

# HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT IS SAYING

In Scripture and Prayer and The Great Cloud of Witnesses

Week of May 29, 2022

*Collect for the Seventh Sunday of Easter*

O God, the King of glory, you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven: Do not leave us comfortless, but send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us, and exalt us to that place where our Savior Christ has gone before; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen. ~BCP 226

## **Acts 16:16-34** CEB 2011

<sup>16</sup> [With Paul and Silas, we came to Philippi in Macedonia, a Roman colony], one day when we were on the way to the place for prayer, we met a slave woman. She had a spirit that enabled her to predict the future. She made a lot of money for her owners through fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> She began following Paul and us, shouting, “These people are servants of the Most High God! They are proclaiming a way of salvation to you!” <sup>18</sup> She did this for many days. This annoyed Paul so much that he finally turned and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to leave her!” It left her at that very moment.

<sup>19</sup> Her owners realized that their hope for making money was gone. They grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the officials in the city center. <sup>20</sup> When her owners approached the legal authorities, they said, “These people are causing an uproar in our city. They are Jews <sup>21</sup> who promote customs that we Romans can’t accept or practice.” <sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in the attacks against Paul and Silas, so the authorities ordered that they be stripped of their clothes and beaten with a rod. <sup>23</sup> When Paul and Silas had been severely beaten, the authorities threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to secure them with great care. <sup>24</sup> When he received these instructions, he threw them into the innermost cell and secured their feet in stocks.

<sup>25</sup> Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup> All at once there was such a violent earthquake that it shook the prison’s foundations. The doors flew open and everyone’s chains came loose. <sup>27</sup> When the jailer awoke and saw the open doors of the prison, he thought the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword and was about to kill himself. <sup>28</sup> But Paul shouted loudly, “Don’t harm yourself! We’re all here!” <sup>29</sup> The jailer called for some lights, rushed in, and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> He led them outside and asked, “Honorable masters, what must I do to be rescued?” <sup>31</sup> They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your entire household.” <sup>32</sup> They spoke the Lord’s word to him and everyone else

## 2

in his house. <sup>33</sup> Right then, in the middle of the night, the jailer welcomed them and washed their wounds. He and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. <sup>34</sup> He brought them into his home and gave them a meal. He was overjoyed because he and everyone in his household had come to believe in God.

### **Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21** NRSV 1989

[At the end of the visions I, John, heard these words]: <sup>12</sup> “See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone’s work. <sup>13</sup> I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” <sup>14</sup> Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates.

<sup>16</sup> “It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” <sup>17</sup> The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let everyone who hears say, “Come.” And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

<sup>20</sup> The one who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

<sup>21</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

### **John 17:20-26** NRSV 1989

Jesus continued <sup>20</sup> “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup> that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. <sup>24</sup> Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. <sup>25</sup> “Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup> I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

### **Psalm 97** BCP 726

1 The LORD is King; let the earth rejoice; \*  
let the multitude of the isles be glad.

- 2 Clouds and darkness are round about him, \*  
righteousness and justice are the foundations of his throne.
- 3 A fire goes before him \* and burns up his enemies on every side.
- 4 His lightnings light up the world; \* the earth sees it and is afraid.
- 5 The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the LORD, \*  
at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.
- 6 The heavens declare his righteousness, \*  
and all the peoples see his glory.
- 7 Confounded be all who worship carved images  
and delight in false gods! \*  
Bow down before him, all you gods.
- 8 Zion hears and is glad, and the cities of Judah rejoice, \*  
because of your judgments, O LORD.
- 9 For you are the LORD, most high over all the earth; \*  
you are exalted far above all gods.
- 10 The LORD loves those who hate evil; \*  
he preserves the lives of his saints  
and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.
- 11 Light has sprung up for the righteous, \*  
and joyful gladness for those who are truehearted.
- 12 Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous, \* and give thanks to his holy  
Name.

## Supplemental Resources

### **Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21: A Pastoral Perspective**

*By Paul "Skip" Johnson, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Pastoral Theology and Care,  
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Coming at the very end of the book of Revelation, as well as being the words that close the Christian Bible, this text has interested the church for centuries. The proclaimed words of promise draw a portion of their power from their familiarity to us. They bring to mind experiences that all of humanity shares. They invoke memories of long-distance separations stained with tears and weighted with heavy hearts, when we wondered if and when our loved ones might be seen again. They acknowledge protracted periods of waiting and yearning for the presence of another, and then comes the phone call, the telegram, the letter, the e-mail message, the announcement that the wait is almost over. Our experience of separation will soon be ending. Arrival of the loved one is imminent.

Yet rather than be caught up in the emotions of anticipation, the text

## 4

carries explicit instructions for those who are waiting. “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city” (v. 14). It is an odd directive. It points us away from sky gazing and orients us toward the everyday work of the faithful, in ways that can be interpreted both practically and metaphorically. Doing laundry is not glamorous or exciting. It can be mundane and tedious labor. Yet it is necessary.

The adrenaline high that is generated by speculations of Christ’s return date is exciting. Every generation since Christ’s ascension has seen the rise of religious leaders offering numerical calculations of a calendar date for Christ’s return. In the United States of 1844, thousands of followers of William Miller gathered together in fervent anticipation on October 22, in response to the prediction that the day of return had arrived. As later noted by Hiram Edson, one of those participants, “Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before.... We wept and wept, till the day dawn.” In the early 1970s the author Hal Lindsey published a hugely successful book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which cobbled together an assortment of twentieth-century international events that were loosely matched to Scripture, in order to determine a date of Christ’s return. The result of his book and related others was an eschatological orientation among many Christians of the late twentieth century that served only as a distraction from the practices and work of the faithful in a broken world. The instructions for those who are waiting are to concentrate on the tasks at hand and to be about the work of cleansing a world made unclean.

A significant aspect of the text is the relational orientation of the speakers. The verses can be experienced as a call-and-response, back-and-forth exchange that sets the reader in the midst of urgency and anticipation. Jesus announces his return and provides instructions. The Spirit and the bride reply. Then all who hear are urged to join in as well. We listen to this text, not as passive receivers, but as active participants asked to be prepared to enter into the community. This is a call to ministry, not a ticketed invitation to sit in a stadium and watch a spectacle. It is a reminder that being a Christian assumes an active disposition and an attitude of grace-filled practice within the community of faith.

Another powerful note of the text comes in the universality of the announcement of return and its accompanying invitation to the waters of life. Everyone who is thirsty is told to come. No qualifications or prerequisites are given, outside of the request for attention to laundry washing. No limitations are posted regarding who is allowed to enjoy the drink of salvation. “Let anyone who wishes take the water of life” (v. 17d).

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## Revelation 22:17d in translation

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. (KJV, 1611)

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." Let the hearer say, "Come." Let the one who thirsts come forward, and the one who wants it receive the gift of life-giving water. (NABRE, 2011)

The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' Let the one who hears say, 'Come!' And let the one who is thirsty come! Let the one who wishes receive life-giving water as a gift. (CEB, 2011)

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It creates a marvelous cinematic image of countless people of all nationalities, ages, languages, classes, and so forth drawing out water that is freely given as a gift.

It brings to mind a personal memory of a morning spent on the banks of the Ganges River in India as thousands of brightly clad pilgrims descended stone steps in the city of Varanasi to draw out water from a river that is considered holy. The sun was rising, and moving toward the stream were men and women old and young, prosperous and poor, with shadings of every skin color. Children were assisted by older siblings. Mothers carried babies, and the infirm were helped by friends and family. Differences were of no matter. What was of importance was the coming to the sacred waters.

Far too often we emphasize the particularity of Christ's return and grasp it as the personal possession for a favored community of which we claim membership. These closing verses of our Bible suggest, to the contrary, that such exclusivity is a manufactured interpretation that is truly separate from the design and will of the returning Christ. Perhaps this is part of the washing that the text is referring to, a cleansing of our own prejudices and assumptions, which must be addressed before we may enter the heavenly city that has descended to us.

Southern writer Flannery O'Connor addressed these matters repeatedly in her fiction. In her well-known short story "Revelation," she brings this biblical message to the fore through a character whose narrow-mindedness and intolerance for others are revealed through the unexpected (and undesired) experience of a divine vision that comes to her in the waiting area of a doctor's office. The character's pride and self-importance are mortally punctured as she glimpses a celestial bridge to the heavens filled with persons that she judges to be unworthy and grotesque. It is an ironic apocalyptic vision borrowed from John that points to our own need of preparation to be worthy of Christ's greeting.

David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year C, vol. 2* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009)

## Alpha and Omega



Both in antiquity and the Middle Ages, alpha and omega occur more frequently in Christian art and inscriptions than in literature. With few exceptions, Christian iconography employs the letters on coins, vases, and monuments in connection with figures symbolic of Christ (rather than God the Father), the usual form being a monogram of Χριστός (Christos) flanked by alpha and omega.

David L. Jeffrey, *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1992).



## Unity and Uniformity are not the same

*John 17:1* Jesus ... looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you....”

[Jesus continued], <sup>20</sup> “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup> that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” John 17:1, 20-23

It seems to me that much of the problem stems from a lack of appreciation for the difference between unity and uniformity. In Jesus’ great prayer for his disciples, he prays three times for unity, “ ... that they may be one ... ” (Jn. 17:11, 21, 23). He did not pray for uniformity. Warren Wiersbe writes: “The unity that our Lord prayed for is not institutional or organizational. It is spiritual: ‘that they may be one, just as We are’” (Jn. 17:22). Unity grows from within; uniformity is forced from without. Unity is living, it grows and expands; but uniformity is dead and brittle, and the least jarring thing breaks it. Unity allows for variety and diversity, but uniformity demands conformity. Unity is based on love and thrives on love, but uniformity is defensive and is based too often on fear. You see, here is the thing. Christian unity is based upon me loving Christ enough, to love you enough, to let you be different ... to let you have different points of view ... to let you have different ways of seeing things.

David Webber in *Presbyterian Record* (June 2008) quoted in *Synthesis* May, 2010

# Spiritual Day Hike

In the landscape where Spirit & World intersect

Week of May 29, 2022

## This Week's Holy Women and Men (Witnesses to inspire us)

*Commemorations in the Episcopal Church are listed in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), in Lesser Feasts and Fasts (LFF), and in a Great Cloud of Witnesses (GCoW).*

*Here are the Holy Women and Men remembered this week:*

May 30 .....[Jeanne d'Arc \(Joan of Arc\)](#), Mystic and Soldier, 1431 *GCoW*

Jun 1.....[Justin](#), Martyr, c. 167 *LFF*

Jun 2.....[Blandina & her companions](#), The Martyrs of Lyons, 177 *LFF*

Jun 3.....[The Martyrs of Uganda](#), 1886 *LFF*

Jun 4.....[John XXIII](#), Bishop, 1963 *LFF*

## From A Great Cloud of Witnesses

[T]his volume presents a wide array of possible commemorations for individuals and congregations to observe. Recognizing that there are many perspectives on the identity and place of exemplary Christians in the life of the Church, this volume proposes that the metaphor of a “family history” is a fitting way to describe who is included. As such, the title of this volume is drawn from the Epistle to the Hebrews, recalling that “we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1). The people found in this volume are not all definitively declared to be saints, but are Christians who have inspired other Christians in different times and places.

The Book of Common Prayer proclaims in the ecumenical creeds and in our prayers its belief in the “communion of the saints.”

The saints encourage us; they pray for us; they strengthen us.

*Introduction to A Great Cloud of Witnesses, 2018*

## Blandina and her companions

In the second century, after a brief respite, Christians in many parts of the Roman empire were once again subjected to persecution. At Lyons and Vienne, in Gaul, there were missionary centers which had drawn many Christians from Asia and Greece. They were living a devout life under the guidance of Pothinus, elderly Bishop of Lyons, when persecution began in 177.

At first, the Christians were socially excluded from Roman homes, the public baths, and the market place; insults, stones, and blows were rained on them by pagan mobs, and Christian homes were vandalized. Soon after,

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the imperial officials forced Christians to come to the market place for harsh questioning, followed by imprisonment.

Some slaves from Christian households were tortured to extract public accusations that Christians practiced cannibalism, incest, and other perversions. These false accusations roused the mob to such a pitch of wrath that any leniency toward the imprisoned Christians was impossible. Even friendly pagans now turned against them.

The fury of the mob fell most heavily on Sanctus, a deacon; Attalus; Maturus, a recent convert; and Blandina, a slave. According to Eusebius, Blandina was so filled with power to withstand torments that her torturers gave up. "I am a Christian," she said, "and nothing vile is done among us." Sanctus was tormented with red-hot irons. The aged Pothinus, badly beaten, died soon after. Finally, the governor decided to set aside several days for a public spectacle in the amphitheater.

Eusebius depicts Blandina in particular as standing in the person of Christ: "Blandina was suspended on a stake, and exposed to be devoured by the wild beasts who should attack her. And because she appeared as if hanging on a cross, and because of her earnest prayers, she inspired the combatants with great zeal. For they looked on her in her conflict, and beheld with their outward eyes, in the form of their sister, him who was crucified for them, that he might persuade those who believe in him, that every one who suffers for the glory of Christ has fellowship always with the living God."

On the final day of the spectacle, writes Eusebius, "Blandina, last of all, like a noble mother who had encouraged her children and sent them ahead victorious to the King, hastened to join them." Beaten, torn, burned with irons, she was wrapped in a net and tossed about by a wild bull. The spectators were amazed at her endurance.

Eusebius concludes: "They offered up to the Father a single wreath, but it was woven of diverse colors and flowers of all kinds. It was fitting that the noble athletes should endure a varied conflict, and win a great victory, that they might be entitled in the end to receive the crown supreme of life everlasting."

*Great Cloud of Witnesses, 2018*

### *Collect for the Commemoration*

Grant, O Lord, that we who keep the feast of the holy martyrs Blandina and her companions may be rooted and grounded in love of you, and may endure the sufferings of this life for the glory that shall be revealed in us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

## The Martyrs of Uganda

On June 3, 1886, thirty-two young men, pages of the court of King Mwanga of Buganda, were burned to death at Namugongo for their refusal to renounce Christianity. In the following months many other Christians throughout the country died by fire or spear for their faith.

These martyrdoms totally changed the dynamic of Christian growth in Uganda. Introduced by a handful of Anglican and Roman Catholic missionaries after 1877, the Christian faith had been preached only to the immediate members of the court, by order of King Mutesa. His successor, Mwanga, became increasingly angry as he realized that the first converts put loyalty to Christ above the traditional loyalty to the king.

Martyrdoms began in 1885 (including Bishop Hannington and his Companions: see October 29th). Mwanga first forbade anyone to go near a Christian mission on pain of death, but finding himself unable to cool the ardor of the converts, resolved to wipe out Christianity.

The Namugongo martyrdoms produced a result entirely opposite to Mwanga's intentions. The example of these martyrs, who walked to their death singing hymns and praying for their enemies, so inspired many of the bystanders that they began to seek instruction from the remaining Christians. Within a few years the original handful of converts had multiplied many times and spread far beyond the court. The martyrs had left the indelible impression that Christianity was truly African, not simply a white man's religion. Most of the missionary work was carried out by Africans rather than by white missionaries, and Christianity spread steadily.

Renewed persecution of Christians by a Muslim military dictatorship in the 1970s proved the vitality of the example of the Namugongo martyrs. Among the thousands of new martyrs, both Anglican and Roman Catholic, was Janani Luwum, Archbishop of the (Anglican) Church of Uganda (see February 17th), whose courageous ministry and death inspired not only his countrymen but also Christians throughout the world.

*A Great Cloud of Witnesses, 2018*

### *Collect for the Commemoration*

O God, by your providence the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church: Grant that we who remember before you the blessed martyrs of Uganda, may, like them, be steadfast in our faith in Jesus Christ, to whom they gave obedience, even to death, and by their sacrifice brought forth a plentiful harvest; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Preface to Lesser Feasts and Fasts, 2018

Christians have since ancient times honored men and women whose lives represent heroic commitment to Christ and who have borne witness to their faith even at the cost of their lives. Such witnesses, by the grace of God, live in every age. The criteria used in the selection of those to be commemorated in the Episcopal Church are set out below and represent a growing consensus among provinces of the Anglican Communion also engaged in enriching their calendars.

What we celebrate in the lives of the saints is the presence of Christ expressing itself in and through particular lives lived in the midst of specific historical circumstances. In the saints we are not dealing primarily with absolutes of perfection but human lives, in all their diversity, open to the motions of the Holy Spirit. Many a holy life, when carefully examined, will reveal flaws or the bias of a particular moment in history or ecclesial perspective. It should encourage us to realize that the saints, like us, are first and foremost redeemed sinners in whom the risen Christ's words to St. Paul come to fulfillment, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

The "lesser feasts" provide opportunities for optional observance. They are not intended to replace the fundamental celebration of Sunday and major Holy Days.

As the [Standing Liturgical Commission](#) and the General Convention add or delete names from the calendar, successive editions of this volume will be published, each edition bearing in the title the date of the General Convention to which it is a response.

This latest edition of Lesser Feasts and Fasts is intended to reflect a balance of women and men, orders of ministry, races and ethnicities, and historical time periods. It has been designed so that it can stand alone, but can also be used in conjunction with the additional optional resource *A Great Cloud of Witnesses*, which includes an even broader list of names and a more expansive set of criteria for inclusion. This use of two books recognizes that there is a diversity of understandings in the Episcopal Church about what it means for someone to appear on the calendar and a range of practices in how the calendar is used.

### Revising the calendar of commemorations: Lesser Feasts and Fasts, 2018

In the Episcopal Church, we remember the saints because they show us how to make and remake our lives, following the Way of Jesus Christ. They do this by messing things up; they mess up our preconceptions about God and ourselves so that we can be transformed in both our self-understanding and in the ways that we know God.

In their lives, valiant witnesses of the Risen Christ asked dangerous questions about the world in which they lived. They questioned the common assumption that history was either an inevitable ascent by human will, or devolution into chaos or an exercise of power over weakness. In their lives, the saints lived out the Gospel in ways that so captured the imagination of their friends (and sometimes their enemies) that we continue to tell their stories. The saints' stories are repeated as a part of our own sacred stories, giving us, year after year, a way of listening anew to the Gospel, and then speaking Gospel in our lives.

[SCLM website post on March 6, 2018](#) accessed May 5, 2022