

HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT IS SAYING

In Scripture and Prayer and The Great Cloud of Witnesses

Week of July 17, 2022

Collect for Proper 11

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. BCP 231

Genesis 18:1-10a NRSVue, 2021

In our Hebrew scripture story the Lord appears to Abraham and promises that he and Sarah will have a son. As often seen in biblical narratives, the Lord's presence is disguised, this time in one of three visitors. Abraham may suspect God's nearness, but he also generously fulfills his duty of hospitality to strangers.

¹ The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them and bowed down to the ground. ³ He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵ Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." ⁶ And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." ⁷ Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. ⁸ Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared and set it before them, and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

⁹ They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." ¹⁰ Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son."

Colossians 1:15-28 NRSVue, 2021

This lesson exults in the primacy of Christ, who is the image of the invisible God in whom all things find meaning and coherence. All the fullness of deity was pleased to dwell in Christ, who provides headship to the living body of the church. In the mystery of God's plan, Gentiles, too, share in the hope of glory. For this ministry to non-Jews Paul has been especially appointed. The sufferings he experiences in his work are a way of filling out the redemptive activity of Christ through his body, the church. The result is that those who once were strangers to God and living in sin may now be reconciled through Christ's sacrifice and grow toward their maturity in his body.

¹⁵ [Christ Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all

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creation, ¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in[j] him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

²¹ And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, ²³ provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a minister of this gospel.

²⁴ I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. ²⁵ I became its minister according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Luke 10:38-42 NRSVue, 2021

The gospel is the story of Martha and Mary and their different attitudes toward life and the Lord's presence. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and his death. The little narrative focuses on Martha and indicates how good works without a response to the Lord may only lead to anxiety and to missing what is essential.

³⁸ Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him. ³⁹ She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus's feet and listened to what he was saying. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her, then, to help me." ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—indeed only one. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Psalm 15 BCP 599

The psalm describes the virtues of one who is worthy to worship the Lord.

- 1 LORD, who may dwell in your tabernacle? *
who may abide upon your holy hill?
- 2 Whoever leads a blameless life and does what is right, *
who speaks the truth from his heart.
- 3 There is no guile upon his tongue; he does no evil to his friend; *
he does not heap contempt upon his neighbor.
- 4 In his sight the wicked is rejected, *
but he honors those who fear the LORD.
- 5 He has sworn to do no wrong * and does not take back his word.
- 6 He does not give his money in hope of gain, *
nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.
- 7 Whoever does these things * shall never be overthrown.

Supplemental Resources

Colossians 1:15-28: A Pastoral Perspective

*By Rodger Nishioka the Benton Family Associate Professor of Christian Education,
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Jesus Christ is the firstborn of all creation. He is truly unique. There is no other like him. Both in his relationship to God and in his being as God's revelation and redeemer of the whole world, he is stamped with a finality and completeness that knows no compromise. He is both the subject of creation, meaning that all things have been created through him and for him, and the cosmic reconciler, through whom God restores harmony between God and all of the creation. Thus begins the magnificent Christ hymn that forms the foundation for this letter. Lest anyone misunderstand, this community is marked as "Christian" because of its belief in these essential claims about Jesus Christ. It is a bold reminder of our purpose. The church is the body of Jesus Christ, and it is Christ whom we proclaim.

One would think this is clear, but it is not that simple. Theologian Brian McLaren writes in his book *A Generous Orthodoxy*(1) about his own confusion and growth in understanding this Jesus Christ whom we are called to proclaim. He describes the "seven Jesuses I have known." McLaren begins with his upbringing as a child when he first met Jesus, whom he calls the "Conservative Protestant Jesus." This Jesus was "born to die," he writes. The focal point was Jesus' innocent death on the cross for McLaren's sins.

Over time, McLaren struggled with this view of Jesus because it seemed an individualistic, legalistic view with personal but no global import. As a young adult, McLaren next met the “Pentecostal/ Charismatic Jesus.” This Jesus was present, personal, and dramatically involved in everyday life through the Holy Spirit, but nagging questions about God’s concern for the whole world, for history, and for creation frustrated McLaren. This led him to the “Roman Catholic Jesus.” McLaren loved the way this Jesus helped him focus on the Eucharist and the connection to ancient tradition that was beyond his present experience, but the exclusivism of the church in this view troubled him.

For a time, he worshiped the “Eastern Orthodox Jesus,” which emphasized the Trinity, affirmed mystery, and still engaged the world. This led him to the “Liberal Protestant Jesus,” with a focus on social justice that grew from personal experience of faith in Christ. From there he ventured to the “Anabaptist Jesus,” with its historic focus on peace and nonviolence, and from there to the “Liberation Theology Jesus,” who confronted injustice in the whole of society and stood in solidarity with the poor and oppressed.

In this way, McLaren illustrates the complexity of proclaiming Christ. While he does not argue that one of these interpretations is the true Jesus, he does remind us that the purpose of the church is to proclaim Jesus Christ, whoever that church understands Christ to be. That, too, can be complex, given our human need for certitude against the solipsistic claim that all belief is relative and therefore subject to our individual whims or conceptions of the truth.

Professor David Ng, much like the apostle Paul and Brian McLaren, sought to remind the church of its central purpose when he wrote *Youth in the Community of Disciples*.⁽²⁾ Concerned that the church had become distracted from its essential identity as the body of Jesus Christ and its central task of proclaiming Christ, he wrote that the purpose of the church is not to be a place of entertainment where persons, and especially young people, come to be spectators while worship leaders and Bible teachers “put on a show,” using whatever gimmicks and novelties they can pull out of their bag of tricks so that everyone has fun. The church is not some theological theme park where frantic leaders, fearful of ever boring or frustrating their customers, employ an ever-escalating array of techniques.

Ng also wrote that the purpose of the church is not maintenance—to be a safe place, a refuge for its members—until Christ comes again. This vision of the church as perpetual purgatory requires nothing of its members except that they wait and not stir things up, lest they become more anxiety ridden than they already are. The key purpose of this kind of church is

to keep the status quo. Abhorrent of disruption, change, or even growth, the church focuses on itself by keeping its members comfortable without challenges. Keeping its members in this continuous holding pattern, the church simply tries to survive.

Furthermore, Ng wrote, the purpose of the church is not fellowship where the entire energy of the congregation is focused on its social relationships, so that each person feels as if he or she belongs. Certainly, he argues, fellowship is an important dimension of the church, but it is not the church's central purpose. Fellowship-focused churches act as little more than social organizations that exist for their own members, rather than for the worship of God as the body of Christ. With a tendency to be insular—and more often than not exclusive—the congregation whose primary purpose is fellowship tends toward a more therapeutic focus; the emphasis is one's comfort within the larger group, rather than whether one is living one's life faithfully.

Finally, Ng also wrote that the purpose of the church is not protection, where the community, terrified of the world beyond its walls, invests all its energies in constructing a safe place where its members can dutifully worship, study, and enact their sacred rituals. These congregations ultimately forbid any interaction with outsiders until the strangers have been duly tested and assimilated. For Ng, the real purpose of the church is clear—to be the community of disciples of Jesus Christ and as such, to proclaim Christ. We do not proclaim entertainment or fun or fellowship or maintenance or protection. The apostle Paul would agree with Ng. The church of Jesus Christ does not exist for us. We exist for one reason: to proclaim Christ the firstborn of all creation!

In Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year C, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 3 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010)

Notes

- (1) Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Youth Specialties, 2004).
- (2) David Ng, *Youth in the Community of Disciples* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1984).

Colossians 1:15-28: An Exegetical Perspective

By Susan Grove Eastman an Assistant Professor of Practice of Bible and Christian Formation, Duke Divinity School, Durham, North Carolina

Today's epistle lesson divides into three sections: a "hymn" in praise of Christ (vv. 15–20), the application of Christ's action directly to the Gentile Christians in Colossae (vv. 21–23), and Paul's reflections on his ministry to the Gentiles (vv. 24–28). As throughout the letter, however, Christ, the Colossians, and Paul himself are closely related.

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The poetic structure of 1:15–20 suggests that the passage belongs to an early Christian hymn or liturgy. It divides into two stanzas (vv. 15–16 and vv. 18b–20), bracketing the central affirmation that Christ is “before all things,” the one in whom “all things hold together,” and the “head of the body, the church.” In the Greek text, verses 15 and 18b are parallel: “who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” and “who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead” (my trans.). The central affirmation of Christ’s priority in creation and in the church is also structured by two parallel phrases in Greek: “and he is before all things” (1:17a); “and he is the head of the body, the church” (1:18a) (my translation). Thus Christ has preeminence in both creation and redemption, as the agent and goal of the first creation, holding it all together, and as the agent and goal of the new creation, brought about by his reconciling death on the cross. The all-inclusive character of these claims is conveyed through the repeated references to “all,” “all things,” and “everything,” which occur eight times in the hymn. Furthermore, the repetition of “in heaven and on earth” (v. 16) and “on earth or in heaven” (v. 20) underscores the cosmic scope of both creation and redemption in Christ.

In *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year C*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 3 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).

Note

exegesis N. (plural noun exegeses/-sēz/)

Critical explanation or interpretation of a text, especially of scripture.
‘the task of biblical exegesis’

Source: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/exegesis>

Brief introduction to the Letter to the Colossians

Colossae was a city in what is now southwestern Turkey. It had a flourishing wool and textile industry and a significant Jewish population. It seems that most Christians there were Gentile. Although long thought to be written by Paul, today this epistle is considered non-Pauline for a number of reasons. The most compelling is that it emphasizes what God has already done for his people: Paul tells us what God is going to do in the future (although some argue that Paul shifted his viewpoint in later life.) It gives descriptions of false teachings which were being promulgated in the churches. Some scholars consider this evidence of later authorship. In the ancient world, writing in the name of a respected author was accepted and regarded as an honour.

[Comments. Revised Common Lectionary Commentary](#) by Chris Haslam and supervised by the Venerable Alan T. Perry, Anglican Diocese of Montreal (Anglican Church of Canada). Accessed July 8, 2022

Spiritual Day Hike

In the landscape where Spirit & World intersect



Week of July 17, 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:

Jul 17.....[William White](#), Bishop, 1836 *LFF*

Jul 18.....[Bartolomé de las Casas](#) Friar and Missionary to the Indies, 1566 *GCoW*

Jul 19.....[Macrina of Caesarea](#), Monastic and Teacher, 379 *LFF*

Jul 20.....[Maria Skobtsova](#), Monastic and Martyr, 1945 *LFF*

Jul 20.....[Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 1902; Amelia Bloomer, 1894; Sojourner Truth, 1883; and Harriet Ross Tubman, 1913](#)

Liberators and Prophets *GCoW*

Jul 21.....[Albert John Luthuli](#), Prophetic Witness in South Africa, 1967 *GCoW*

Jul 22.....Saint Mary Magdalene *LFF* [View or download more on Mary Magdalene](#)

Jul 23.....[John Cassian](#), Monastic and Theologian, 435 *LFF*

July 20: Maria Skobtsova, Monastic and Martyr, 1945

Maria Skobtsova was born to a well to do family in 1891. She was given the name Elizaveta, known as Liza to her family. In 1906, after the death of her father, her mother took the family to St. Petersburg, where she became involved in radical intellectual circles. After her divorce from her first husband, she was drawn to Christianity. She married her second husband, Daniel Skobtsov, and they emigrated to Paris in 1923. Three years later, her youngest child died, and she separated from her second husband. After this, Liza began to work more directly with those who were in need.

In 1932, Liza's bishop encouraged her to take vows as a nun, which she did taking the name, Maria. She realized that Christian asceticism was not primarily about self-mortification and the cloistered life, but responding with love to the needs of others while trying to create better social structures. She could often be found sitting along the Boulevard Montparnasse, in front of a café, with a glass of beer, smoking cigarettes, and talking with simple workers in full monastic robes. Maria made a rented house in Paris her "convent." It was a place with an open door for refugees, the needy and the lonely. It also soon became a center for intellectual and theological discussion. For Maria, these two elements—service to the poor and theology—went hand-in-hand.

When the Nazis took Paris in 1940, Maria began to provide a safe haven for Jewish Parisians. Many came to her hoping to receive baptismal certificates, which they believed would prevent their deportation. Her chaplain, Father Dimitri, gladly

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provided them. As the occupation became more dangerous, the community hid more Jewish people, providing shelter and helping many to escape. Eventually, this work of the community was discovered by the Gestapo. Maria, her son Yuri, her mother Sophia, and Dmitri Klepinin were all taken into custody.

Maria was sent to the concentration camp in Ravensbrück, Germany. While imprisoned, she encouraged the other inmates. Her faith was strengthened by her claim that “each person is the very icon of God incarnate in the world.” With this recognition came the need “to accept this awesome revelation of God unconditionally, to venerate the image of God” in her brothers and sisters.

On Holy Saturday, March 31st, 1945, Mother Maria was taken to the gas chamber and entered eternal life. It is suggested that she took the place of a Jewish woman who had been selected for death. A week later, the camp was liberated by the Red Army. In the Orthodox Church she is commemorated on July 20th.

Lesser Feasts and Fasts, 2018

July 20 Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 1902; Amelia Bloomer, 1894; Sojourner Truth, 1883; and Harriet Ross Tubman, 1913 Liberators and Prophets

Elizabeth Cady Stanton 1815–1902

Born on November 12, 1815, into an affluent, strict Calvinist family in Johnstown, New York, Elizabeth, as a young woman, took seriously the Presbyterian doctrines of predestination and human depravity. She became very depressed, but resolved her mental crises through action. She dedicated her life to righting the wrongs perpetrated upon women by the Church and society.

She and four other women organized the first Women’s Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York, July 19–20, 1848. The event set her political and religious agenda for the next 50 years. She held the Church accountable for oppressing women by using Scripture to enforce subordination of women in marriage and to prohibit them from ordained ministry. She held society accountable for denying women equal access to professional jobs, property ownership, the vote, and for granting less pay for the same work.

In 1881, the Revised Version of the Bible was published by a committee which included no women scholars. Elizabeth founded her own committee of women to write a commentary on Scripture, and applying the Greek she learned as a child from her minister, focused on passages used to oppress and discriminate against women.

Although Elizabeth blamed male clergy for women’s oppression, she attended Trinity Episcopal Church in Seneca Falls with her friend Amelia Bloomer. As a dissenting prophet, Elizabeth preached hundreds of homilies and political speeches in pulpits throughout the nation. Wherever she visited, she was experienced as a holy presence and a liberator. She never lost her sense of humor, despite years of contending with opposition, even from friends. In a note to Susan B. Anthony, she said: “Do not feel depressed, my dear friend, what is good in us is immortal, and if the sore trials we

have endured are sifting out pride and selfishness, we shall not have suffered in vain.” Shortly before she died in New York City, on October 26, 1902, she said: “My only regret is that I have not been braver and bolder and truer in the honest conviction of my soul.”

Amelia Jenks Bloomer 1818–1894

Amelia Jenks, the youngest of six children, born in New York on May 27, 1818, to a pious Presbyterian family, early on demonstrated a kindness of heart and strict regard for truth and right. As a young woman, she joined in the temperance, anti-slavery, and women’s rights movements.

Amelia Jenks Bloomer never intended to make dress reform a major platform in women’s struggle for justice. But, women’s fashion of the day prescribed waist-cinching corsets, even for pregnant women, resulting in severe health problems. Faith and fashion collided explosively when she published in her newspaper, *The Lily*, a picture of herself in loose-fitting Turkish trousers, and began wearing them publicly. Clergy, from their pulpits, attacked women who wore them, citing Moses: “Women should not dress like men.” Amelia fired back: “It matters not what Moses had to say to the men and women of his time about what they should wear. If clergy really cared about what Moses said about clothes, they would all put fringes and blue ribbons on their garments.” Her popularity soared as she engaged clergy in public debate.

She insisted that “certain passages in the Scriptures relating to women had been given a strained and unnatural meaning.” And, of St. Paul she said: “Could he have looked into the future and foreseen all the sorrow and strife, the cruel exactions and oppression on the one hand and the blind submission and cringing fear on the other, that his words have sanctioned and caused, he would never have uttered them.” And of women’s right to freedom, “The same Power that brought the slave out of bondage will, in His own good time and way, bring about the emancipation of woman, and make her the equal in power and dominion that she was in the beginning.”

Later in life, in Council Bluffs, Iowa, a frontier town, she worked to establish churches, libraries, and school houses. She provided hospitality for traveling clergy of all denominations, and for temperance lecturers and reformers. Trinity Episcopal Church, Seneca Falls, New York, where she was baptized, records her as a “faithful Christian missionary all her life.” Amelia Jenks Bloomer died in Council Bluffs on December 30, 1894.

Sojourner Truth, “Miriam of the Later Exodus” 1797–8 to 1883

Isabella (Sojourner Truth) was the next-to-youngest child of several born to James and Elizabeth, slaves owned by a wealthy Dutchman in New York, in 1797 or 1798. For the first 28 years of her life she was a slave, sold from household to household.

She fled slavery with the help of Quaker friends, first living in Philadelphia, then New York, where she joined the Mother Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church when African Americans were being denied the right to worship with white members of St. George’s Church in Philadelphia. Belle (as Isabella was called) became a streetcorner evangelist in poverty-stricken areas of New York City, but quickly realized people needed food, housing, and warm clothing. She focused her work on a homeless shelter for women.

When she was about 46, Belle believed she heard God say to her, “Go east.” So, she set out east for Long Island and Connecticut. Stopping at a Quaker farm for a drink of water, she was asked her name. “My name is Sojourner,” Belle said. “What is your

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last name?” the woman asked. Belle thought of all her masters’ names she had carried through life. Then the thought came: “The only master I have now is God, and His name is Truth.”

Sojourner became a traveling preacher, approaching white religious meetings and campgrounds and asking to speak. Fascinated by her charismatic presence, her wit, wisdom, and imposing six-foot height, they found her hard to refuse. She never learned to read or write, but quoted extensive Bible passages from memory in her sermons. She ended by singing a “home-made” hymn and addressing the crowd on the evils of slavery. Her reputation grew, and she became part of the abolitionist and women’s rights speakers’ network.

During a women’s rights convention in Ohio, Sojourner gave the speech for which she is best remembered: “Ain’t I a Woman.” She had listened for hours to clergy attack women’s rights and abolition, using the Bible to support their oppressive logic: God had created women to be weak and blacks to be a subservient race. In her speech she retorted, “If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.”

Sojourner Truth died on November 26, 1883, in Battle Creek, Michigan.

Harriet Ross Tubman, “Moses of her People” 1820–1913

Slave births were recorded under property, not as persons with names; but we know that Harriet Ross, born sometime during 1820 on a Maryland Chesapeake Bay plantation, was the sixth of eleven children born to Ben Ross and Harriet Green. Although her parents were loving and they enjoyed a cheerful family life inside their cabin, they lived in fear of the children being sold off at any time.

Harriet suffered beatings and a severe injury, but grew up strong and defiant, refusing to appear happy and smiling to her owners. To cope with brutality and oppression, she turned to religion. Her favorite Bible story was about Moses who led the Israelites out of slavery. The slaves prayed for a Moses of their own.

When she was about 24, Harriet escaped to Canada, but could not forget her parents and other slaves she left behind. Working with the Quakers, she made at least 19 trips back to Maryland between 1851 and 1861, freeing over 300 people by leading them into Canada. She was so successful, \$40,000 was offered for her capture.

Guided by God through omens, dreams, warnings, she claimed her struggle against slavery had been commanded by God. She foresaw the Civil War in a vision. When it began, she quickly joined the Union Army, serving as cook and nurse, caring for both Confederate and Union soldiers. She served as a spy and scout. She led 300 black troops on a raid which freed over 750 slaves, making her the first American woman to lead troops into military action.

In 1858 – 9, she moved to upstate New York where she opened her home to African American orphans and to helpless old people. Although she was illiterate, she founded schools for African American children. She joined the fight for women’s rights, working with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, but supported African American women in their efforts to found their own organizations to address equality, work, and education. She died on March 10, 1913, in Auburn, New York.

Lesser Feasts and Fasts, 2018