

HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT IS SAYING

In Scripture and Prayer and The Great Cloud of Witnesses

Week of July 31, 2022

Collect for Proper 13

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. BCP 231

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23 NRSVue, 2021

In our opening reading the Teacher reflects on the useless character of life and the fact that the fruit of all our labors will be inherited by others. The author (who fictionally is King Solomon) refers to himself as Qoheleth, which is variously translated as Teacher, Preacher, or Philosopher. His view of existence is pessimistic. His study indicates that everything we do is a chasing after the wind and that God's ways are unknown. It is one of the Bible's remarkable features that it includes this very human attitude together with other views that suggest God's purposes for creation.

² Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

¹² I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³ I applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to humans to be busy with. ¹⁴ I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun, and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.

¹⁸ I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to my successor, ¹⁹ and who knows whether he will be wise or foolish? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. ²⁰ So I turned and gave my heart up to despair concerning all the toil of my labors under the sun, ²¹ because sometimes one who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. ²² What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun? ²³ For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest. This also is vanity.

Colossians 3:1-11 NRSVue, 2021

In our epistle lesson Christian disciples are to wholly reorient their thinking and manner of life as though they themselves have died and it is the life of Christ which is now expressed in every thought and action. Base desires and conduct must be cast aside and the mind renewed in the image of the Creator. In the transformed realm that the believer now inhabits, there are no distinctions based on human categories; Christ supercedes all such previous divisions.

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¹ So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth, ³ for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. ⁷ These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. ⁸ But now you must get rid of all such things: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. ¹¹ In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, enslaved and free, but Christ is all and in all!

Luke 12:13-21 NRSVue, 2021

In our gospel Jesus warns against greed and tells the story of an individual who was rich only in material possessions. The Lord refuses to be the judge in a matter having to do with inheritance and wealth. Life lived without reference to God is empty and foolish. Despite all our plans and efforts at security, the fact of death makes this very clear.

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” ¹⁴ But [Jesus] said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” ¹⁵ And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” ¹⁶ Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷ And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ ²⁰ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

Psalms 49:1-11 BCP 652

The psalmist speaks words of wisdom: wise and foolish, rich and poor alike, all will die. We cannot pay the price for our lives.

1 Hear this, all you peoples; hearken, all you who dwell in the world, *
you of high degree and low, rich and poor together.

- 2 My mouth shall speak of wisdom, *
and my heart shall meditate on understanding.
- 3 I will incline my ear to a proverb *
and set forth my riddle upon the harp.
- 4 Why should I be afraid in evil days, *
when the wickedness of those at my heels surrounds me,
- 5 The wickedness of those who put their trust in their goods, *
and boast of their great riches?
- 6 We can never ransom ourselves, *
or deliver to God the price of our life;
- 7 For the ransom of our life is so great, *
that we should never have enough to pay it,
- 8 In order to live for ever and ever, * and never see the grave.
- 9 For we see that the wise die also; like the dull and stupid they perish *
and leave their wealth to those who come after them.
- 10 Their graves shall be their homes for ever,
their dwelling places from generation to generation, *
though they call the lands after their own names.
- 11 Even though honored, they cannot live for ever; *
they are like the beasts that perish.

Supplemental Resources

Colossians 3:1-11. A Pastoral Perspective

By David E. Gray, Senior Pastor, Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church, Bethesda, Maryland.

The Letter to the Colossians was written in part to help keep members of the early church loyal to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many early Christians, unsure of the future, were attracted to a variety of false teachings. Some claimed that individuals could gain special knowledge of future salvation. Others argued about the physical and spiritual state of Jesus. Others disagreed about who could be part of the early church. As Jesus did not return within a few years of his resurrection and ascension, there was increasing uneasiness about the future.

Our church members today face a similar uneasiness. It has been many centuries, and Christ has not returned. Warnings of terrorism and economic downturn make members uneasy. People in our pews are unsure about what the future holds in their personal and professional lives.

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They look to those proclaiming the gospel for some good news about the future and for some insight into where they might look to find direction.

Colossians 3 provides some direction. It helps us realize that part of our future is hidden from us by God. According to Colossians 3, our new life is “hidden with Christ in God.” The verb tenses in the Greek indicate what our life experience confirms, that the new life that God has accomplished for us in the past and will make clear in the future has not totally been revealed to us in the present. That can be frustrating when we are trying to figure out what comes next in our lives, but at least pastorally this realization removes some of the pressure from us to have all the answers now.

While God guides and sustains us, how God’s providence and our actions interact is one of life’s mysteries of faith. It is comforting to read that the problem with our lack of clarity is not with us. It is not our inability to figure out God’s plan that keeps us unsure about the future. The Pauline author in Colossians explains that God has hidden part of the future from us. We have to rely on God in faith. We have to wait. We have to be patient.

Waiting can bring out the worst in us. Waiting in line at the bank or restaurant can make us frustrated. Waiting at a red light in our car can make us competitive. Waiting for answers from a customer-service agent on the phone can make us angry. When we have to wait, our worst behaviors can emerge. The Pauline author in Colossians argues to early Christians that they should relinquish their previous, unholy behaviors and act holy for the sake of the new relationship they have been given in Christ. “Set your minds on things above” (v. 2), the author writes, imploring the church to act their best and let go of the impure behaviors. That is hard to consistently do in the world of distractions. The Greek verb for “set” in Colossians emphasizes the need for constant focus on doing right.

Distraction and impatience are problems in our churches today. If we are not careful, that lack of certainty of the details of God’s ultimate plan can become an excuse not to follow the part of God that we do know. Whatever it is that we experience that keeps our actions chained to our base selves must be challenged by the part of our souls that is looking for Christ. If we are patient about finding Christ, Christ will find us.

There is a strong pastoral concern in Colossians 3 about the unity of the church as well. Our lesson ends with the words “Christ is all and in all.” The early church needed a reminder to look toward the Christ in each of us. Many early Christians found it harder to see their spiritual connections than to see their differences. The early church faced differences between Jew and Gentile, barbarian and Scythian, slave and free. Differences like those were very important when a person’s primary allegiance was

to region, ethnicity, or economic status—not as much when a person’s primary allegiance was to Christ.

We face divisions today along ethnic, social, racial, gender, economic, political, military, familial, and geographic lines. Fortunately for us, the God who hides is still the God who guides us to the Christ inside us. “Christ is all and in all”: that is a broad statement the Pauline writer makes. It makes all the difference. If Christ is in all of us, then we all are guided at some level by the same Spirit, larger than us. If Christ is in all of us, then our older way of relating can be superseded by our new way of trusting. If Christ is in all of us, then we are all searching for God’s revealed direction together.

The Pauline author of Colossians writes with care for the early church, suggesting that we recognize the commonality among all believers. All who have experienced the grace of God have the Holy Spirit guiding them. We may not know exactly what the future looks like in our lives, but we know who holds the future.

Our faith in Jesus Christ unites all believers. The author of Colossians was concerned that people were not being faithful to the gospel. The author’s solution was for us to recognize that God is near to us. The gospel of Christ is not far away in a time that will never come, in a land far away, or in the minds of a few know-it-alls. Christ is in the hearts of the people in our church pews. Their actions can be holy because God can make them so. We should not think God is so distant that it does not matter how we act. Our actions should flow from our gratitude for God’s gift in Jesus Christ. That fact can create loyalty to the gospel and reassurance for our people.

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

Spiritual Day Hike

In the landscape where Spirit & World intersect



Week of July 31, 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 31.....[Ignatius of Loyola](#), Priest, 1556 *LFF*

Aug 1.....[Joseph of Arimathea](#) *GCoW*

Aug 2.....[Samuel Ferguson](#), Missionary Bishop, 1916 *GCoW*

Aug 3.....[Joanna, Mary, and Salome](#), Myrrh-Bearing Women *LFF*

Aug 3.....[George Freeman Bragg, Jr.](#), Priest, 1940 *GCoW*

Aug 3.....[William E.B. Du Bois](#), Sociologist, 1963 *GCoW*

Aug 5.....[Albrecht Dürer, 1528, Matthias Grünewald, 1529, and Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1553](#), Artists *GCoW*

Aug 6.....The Transfiguration *BCP*

August 1: Joseph of Arimathea

Joseph of Arimathea was a secret disciple of our Lord whose intervention with Pilate ensured a burial for Jesus' crucified body. After the Crucifixion, when many of Jesus' disciples went into hiding for fear of the authorities, Joseph courageously came forward to ask Pilate's permission to remove Jesus' body from the cross in accordance with pious Jewish practice, namely, to provide the deceased with a timely and proper burial. Moreover, Joseph freely offered his own newly dug tomb for Jesus, preventing further desecration by humans or animals.

Though we know nothing of his further role in the early Christian movement, legends developed in later centuries about Joseph's possible subsequent leadership. However, Joseph's remembrance does not depend upon such legends; what is known of Joseph with certainty comes from the gospel narratives of Jesus' burial, attesting to his devotion, his generous compassion, and his brave willingness to take action on behalf of another when such action mattered.

Collect for the Commemoration

Merciful God, whose servant Joseph of Arimathea with reverence and godly fear prepared the body of our Lord and Savior for burial and laid it in his own tomb: Grant to us, your faithful people, grace and courage to love and serve Jesus with sincere devotion all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. *A Great Cloud of Witnesses, 2018*

Day Hike -2

August 2: Samuel Ferguson, Missionary Bishop for West Africa, 1916

Samuel David Ferguson was the first African American bishop in The Episcopal Church accorded the full honors due his position. While there had been other African American bishops before him, Bishop Ferguson was the first to be seated in the House of Bishops, and he took his role in the House with utmost sincerity and integrity, as an example to those around him. From celebrating the opening Eucharist of the 1910 General Convention to attending society events in the South, Bishop Ferguson modelled a dignity and strength that communicated his equal stature as an Episcopal bishop despite the discrimination he faced.

Ferguson was born in Charleston, South Carolina, on January 1, 1842, but grew up in Liberia, West Africa, having moved there with his family at the age of six. He attended mission schools that were sponsored by The Episcopal Church and eventually became a teacher.

Ferguson was ordained a deacon in 1865 and a priest in 1867, serving first as curate and then as rector of St. Mark's Church, Harper, Liberia. Called to be the fourth bishop of Cape Palmas (later the Diocese of Liberia) in 1885, his ordination to the episcopate took place at Grace Church in New York City. He was the first Americanborn black to become Bishop of Liberia.

Consistent with his first vocation as a teacher, Ferguson emphasized the importance of education throughout his ministry. He founded schools throughout Liberia, assisted financially by the Women's Auxiliary [later to be the United Thank Offering (UTO) of The Episcopal Church Women], and his passion for education influenced other parts of West Africa.

With the generous support of Robert Fulton Cutting, a wealthy New York financier, who served for a time as the treasurer of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, Bishop Ferguson founded Cuttington College in 1889, where, in addition to basic studies, theological, agricultural, and industrial education were emphasized. Ferguson believed that establishing a strong spiritual and educational foundation was the best way for Liberia's young people to transform society. Although interrupted during the Liberian civil wars of 1989- 1996 and 1999-2003, the college, now Cuttington University, resumed its mission to serve the people of Liberia in 2004, thus fulfilling Bishop Ferguson's vision.

Bishop Ferguson remained in Liberia for the rest of his life. He died in Monrovia on August 2, 1916.

A Great Cloud of Witnesses, 2018

August 3: Joanna, Mary, and Salome, Myrrh-Bearing Women

Joanna, Mary, and Salome, are traditionally counted as the three women who came to Jesus' tomb early in the morning on the day of the resurrection in order to anoint the Jesus' body with myrrh and other spices. They were followers of Jesus during his earthly ministry and remained with him throughout his arrest, crucifixion, and burial, and discovered the empty tomb.

Little is known about the lives of Joanna, Mary, and Salome beyond their faithful and unwavering devotion and service to Christ. Joanna is identified in the Gospel of Luke as the wife of Chuza, a steward of Herod and in Luke 8:2-3 is counted among the women who followed and provided for Jesus after having been healed by him.

The Gospel of Mark includes Salome in a list of women present at the crucifixion without any further information; there is a tradition that Salome was the sister of Mary the Mother of Jesus.

In addition to Joanna, Salome, and Mary Magdalene, Matthew 28:1 lists a woman it refers to as "the other Mary." Mark 16:1 refers to her as Mary the mother of James. John 19:25 recounts that Mary the wife of Cleopas was present at the crucifixion, and historically the Christian tradition has tended to assume that all three of these Marys are actually the same person.

The little information that we do have about these women shows them to be faithful disciples and worthy of our commemoration and, more importantly, emulation. There is a particular devotion to these "Holy Myrrhbearers" in the Orthodox Church, and the second Sunday after Easter is celebrated as "Myrrhbearers Sunday".

A Great Cloud of Witnesses, 2018

Read more on the Orthodox Wiki: [Sunday of Myrrh-Bearing Women](#)

August 6: The Transfiguration

The Transfiguration is not to be understood only as a spiritual experience of Jesus while at prayer, which three chosen disciples, Peter, James, and John, were permitted to witness. It is one of a series of supernatural manifestations, by which God authenticated Jesus as his Son. It is at one with the appearance of the angels at the birth and at his resurrection, and with the descent of the Spirit at Jesus' baptism. Matthew records the voice from heaven saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" (Matthew 17:5). Briefly the veil is drawn aside, and a chosen few are permitted to see Jesus, not only as the human son of Mary,

Day Hike –4

but also as the eternal Son of God. Moses and Elijah witness to Jesus as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. In Luke’s account of the event, they speak of the “exodus” which Jesus is to accomplish at Jerusalem. A cloud, a sign of divine presence, envelops the disciples, and a heavenly voice proclaims Jesus to be the Son of God.

Immediately thereafter Jesus announces to Peter, James, and John the imminence of his death. As Paul was later to say of Jesus, “Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and was born in human likeness. And, being found in human form, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6–8).

The Feast of the Transfiguration is held in the highest esteem by the Eastern Churches. The figure of the transfigured Christ is regarded as a foreshadowing of the Risen and Ascended Lord. The festival, however, was only accepted into the Roman calendar on the eve of the Reformation, and for that reason was not included in the reformed calendar of the English Church. Since its inclusion in the American revision of 1892, it has been taken into most modern Anglican calendars.

Lesser Feasts and Fasts, 2018

Readings appointed for August 6