

# **The Sunday Missive – April 30, 2023**

## **The Fourth Sunday in Eastertide**

### **Hymn 178 Alleluia, alleluia**

*Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord,  
Alleluia, alleluia, give praise to God's Name.*

Jesus is Lord of all the earth; he is the King of creation.

Spread the good news o'er all the earth: Jesus has died and has risen.

We have been crucified with Christ. Now we shall live forever.

Come let us praise the living God; joyfully sing to our Saviour.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMyuzXPz2\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMyuzXPz2_k)

### **The Collect of the Day**

O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people:  
Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us  
each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the  
Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, forever and ever. *Amen.*

### **The First Lesson Acts 2:42-47**

Those who had been baptized devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,

praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to the number of those who were being saved.

## **Psalm 23**

The Lord is my shepherd\* ***I shall not want.***

Who maketh me to lie down in green pastures\* ***Who leadeth me beside the still waters.***

Who restoreth my soul\* ***Who leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for God's name's sake.***

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil\* ***For thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.***

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies\* ***Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.***

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life\* ***And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.***

## **The Second Lesson 1 Peter 2:19-25**

It is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten;

but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

**Wonder, Love and Praise Hymn 763, As we gather**

As we gather at your Table, as we listen to your Word,  
Help us know, O God, your presence;  
Let our hearts and minds be stirred.  
Nourish us with sacred story till we claim it as our own;  
Teach us through this holy banquet  
How to make Love's vict'ry known.

Turn our worship into witness in the sacrament of life;  
Send us forth to love and serve you,  
Bringing peace where there is strife.  
Give us, Christ, your great compassion to forgive as you forgave;  
May we still behold your image in the world you died to save.

Gracious Spirit, help us summon other guests to share that Feast  
Where triumphant Love will welcome  
Those who had been last and least.  
There no more will envy blind us nor will pride our peace destroy,  
As we join with saints and angels to repeat the sounding joy.

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

**John 10:1-10**

Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and

the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

### **Unto the Hills -- Easter 4A**

Today we continue to receive and explore the existing texts of the earliest Christians. And, like all Creation these writings are a varied lot, from the practical instructions of Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, to the impassioned but often confusing speeches of Peter; from the ancient allusive songs of the Israelites, to their mystical permutations in John’s Gospel. We are met by strong words and stronger images, and we must interpret them for each other. “Followers of the Way” is what the earliest Christians were called and, as the name implies their way was not the usual one of their day and age. It was a road less travelled, a radical departure, an alternative ethos.

It still is those things. Despite the ebb and flow and ebb again of the Church’s significance in the public sphere, being a genuine part of this movement is apparently counter-intuitive. It seems fundamentally antithetical to our instinctive self-interest and our desire for political and economic and emotional power. This way is about release of those desires in order to make heartspace for charity. It is about introspection, the de-cluttering and airing out of our inner houses so that grace might come down and fill us up.

It used to be easier to know what goodness meant. Our ever-accelerating scientific knowledge of the facts about Creation has not been accompanied by a comparable development of our spiritual relations. Great numbers of us have set aside or minimized our need for the kinds of precepts and practices that alone can deliver us from the heavy downsides of modernization: astronomical greed, horrors perpetrated on great numbers of innocent, so-called enemies, mass incarceration, slavery, weapons proliferation, world war, etc. Just look at my weekend “to-do” list. All verbs: go, do, get, be. Does any entry say, “Inquire...?” or “Seek help in deciding...?” or “Before I dash out the door, fall down on my knees and thank the Lord your God for all the grace I have received to over-balance all the sh...chaff?”

We used to say, “No, thank you” in our culture. Now we deny each other with: “I’m good.” As in, “We’re done.” “Thank you” contains elements of relationship, intention, mutuality, commitment and our own development, whereas “I’m good” means no relationship is necessary, I don’t care if you gave any thought or offered to make any sacrifice to do right by me. Not only are we done, we never got started.

Professor Jacob Olupona, who teaches Religion at a college in the Boston area describes aspects of African religious precept and practice. “The integration of religion into all aspects of daily life poses a sharp contrast to the Church-State dichotomy upheld in Euro-American societies. African religious worldviews permeate economics and politics; the sacred and secular influence each other. By contrast, the separation between religion and government championed in Western democracies sees religion as something that can and must be extracted from public life and quarantined in its own sphere.”

To talk about this is not to ignore the uncondonable violence that persists in parts of Africa, as everywhere. One thinks especially of the vicious policies aimed at oppressing LGBTQ people in many places, policies backed up by so-called Christians. The roots of

those policies are in the worst backwaters of human nature and have been further fouled by the poisons of imperial mayhem. Those responsible for such violence have been driven far from their dependence on spiritual nutrition; as far as we in the so-called 'developed world' have been. They need to turn back; we need turn back. To get a life back; a spiritual life. To un-suppress our souls, as it were and fly into the forever free and open skies of charity.

Our medieval ancestors in Europe lived a little like this – at least theoretically. Their spiritual and secular lives were integrated, at least theoretically. For every problem there was a solution that blended the physical with the mystical. Vocation was a fact of life. Today, vocation is a romantic notion. Practical problems require practical solutions. Our lives are difurcated: Stuff to believe in/and stuff to do. If what we have, or want to do conflicts with what we believe in, tough... beans.

But true convictions are the products, not only of education (Holy Scripture) and experience (Church Tradition) but also of Spirit, the reasonings of our hearts. But because we are a society whose habitual de-prioritizing of beliefs has reached the point where belief systems – precepts – and the actions that celebrate and perperuate them – practices -- are no longer thought to be important, much less necessary ingredients to power and cleverness in our social goulash. Nowadays, belief systems are just sauce. Higher Power sauce. HP Sauce for short. We've forgotten what Tolstoy declared, that wisdom is as much about believing as it is about knowing.

There is a deep desire in the human heart for significance. We want our lives to have meaning. For some, that will entail a striving for greatness; for others, it's goodness they are after. Some lives are satisfying and fulfilled by little moments of domestic affection and care. Others have no luck achieving satisfaction and fulfillment despite vast wealth, or dictatorship, or publicity. But for the first Christians, one thing seems to be

certain: modesty, humility, sharing and simplicity were central to lives well-lived. They were plenty.

We have to be careful when we read about them as ‘good old days.’ For one thing, they didn’t live very long; death came soon to everyone. And for another, they thought the end of all time was near. If we all thought we would die tomorrow, or by next Thursday afternoon, we might be nicer to each other too. But since we’re stuck with each other for God knows how long, it makes sense to want to get ahead. We must not kid ourselves or mislead each other about a utopian fantasy that seems frustratingly unrealizable -- maybe laughable. There is no way most of us can live just like these folks did two thousand years ago.

But we keep telling their stories to each other today because there are parallels. We can get clues about what will help us by looking at what helped them. In their simplicity and their priorities we can find direction for our lives as today’s Followers of the Way.

For it is vital to our identity and orientation to keep in mind that this is indeed a movement, one that will not appeal to everybody. We would allow ourselves to be set apart from the status quo — whatever the consequences—and in that way, we can be very much like those first folks. They of course were risking their lives, whereas with us, it’s mostly our pride. The sweet and savory irony is that we would set ourselves apart by devoting ourselves to the world; we leave the world by entering it. But instead of building great things and amassing power and wealth, we nurture and celebrate and enact justice; we try to heal relationships so they can last forever. We plan to be there to see! We do our best to take care of the poor, and to take care of each other. We go out of our ways to welcome the stranger and move the bar down when deeming wrongs unforgivable. We become willing to forego some of our luxuries -- our immediate gratification -- so that others may eat and smile and live free.

## Hymn 492 Sing, ye faithful

Sing, ye faithful, sing with gladness, wake your noblest, sweetest strain,  
With the praises of your Savior let his house resound again;  
Him let all your music honor, and your songs exalt his reign.

Sing how he come forth from heaven, bowed himself to Bethlehem's cave,  
Stooped to wear the servant's vesture, bore the pain, the cross, the grave,  
Passed within the gates of darkness, thence his banished ones to save.

So, he tasted death for mortals, he of humankind the head,  
Sinless one, among the sinful, Prince of life, among the dead;  
Thus he wrought the full redemption, and the captor captive led.

Now on high, yet ever with us, from his Father's throne the Son  
Rules and guides the world he ransomed, till the appointed work be done,  
Till he see, renewed and perfect, all things gathered into one.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xo9IUSJCUpg>

## Summer Morn

All yesterday it poured, and all night long  
I could not sleep; the rain unceasing beat  
Upon the shingled roof like a weird song,  
Upon the grass like running children's feet.  
And down the mountains by the dark cloud kissed,  
Like a strange shape in filmy veiling dressed,  
Slid slowly, silently, the wraith-like mist,  
And nestled soft against the earth's wet breast.  
But lo, there was a miracle at dawn!  
The still air stirred at touch of the faint breeze,  
The sun a sheet of gold bequeathed the lawn,  
The songsters twittered in the rustling trees.  
And all things were transfigured in the day,

Claude McKay