

HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT IS SAYING

In Scripture and Prayer and The Great Cloud of Witnesses

Week of August 7, 2022

Collect for Proper 14

Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen. BCP 232

Genesis 15:1-6 NRSVue, 2021

In our first reading the Lord visits Abraham and promises that he will have a son and descendants in number like the stars. Because he had no son, Abraham (whose name at one time was Abram) had chosen one of his slaves to be his heir. But now he believes the Lord, and through his son Isaac becomes the father of Israel. Christians will later understand Abraham to be the father of all who put their trust in the Lord and find that God has accepted them into a right relationship.

¹ After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”
² But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”
³ And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.”
⁴ But the word of the LORD came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.”
⁵ He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”
⁶ And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Hebrews 1:1-3, 8-16 NRSVue, 2021

In this New Testament lesson faith is described as a holding fast to things hoped for and learning to trust in their reality. Abraham is among those who had such a faith. Noah is another of the great figures of the Old Testament who found a right relationship with God through faith. But Abraham, who trusted God’s word that he would have many descendants, is our chief example. As he left his own country for the promised land, so we now look forward in faith to the promise of a heavenly country.

¹ Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
² Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval.
³ By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going.
⁹ By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised,

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as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

¹¹ By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.” ¹³ All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, ¹⁴ for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

Luke 12:32-40 NRSVue, 2021

In the gospel Jesus teaches his disciples to trust entirely in the reign of God, their Father, and to be ready for the coming of the Son of Man. The kingdom is God's gift. Disciples are to respond by letting go of their hold on worldly possessions and giving their heart to a treasure that is heavenly. They are to remember the householder who would have kept his house safe if he knew when the thief was coming. They are to be like servants alert for the return of their master whenever he comes. Like the Lord of the Eucharist, he will then wait on them.

³² “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

³⁵ “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; ³⁶ be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. ³⁷ Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. ³⁸ If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. ³⁹ “But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁰ You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Psalm 33:12-22 BCP 626

Joyful are the people who trust in the Lord. From heaven God sees all who dwell on the earth.

- 12 Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord! *
happy the people he has chosen to be his own!
- 13 The Lord looks down from heaven, *
and beholds all the people in the world.
- 14 From where he sits enthroned he turns his gaze *
on all who dwell on the earth.
- 15 He fashions all the hearts of them * and understands all their works.
- 16 There is no king that can be saved by a mighty army; *
a strong man is not delivered by his great strength.
- 17 The horse is a vain hope for deliverance; *
for all its strength it cannot save.
- 18 Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon those who fear him, *
on those who wait upon his love,
- 19 To pluck their lives from death, * and to feed them in time of famine.
- 20 Our soul waits for the Lord; * he is our help and our shield.
- 21 Indeed, our heart rejoices in him, *
for in his holy Name we put our trust.
- 22 Let your loving-kindness, O Lord, be upon us, *
as we have put our trust in you.

Supplemental Resources

Hebrews 1:1-3, 8-16. An Exegetical Perspective

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The dog days of August, roughly midway between Easter/Pentecost and Christmas/Epiphany, often seem a time of spiritual lethargy in churches in the Northern Hemisphere. Thus the lections from Hebrews 11 and 12, assigned for three consecutive Sundays between August 7 and August 27, may be heard as a plea for patience until schools reopen and life gets back to normal. However, the life situation of the readers addressed by Hebrews was considerably more menacing. While it is unlikely that the members of the congregation were facing martyrdom ([12:4](#)), some had already been subjected to prison and plunder of possessions, and most had experienced hostility, ridicule, and shame, simply because following Jesus, a crucified savior, set them at odds with the surrounding culture ([10:32-39](#)). How does one encourage other Christians to remain steadfast, to persevere through difficult days?

The unknown author of Hebrews approaches the audience through their experience of faith. This book has already reminded the readers that the once-for-all nature of Jesus' sacrifice should bolster their confidence in the realities of faith, hope, and love, sufficient to sustain hope and provoke each other to deeds of love. It has warned them of the judgment that awaits those who have spurned the Lord Jesus Christ ([10:26-31](#)) and recalled earlier occasions of persecution when the congregation persevered by mutually supporting each other. In chapter 11, the author explores yet other dimensions of faith: readers are reminded that what they hope for is intimately connected to their experience of faith ("the assurance of things hoped for") and that they should not expect their faith ("the conviction of things not seen") to be supported by the surrounding culture ([v. 1](#)). The writer assures them that God will commend their faithfulness ([v. 2](#)) and then begins a litany of heroes who have embodied faith even in the face of disappointment.

Faith is a multifaceted reality, with strange, even paradoxical, features. Born in a revelatory event, it is at once the gift of God's unconditional love and a human response of trust and gratitude that issues in deeds of love and justice. Faith is a way of knowing that constantly seeks understanding, leading to theological reflection and to faith as "belief" in various doctrines about God, Jesus, creation, sin, salvation, and human destiny. Faith is often presented, rightly as here, as that which enables one to cope with the trials and tribulations of life, but Hebrews 11 reminds us of another paradox: faith is also that which has provoked the hostility and ridicule being heaped upon this Christian community.

Despite the claim of 11:1 that faith is not sight ("the conviction of things not seen"), it can be helpful to think of faith as a kind of seeing, at least metaphorically. Many come to faith, for example, by "seeing" something compelling in the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus or in the communal life of Jesus' followers. Faith, then, is the perception that the way of Jesus is the way to become who I most truly am, a creature in the image of God. Faith includes the awareness that the meaning of life is not to be found in the accumulation of wealth, power, and privilege, but in loving God and neighbor. The "way" of Jesus puts one at odds with the dominant social script, which usually does see the meaning of life in the accumulation of worldly goods.

When faith leads an individual or group to challenge the values of the dominant culture, people are often marginalized and excluded from positions of power and privilege. They may even be regarded as subhuman and thus legitimate targets of hostility, ridicule, and economic discrimination. The refusal of the Christians to worship Caesar or the

Roman gods, for example, and their worship of a crucified savior, executed as a traitor to the empire, must have seemed utterly foolish and even subversive to those steeped in worldly wisdom (see [1 Cor. 1:18–25](#)). The struggle becomes a constant daily effort to sustain an alternative vision amid hostility and ridicule. Here faith presents itself as courage. One should ask whether Christians in North America, who find themselves relatively affluent and holding positions of power and privilege in the dominant culture, can truly identify with the plight of the community of Hebrews. Perhaps one should push further and ask, Have Christians in North America failed to see the difference between being an American and being a Christian?

The recitation of persons and events from the past suggests that faith is not adequately defined by a single individual or community. It must be seen in terms of a larger story that reaches back at least to Abraham, who trusted the promises of God and left his home in Ur without knowing exactly where he was going. None of these ancestors received fully the promise that had been offered. They remained strangers and foreigners, sojourners and pilgrims, even in the land of promise. They died in faith without seeing the promise fulfilled.

What exactly is the promise that the writer of Hebrews holds forth for his readers? Is it otherworldly, simply a matter of going to heaven when I die? The text can be read in this way, for clearly the promise is a “heavenly” country ([v. 16](#)) that extends beyond death. It is a “homeland” ([v. 14](#)), a place where we can be fully at home, free of the conflicts and contradictions that beset our present existence. Drawing upon images from Jesus’ parables about the kingdom of God, one imagines a community of worship, deep friendships between former enemies, a banquet table open to all persons. Strangely, however, precisely because the promise reaches beyond death, it often invades the present through hope, enabling one to see the wondrous beauty already here and inspiring new possibilities for this earthly existence. Perhaps this invasion of hope also renews the courage of faith and enables the faithful to live freely and meaningfully in this beautiful but dangerous world.

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 August 7, 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:

- Aug 7.....[John Mason Neale](#), Priest and Hymnographer, 1866 *LFF*
Aug 7.....[Catherine Winkworth](#), Poet, 1878 *GCoW*
Aug 8.....[Dominic](#), Priest and Friar, 1221 *LFF*
Aug 9.....[Edith Stein](#) (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross), Philosopher, Monastic, and Martyr, 1942 *LFF*
Aug 9.....[Herman of Alaska](#) Missionary to the Aleut, 1837
Aug 10.....[Laurence of Rome](#), Deacon and Martyr, 258 *LFF*
Aug 11.....[Clare of Assisi](#), Monastic, 1253 *LFF*
Aug 12.....[Florence Nightingale](#), Nurse, 1910 *LFF*
Aug 13.....[Jeremy Taylor](#), Bishop and Theologian, 1667 *LFF*

August 7: John Mason Neale, Priest and Hymnographer, 1866

John Mason Neale was born in London in 1818, studied at Cambridge, where he also served as tutor and chaplain, and was ordained to the priesthood in 1842. Chronic ill health made parish ministry impracticable, but in 1846, he was made warden of Sackville College, a charitable residence for the poor, which position he held for the rest of his life. Both a scholar and a creative poet, his skills in composing original verse and translating Latin and Greek hymns into effective English lyrics were devoted to the Church and were but one expression of his active support to the Oxford Movement in its revival of medieval liturgical forms. With such familiar words as “Good Christian men, rejoice” (*The Hymnal* 1982, #107), “Come, ye faithful, raise the strain” (#199, 200), “All glory, laud, and honor” (#154, 155), “Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle” (#165, 166), and “Creator of the stars of night” (#60), he greatly enriched our hymnody.

Gentleness combined with firmness, good humor, modesty, patience, devotion, and “an unbounded charity,” describe Neale’s character. A prolific writer and compiler, his works include *Medieval Hymns and Sequences*, *Hymns of the Eastern Church*, *Liturgiology and Church History*, and a four-volume commentary on the Psalms. He established the Camden Society, later called the Ecclesiological Society, and consistent with Anglo-Catholic principles that wed liturgical piety with compassionate social action, he founded the Sisterhood of St. Margaret for the relief of suffering women and girls.

Neale faced active persecution for his liturgical and theological principles. He

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was forced to resign his first parish due to disagreements with his bishop. He was physically attacked several times including at a funeral of one of the Sisters. Mobs threatened both him and his family, believing him to be a secret agent of the Vatican attempting to destroy the Church of England from within.

Though his work was little appreciated in England, his contributions were recognized both in the United States and in Russia, where the Metropolitan presented him with a rare copy of the Old Believers' Liturgy. He died on the Feast of the Transfiguration in 1866, at the age of 46, leaving a lasting mark on our worship.

A Great Cloud of Witnesses, 2018

August 7: Catherine Winkworth, Poet, 1878

Catherine Winkworth is celebrated as the premier translator of German hymns and chorales into English.

Winkworth was born in London in 1827, but grew up in Manchester, where she spent most of her life. Her lifelong fascination with German hymns and chorales began during a yearlong visit to Dresden, Germany, in 1848. Her first set of translations, *Lyra Germanica*, 1855, contained 103 hymns, and a second series under the same title appeared in 1858, and contained 121 hymns. Her translations were immensely successful in expressing the theological richness and spirit of the German texts; *Lyra Germanica* went through numerous editions and reprints and remains today a monumental contribution to the history of hymnody. Among the most well known of Winkworth's translations are "Comfort, comfort ye my people" (*The Hymnal 1982*, #67), "Now thank we all our God" (#396; #397), "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" (#390), and "Deck thyself, my soul, with gladness" (#339)

In some cases, Winkworth's sturdy translations had been wed with tunes that did not always capture the spirit of the original German chorale. To help rectify this, Winkworth published *The Chorale Book for England* in 1863 that matched her translations with their original tunes. In 1869, she published a commentary that provided biographies of the German hymn writers and other material to make the German hymn and chorale more accessible to the English singers of her masterful translations.

She is also remembered for her advocacy for women's rights and for her efforts to encourage university education for women. In support of her advocacy for women, Winkworth sought inspiration in German literature and made it available in English translation. Notable are her translations of the biographies of two founders of sisterhoods for the poor and the sick: *Life of Pastor Fliedner*, 1861, and *Life of Amelia Sieveking*, 1863.

Winkworth was traveling to an international conference on women's issues when she died of a heart attack on July 1, 1878. She was 51. She was buried at Monnetier, near Geneva. Her life and work has been honored with a monument in Bristol Cathedral.

A Great Cloud of Witnesses, 2018

August 8: Herman of Alaska, Missionary to the Aleut, 1837

Herman of Alaska, known in the Russian Orthodox Church as “St. Herman: Wonderworker of All America,” was the first saint to be canonized by the Orthodox Church in America.

Herman was born in Russia, near Moscow, in 1756. His baptismal and family names are unknown. He is known by his monastic name. Naturally pious from an early age, Herman entered the Trinity- St. Sergius Hermitage near St. Petersburg at 16 and, drawn to the spiritual charism of Abbot Nasarios, eventually transferred to the Valaam Monastery. He was never ordained. For many years he secured permission to live as a hermit, attending the liturgies of the monastery only on holy days.

In 1793, with a small group of colleagues, Herman set out to do missionary work in Alaska. They settled on Spruce Island, near Kodiak, and named their community “New Valaam” in honor of their home monastery. Herman lived and worked in the area for the remainder of his life.

He advocated for and defended the native Aleut against sometimes oppressive authorities, particular Russian and European colonists with commercial interests. He cared lovingly and sacrificially for all who came to him, counseling and teaching them, and tirelessly nursing the sick. He especially loved children, for whom he often baked biscuits and cookies.

Even though Herman had minimal education outside of the monastic life, he was regarded among the native Alaskans as a great and compelling teacher. Over time he also developed a reputation as a teacher and sage among the Russian and European settlers in the area. He so captivated his listeners that many would listen to him through the long hours of the night and not leave his company until morning. The people he served often referred to Herman as their North Star.

Herman died at Spruce Island on December 25, 1837, according to the Gregorian calendar then still in use in Alaska.

In the spring of 1969, the Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America proclaimed Herman a saint. He was glorified in a solemn liturgy on August 9, 1970, at Holy Resurrection Orthodox Cathedral on Kodiak Island, Alaska, with simultaneous rites taking place at other Orthodox centers.

A Great Cloud of Witnesses, 2018

Day Hike –4

August 10: Laurence Deacon, and Martyr at Rome, 258

Laurence the Deacon was martyred at Rome during a persecution initiated in 257 by the Emperor Valerian, aimed primarily at the clergy and the laity of the upper classes; all properties used by the Church were confiscated, and assemblies for Christian worship were forbidden. On August 4, 258, Pope Sixtus II and his seven deacons were apprehended in the Roman catacombs and summarily executed, except for the archdeacon, Laurence, who was martyred on the tenth. Though no authentic record of Laurence's ordeal has been preserved, tradition maintains that the prefect demanded information from him about the Church's treasures. Laurence, in reply, assembled the sick and poor to whom, as archdeacon, he had distributed the Church's relief funds, and presented them to the prefect, saying, "These are the treasures of the Church." Laurence is believed to have been roasted alive on a gridiron.

The Emperor Constantine erected a shrine and basilica over Laurence's tomb in a catacomb on the Via Tiburtina. The present Church of St. Laurence Outside the Walls, a beautiful double basilica (damaged in World War II), includes a choir and sanctuary erected by Pope Pelagius II (579–590) and a nave by Pope Honorius III (1216–1227).

Laurence is the subject of a small round glass medallion, probably dating from the fourth century, now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. It bears the simple inscription, "Live with Christ and Laurence."

The Greek word from which we derive our English word "martyr" simply means "witness;" in the age of the persecutions, before Constantine recognized the Church early in the fourth century, a "martyr" came to be generally understood, as it is to this day, as one who had witnessed even to death. For Laurence, as for all the martyrs, to die for Christ was to live with Christ.

A Great Cloud of Witnesses, 2018