

# Hear what the Spirit is saying

Sunday Morning at St. Hugh's in Idyllwild, California

August 23, 2020 | Pentecost +12

## *Collect for Proper 16*

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.** ~BCP 232

## **Isaiah 51:1-6 NRSV**

*Through the Prophet God bids his people to listen for his voice, pursue righteousness, and seek him.*

<sup>1</sup> Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. <sup>2</sup> Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many. <sup>3</sup> For the Lord will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song. <sup>4</sup> Listen to me, my people, and give heed to me, my nation; for a teaching will go out from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples. <sup>5</sup> I will bring near my deliverance swiftly, my salvation has gone out and my arms will rule the peoples; the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope. <sup>6</sup> Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended.

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

*In this lesson Paul urges the Christians in Rome to devote themselves to God's service and to recognize that with different functions they are all members of one body. Instead of dead animals, they are to offer themselves as living sacrifices. Their way of life is to be quite different from worldly standards. So will they know the will of God. All are to live in humility, realizing that they have their various gifts through God's grace.*

<sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. <sup>6</sup> We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; <sup>7</sup> ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; <sup>8</sup> the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

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

*In our gospel Peter realizes that Jesus is the Christ, and Jesus then sees Peter as the rock foundation for his church and gives to him the keys of the kingdom. The passage helps us to recognize that during Jesus' lifetime and afterward there was speculation about his role. Some saw the Son of Man as a kind of reemodiment of John the Baptist or another prophet. Simon is renamed Peter (which means rock), for on him and because of this revelation the church will be built, although Jesus' messiahship must be kept secret for the present. To Peter are given the keys to open or shut the gates of the kingdom and so to make judgment.*

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" <sup>14</sup> And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." <sup>15</sup> He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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." <sup>20</sup> Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

### **Psalm 138 BCP 793**

*A hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord on high, who has saved God's servant and cares for the lowly.*

- 1 I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with my whole heart; \*  
before the gods I will sing your praise.
- 2 I will bow down toward your holy temple and praise your Name, \*  
because of your love and faithfulness;
- 3 For you have glorified your Name \* and your word above all things.

- 4 When I called, you answered me; \*  
you increased my strength within me.
- 5 All the kings of the earth will praise you, O Lord, \*  
when they have heard the words of your mouth.
- 6 They will sing of the ways of the Lord, \*  
that great is the glory of the Lord.
- 7 Though the Lord be high, he cares for the lowly; \*  
he perceives the haughty from afar.
- 8 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe; \*  
you stretch forth your hand against the fury of my enemies;  
your right hand shall save me.
- 9 The Lord will make good his purpose for me; \*  
O Lord, your love endures for ever;

August 23, 2020 | Pentecost+12  
SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

*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.*

Romans 12:2



Commentary on Romans 12:1-6

By N.T. Wright<sup>1</sup>

William was coming to the end of his first year as chairman of the company when I met him at a lunch.

‘How’s it been going?’ I asked.

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Thomas Wright (born 1 December 1948), known as N. T. Wright or Tom Wright, is an English New Testament scholar, Pauline theologian and Anglican bishop. He was the Bishop of Durham from 2003 to 2010. He then became Research Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at St Mary's College in the University of St Andrews in Scotland until 2019, when he became a senior research fellow at Oxford University. –[Wikipedia entry N.T. Wright](#)

‘Oh,’ he said, ‘it’s been wonderful in several ways. The company is doing well and I’m proud to be part of it.’

‘Why only several ways?’ I asked, picking up the implied hesitation in the way he had answered.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I’ve only just realized what my problem has been. Everybody in the company has a clear idea of how they want the chairman to act, what sort of meetings they think they need, and so on. I’ve done my best to make my number with everyone. I’ve gone out of my way to learn the procedures they have in place. But I’ve figured out now that I’ve gone too far. I’ve let their expectations dictate the shape of my work, of how I spend my time. I now need to turn that inside out. I have my own ideas of what we should be doing, and from now on I’m going to set the pace.’

Now, of course, a wise executive will want to listen carefully to those who know more about the company than he or she does. To this extent the picture doesn’t quite fit what Paul is saying. But it does in the all-important point: his appeal now is that we should refuse to let ‘the present age’ squeeze us into its mould, dictate to us how we should think and indeed what we should think, and tell us how we can and can’t behave. Instead, we are to be transformed; our minds need to be renewed. We have to set the pace ourselves, and work out what sort of people we should be. The basis for this is not what the surrounding culture expects of us, but what God in his mercy has done for us.

One of the key phrases here is ‘the present age’ (verse 2). In Galatians 1:4 Paul calls this ‘the present evil age’. Like many first-century Jews, he believed that world history was divided into ‘the present age’, characterized by rebellion against God and the corruption and death which result, and ‘the age to come’, in which God would give new life to the world and humankind, bringing justice, joy and peace once and for all. Part of the point of Paul’s gospel is his belief that this ‘age to come’ had already begun in Jesus, and supremely in his death and resurrection.

Christians are therefore in the position, not (to be sure) of a new executive learning the job, but of someone who needs to stop letting the world around dictate its own terms and conditions, and who instead must figure out how to think, speak and act as is appropriate not for the present age but for the new age which is already breaking in. Christians are called to be counter-cultural—not in all respects, as though every single aspect of human society and culture were automatically and completely bad, but at

least in being prepared to think through each aspect of life. We must be ready to challenge those parts where the present age shouts, or perhaps whispers seductively, that it would be easier and better to do things that way, while the age to come, already begun in Jesus, insists that belonging to the new creation means that we must live this way instead.

The key to it all is the transforming of the mind. Many Christians in today's world never come to terms with this. They hope they will be able to live up to something like Christian standards while still thinking the way the rest of the world thinks. It can't be done. Paul's analysis of human rebellion against God in 1:18–32 included a fair amount of wrong thinking. Having the mind renewed by the persuasion of the spirit is the vital start of that true human living which is God's loving will for all his children.

This, after all, is a way of growing up to maturity. People sometimes suggest that living a Christian life means a kind of immaturity, since you are guided not by thinking things through for yourself but by rules and regulations derived from elsewhere. That isn't Paul's vision of Christian living. Of course there are plenty of firm boundaries. He will have more to say about them presently. But at the centre of genuine Christianity is a mind awake, alert, not content to take a few guidelines off the peg but determined to understand why human life is meant to be lived in one way rather than another. In fact, it is the way of life of 'the present age' which often involves the real human immaturity, as people simply look at the surrounding culture, with all its shallow and silly patterns of behaviour, and copy it unthinkingly.

For Paul, the mind and the body are closely interconnected, and must work as a coherent team. Having one's mind renewed and offering God one's body (verse 1) are all part of the same complete event. Here Paul uses a vivid, indeed shocking, idea: one's whole self (that's what Paul means by 'body') must be laid on the altar like a sacrifice in the Temple. The big difference is that, whereas the sacrifice is there to be killed, the Christian's self-offering is actually all about coming alive with the new life that bursts out in unexpected ways once the evil deeds of the self are put to death. (To get the full picture, we need to see the several ways in which this passage stands on the shoulders of others like 6:1–14 and 8:12–17.) Christian living never begins with a set of rules, though it contains them as it goes forwards. It begins in the glad self-offering of one's whole self to the God whose mercy has come all the way to meet us in our rebellion, sin and death. Within that, it involves the renewal of the mind so that we are

enabled both to think straight, instead of the twisted thinking that the world would force upon us, and to act accordingly.

One of the first things that Christians need to get their minds around—and one of the things that will have an immediate impact on the way we live—is the call to live as different members of a single family. Paul has already warned the Roman Christians against thinking too highly of themselves (11:25). Being loved unconditionally by the creator God makes you quite special enough without imagining that your family membership or civic background can make you any more so! Now he warns them again that they are to regard themselves, not as the ‘premier-league’ Christians while people in other places or from other backgrounds are in a kind of second rank, but as simply various limbs and organs of the one body which also possesses many others.

This is one of two famous passages (the other one being 1 Corinthians 12) in which Paul uses this image of the body with its limbs and organs in order to stress that the church is a unity made up of quite different members. ‘One body in the Messiah’; that is the way he puts it here, in verse 5. The Messiah is the truly human being, as well as being ‘God over all’ (9:5); those who are ‘in him’, members of his ‘body’, form God’s renewed humanity. In other words, the picture of ‘body and members’ isn’t simply an illustration at random. It is designed to speak of the new human life which the church is to live and model before the world.

This is one of those points where we begin to detect something of Paul’s wider purpose for the church, which will become more and more apparent as the next chapters go on. People sometimes suppose that the ‘theological’ part of Romans is finished with chapter 11, and that what we have from here on is simply ‘practical’ teaching. Paul is seldom as unsubtle as that. (In any case, there has been a lot of ‘practical’ or ‘ethical’ teaching already in the letter, as we have seen in chapters 6 and 8.) Rather, the appeal for church unity, which will be spelled out in more detail in chapters 14 and 15, grows directly out of everything Paul has been saying throughout the letter about the coming together of Jew and Gentile in the Messiah.

That unity is not simply based on a general belief that everyone matters. It is based, as we saw in chapter 3 and 4 (and in Galatians 2, 3 and 4), on the fact that Christians all have the same faith. God has given each Christian the same faith in Jesus as the risen Messiah and Lord. However different people may be, in temperament, background, calling and ability,

all Christians share this faith, and it is the ground of their unity and cooperation.

This is a lesson the church of our own day needs to learn afresh. The world around us loves to force us into disunity. We must once more be transformed by having our minds renewed, not least through the self-offering of worship. That way, as we learn the lessons of unity, we may perhaps discover how to put them into effect.

### **TAKE MY LIFE AND LET IT BE**

*Frances R. Havergal, 1836–1879*

*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)*

In this day of self-centered living and pleasure-oriented lifestyle, the total commitment to God of body, mind, and possessions portrayed in this text is difficult for many Christians to achieve. Even though we realize that we have nothing we have not received and that we are only stewards of the good gifts God has entrusted to us, we often fail to apply this basic truth to our daily lives:

The gold that came from Thee, Lord, to Thee belongeth still;  
Oh, may I always faithfully my stewardship fulfill.

—Unknown

It was said of Frances Ridley Havergal, author of this text, that the beauty of a consecrated life was never more perfectly revealed than in her daily living. She has rightfully been called “The Consecration Poet.”

“These little couplets that chimed in my heart one after another” were for Frances Havergal the result of an evening in 1874 passed in pursuing a deeper consecration of herself to God. “Take my voice and let me sing always only for my King” was personally significant for Frances. She was naturally very musical and had been trained as a concert soloist with an unusually pleasant voice. Her musical talents could have brought her much worldly fame. However, she determined that her life’s mission was to sing and work only for Jesus. The line “Take my silver and my gold” was also sincerely phrased. At one time Frances gathered together her many fine pieces of jewelry and other family heirlooms and shipped them to the church missionary house to be used for evangelizing the lost. Nearly fifty articles were sent with “extreme delight.”

**Original**

Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee; take my hands  
and let them move at the impulse of Thy love;

Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee; take my  
voice and let me sing always only, for my King.

Take my lips and let them be filled with messages for Thee; take my  
silver and my gold—not a mite would I withhold.

Take my love—my God, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store; take myself  
—and I will be ever, only, all for Thee, ever, only, all for thee.

Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions*  
(Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1996), August 25

**Hymnal 1982 #707**

*This will be our closing hymn on Sunday, August 23, 2020 ~Fr. Dan*

1

Take my life, and let it be  
consecrated, Lord, to thee;  
take my moments and my days,  
let them flow in ceaseless praise.  
Take my hands, and let them move  
at the impulse of thy love;  
take my heart, it is thine own;  
it shall be thy royal throne.

2

Take my voice, and let me sing  
always, only, for my King;  
take my intellect, and use  
every power as thou shalt choose.  
Take my will, and make it thine;  
it shall be no longer mine.  
Take myself, and I will be  
ever, only, all for thee.