were there disagreements, sure. But no more than in most families. All of them are glad of each other. They are happy to be sharing the planet and their reconfigured family.

Our human proclivity for returning to the same old song when difficulties arise: subdue and rule, has never worked and never will. When Jesus appeared and spoke God's truth, this was the truth, the formula, the commandment that was heard: We must each of us make it our business to see to it that the rest of Creation has the best possible relationship with the God of their understanding; we must each make it as good as possible for the rest of humanity to live their own lives.

We must sing this new song, says Jesus, even though we are daunted by the deafness of others to its power. We must sing it loudest in the face of the most selfish, mendacious and cruel. If there are forms of violence to be subdued, in ourselves or in others, we must subdue them. But we must never seek to rule anyone but ourselves, much less claim greater resemblance to God. Above all, we must keep on singing this song for it will always be new.

Hymn 410 Praise, my soul the king of heaven

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven; to his feet thy tribute bring;
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, evermore his praises sing:
Alleluia, alleluia! Praise the everlasting King.

Praise him for his grace and favor to his people in distress;
Praise him still the same as ever, slow to chide, and swift to bless:
Alleluia, alleluia! Glorious in his faithfulness.

Father-like he tends and spares us; well our feeble frame he
knows;

In his hand he gently bears us, rescues us from all our foes.
Alleluia, alleluia! Widely yet his mercy flows.

Angels, help us to adore him; ye behold him face to face;
Sun and moon, bow down before him, dwellers all in time and
space.

Alleluia, alleluia! Praise with us the God of grace.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GyRIVbdsi4c>

Passage

And there was evening, humid with lightning, when my father fell to the earth like summer hail, scattered. I gathered

my mother, we threw in a handful of pebbles. And there was morning, bitterly. There was evening news

bluing walls, violet morning on thunderheads, and the evening when morning would never again light our bodies in bed.

Morning caravans, headlights, evening. A long caravan of evenings. Then there was only me, morning. Awake in a room in a building vast with rooms. Everyone

evening. Everyone morning. And God had finished all the work he had been doing— babies, honeybees, spreadsheets, winter mornings. I said,

I will not stop here, evening. I'll see you in the morning.

Thomas Dooley