

# HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT IS SAYING

In Scripture and Prayer and The Great Cloud of Witnesses

Week of August 14, 2022

*Collect for Proper 15*

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. BCP 232

## **Jeremiah 23:23-29** NRSVue, 2021

*In our first reading God speaks through the prophet: this is a God lofty and distant as well as near, and God knows the lies of the false prophets. In Jeremiah's time there were many individuals who appointed themselves prophets. They said the Lord was close to them, and they relied on dreams for their inspiration. They told people the comfortable things they wanted to hear and led them into false worship. But the words of the Lord are words of judgment to the people, like scorching fire or a hammer on rock.*

<sup>23</sup> Am I a God near by, says the Lord, and not a God far off? <sup>24</sup> Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord. <sup>25</sup> I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, "I have dreamed! I have dreamed!" <sup>26</sup> How long? Will the hearts of the prophets ever turn back—those who prophesy lies and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart? <sup>27</sup> They plan to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, just as their ancestors forgot my name for Baal. <sup>28</sup> Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? says the Lord. <sup>29</sup> Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?

## **Hebrews 11:29–12:2** NRSVue, 2021

*In this New Testament lesson Jesus the promised one has opened access to the Father in ways previous generations longed to see. The righteous men and women of former days performed all their deeds in faith, true to God and to such revelation as they had received. Now disciples are to set aside distractions and surmount every obstacle, encouraged by the witness of the faithful ancestors and walking confidently in the way forged by Jesus through the sacrifice of the cross.*

<sup>29</sup> By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. <sup>30</sup> By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. <sup>31</sup> By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace. <sup>32</sup> And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah,

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of David and Samuel and the prophets, <sup>33</sup> who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. <sup>35</sup> Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. <sup>36</sup> Others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup> They were stoned to death; they were sawn in two; they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented—<sup>38</sup> of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains and in caves and holes in the ground. <sup>39</sup> Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

<sup>12:1</sup> Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

### **Luke 12:49-56** NRSVue, 2021

*In our gospel passage Jesus foresees difficult times ahead: his own ordeal and the necessity of division even within families. He has come to bring the purifying fire of judgment, and must himself first undergo the baptism of suffering and death. Before there is any peace on earth, hard decisions leading to ruptures have to be made. The people should be like good weather-watchers in reading the signs of the times.*

<sup>49</sup> [Jesus said], “I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already ablaze! <sup>50</sup> I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! <sup>51</sup> Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! <sup>52</sup> From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; <sup>53</sup> they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

<sup>54</sup> He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘It is going to rain,’ and so it happens. <sup>55</sup> And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. <sup>56</sup> You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

## Psalm 82 BCP 705

*God pronounces judgment on the heavenly beings who have failed to defend the weak and the poor. The people call on the one true God to judge and rule the earth.*

- 1 God takes his stand in the council of heaven; \*  
he gives judgment in the midst of the gods:
- 2 “How long will you judge unjustly, \* and show favor to the wicked?
- 3 Save the weak and the orphan; \* defend the humble and needy;
- 4 Rescue the weak and the poor; \*  
deliver them from the power of the wicked.
- 5 They do not know, neither do they understand;  
they go about in darkness; \*  
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.
- 6 Now I say to you, ‘You are gods, \*  
and all of you children of the Most High;
- 7 Nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, \* and fall like any prince.”
- 8 Arise, O God, and rule the earth, \*  
for you shall take all nations for your own.

## Supplemental Resources

### Hebrews 11:29–12:2. A Theological Perspective

*By John C. Shelley is the Dorothy Peace Professor of Religion, Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina*

The reading this week continues the reading from Hebrews 11–12 begun last week. The writer of Hebrews has introduced the idea of faith as the courage to endure, in an effort to stiffen the spines of the little band of Christians struggling with hostility, ridicule, and shame. He has suggested that faith can be fully understood only in terms of the larger story of promise reaching back to ancient ancestors such as Abraham, who were themselves strangers, pilgrims even in the land of promise. The promise seems elusive, not identifiable with anything specific in the lives of the Christians, but nevertheless present in the form of hope, which enables one to live as a stranger in the midst of a hostile culture, reaching for what cannot yet be fully grasped.

What is striking about the present passage, especially 11:29–38, is the fact that faith seems strangely ambiguous. It may lead, on the one hand, to amazing results, such as the crossing of the Red Sea and the fall of Jericho, but it may point, on the other hand, simply to courageous endurance of torture and persecution. The reality of faith cannot be decisively recognized

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by empirical observation. It is faith itself that perceives the hand of God in the rescue at the Red Sea or in the courageous endurance of martyrs. I have often questioned the author's emphasis on military victories as examples of faith—not to mention his inclusion of Jephthah in this list—but his examples do suggest incidents in which God fought for Israel, giving them victory against great odds. This does seem to fit with the earlier mention of Abraham, one “as good as dead,” and of course the resurrection of Jesus. The promise is not simply an extension of the present, based on what seems possible at the moment. It is a new creation that invades our present reality and makes the impossible possible.

Christian ethics should emphasize the power of imagination much more than a compendium of moral rules. Often our moral failures are more a failure of imagination than a deficit of good intention and goodwill. We resort to violence because we have been unable to conceive a better way of dealing with conflict. As Glen Stassen reminds us in his study of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls us to imagine “transforming initiatives” in following the way of Jesus.

Hebrews 11:40, especially the phrase “apart from us,” has often been cited to support a Christian triumphalism, the claim that, with the coming of Jesus, Christians have supplanted Israel as God's elect. The Holocaust has become a moral imperative for Christians to reconsider their relationship to Judaism, giving particular attention to anti-Jewish passages in the New Testament and two millennia of Christian anti-Semitism. The New Testament does reflect tensions between Judaism and nascent Christianity, and most early Christians probably thought of themselves as a Jewish sect. Hebrews 11:40 may be read in this triumphalist way, as suggesting that God had waited until the coming of Jesus and the establishment of the church finally to deliver on the promises made to ancient ancestors.

It is also quite plausible, however, to read this verse in a spirit of humble gratitude, similar to Paul's image of the church as a “wild olive shoot” grafted into the “rich root of the olive tree” (Rom. 11:17–24). Christians are the beneficiaries of this “cloud of witnesses,” not the extraordinary heroes who finally get the job done. A triumphalist reading of any New Testament text calls into question God's faithfulness. If God has reneged on the promise to Israel, how can the church depend on God's faithfulness to the promise made through Jesus Christ?

The mention of “sin” in 12:1 invites reflection on the nature of sin. The singular form challenges our popular tendency to think of sin as a list of acts or deeds that cause trouble and for which one is worthy of blame.

If we do think of sin in the singular, it is usually a reference to the basic orientation of the self as one of presumption, arrogance, pride, the will to dominate. Feminist and African American theologians in recent decades have challenged us to consider the dialectical opposite of presumption and arrogance also as sin. Thus sin takes the more “passive” form of despair, apathy, servility, the refusal to accept my responsibility to God and neighbor and to God’s future. Is it the case that this more passive form of sin is the bigger temptation for the community of Hebrews? Might it also be the case that this is the more pernicious sin of affluent First-World Christians? We easily accommodate ourselves to the structures and institutions of power and privilege. We eagerly volunteer for work in soup kitchens and other agencies to assist those living in poverty, but we despair of real structural change, realizing just how difficult it is and what it may cost us.

Hebrews 12:2 reinforces the writer’s Christology, which seems remarkably Chalcedonian: “Jesus is fully God and fully human.” The focus here is primarily on Jesus’ humanity and his experience of enduring the cross for the sake of a greater joy, much like the situation facing the community of Hebrews. Jesus’ suffering and death are presented, not as a sacrifice for sin, but as his entering into solidarity with all persons, having endured shame, brutal suffering, and death. Jesus, therefore, can identify with the marginalized band of Christians; for that reason they should look to Jesus, “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.” The writer images life as a long-distance race. Jesus is the one who runs ahead, sets the pace, and neutralizes the distractions that entice the runners to wander off course. It seems to be a part of every runner’s experience that he or she wonders at some point in the race, “Why am I doing this?” For the small community of Christians beset with shame and hostility, Jesus becomes a reminder that the finite goods of the world, however tempting, cannot finally give life meaning. One must hold out for the ultimate promise.

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 14, 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 14.....[Jonathan Myrick Daniels](#), Martyr, 1965 *LFF*

**Aug 15....Saint Mary the Virgin, Mother of Jesus** BCP & *LFF*

Aug 17.....[Samuel Johnson, 1772, Timothy Cutler, 1765, Thomas Bradbury Chandler, 1790, Priests](#) *GCoW*

Aug 17.....Baptisms of [Manteo](#) and [Virginia Dare](#), 1587, *GCoW*

Aug 18.....[William Porcher DuBose](#), Priest, 1918 *GCoW*

Aug 18.....[Artemisia Bowden](#), 1969 *GCoW*

Aug 20.....[Bernard](#), Abbot Clairvaux, 1153 *LFF*

## From the Introduction to A Great Cloud of Witnesses, 2018

This [2018] volume, *A Great Cloud of Witnesses*, is a further step in the development of liturgical commemorations within the life of The Episcopal Church. These developments fall under three categories. First, this 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.

## August 14: Jonathan Myrick Daniels, Seminarian Martyr, 1965

Jonathan Myrick Daniels was born in Keene, New Hampshire, in 1939. Like many young adults, from high school in Keene to graduate school at Harvard, Jonathan wrestled with vocation. Attracted to medicine, ordained ministry, law, and writing, he found himself close to a loss of faith when his discernment was clarified by a profound conversion on Easter Day 1962 at the Church of the Advent in Boston. Jonathan then entered the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

## Day Hike -2

In March 1965, the televised appeal of Martin Luther King, Jr. to come to Selma to secure for all citizens the right to vote touched Jonathan's passions for the well-being of others, the Christian witness of the Church, and political justice. His conviction was deepened at Evening Prayer during the singing of the Magnificat: "He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble and meek. He hath filled the hungry with good things," writing, "I knew that I must go to Selma. The Virgin's song was to grow more and more dear to me in the weeks ahead."

In Selma he found himself in the midst of a time and place where the nation's racism and the Episcopal Church's share in that inheritance were exposed. Greatly moved by what he saw and experienced, he returned to seminary, asked leave to work in Selma while continuing his studies, and returned there under the sponsorship of the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity.

After a brief return to Cambridge in May to complete exams, he returned to Alabama to resume his efforts assisting those engaged in the integration struggle. Jailed on August 14 for joining a picket line, Jonathan and his companions resolved to remain together until bail could be posted for all of them, as it was six days later. Released and aware that they were in danger, four of them walked to a small store. As sixteen-year-old Ruby Sales reached the top step of the entrance, a man with a shotgun appeared, cursing her. Jonathan pulled her to one side to shield her from the unexpected threats and was killed instantly by the 12-gauge blast.

Jonathan's letters and papers bear eloquent witness to the profound effect Selma had upon him. He writes, "The doctrine of the creeds, the enacted faith of the sacraments, were the essential preconditions of the experience itself. The faith with which I went to Selma has not changed: it has grown...I began to know in my bones and sinews that I had been truly baptized into the Lord's death and resurrection...with them, the black men and white men, with all life, in him whose Name is above all the names that the races and nations shout...We are indelibly and unspeakably one."

*A Great Cloud of Witnesses, 2018*

## August 15: Saint Mary the Virgin, Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ

*This Feast is one of many Holy Days "regularly observed throughout the year." The Calendar of the Episcopal Church is detailed on pages 15-18 of the Book of Common Prayer, 1979. Other Holy Days are listed on pages 16-17 in the BCP.*

The honor paid to Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ, goes back to the earliest days of the Church. Two Gospels tell of the manner of Christ's birth, and the familiar Christmas story testifies to the Church's conviction that he was born of a virgin. In Luke's Gospel, we catch a brief glimpse of Jesus' upbringing at Nazareth, when the child was in the care of his mother and her husband Joseph.

During Jesus' ministry in Galilee, we learn that Mary was often with the other women who followed Jesus and ministered to his needs. At Calvary, she was among the little band of disciples who kept watch at the cross. After the resurrection, she was to be found with the Twelve in the upper room, watching and praying until the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost.

Mary was the person closest to Jesus in his most impressionable years, and the words of the Magnificat, as well as her courageous acceptance of God's will, bear more than an accidental resemblance to the Lord's Prayer and the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount.

Later devotion has claimed many things for Mary beyond the brief description that is given in Holy Scripture. What we can believe is that one who stood in so intimate a relationship with the incarnate Son of God on earth must, of all human beings, have the place of highest honor in the eternal life of God. A paraphrase of an ancient Greek hymn expresses this belief in very familiar words: "O higher than the cherubim, more glorious than the seraphim, lead their praises, alleluia."

*Lesser Feasts and Fasts, 2018*

## **August 17: Baptisms of Manteo, and Virginia Dare, 1587**

In the late sixteenth century, Sir Walter Raleigh established three colonies along the northeastern coast of what is now the state of North Carolina. In July 1587, the third and final settlement, consisting of 120 men, women, and children, under the leadership of John White, landed on Roanoke Island, near the present-day community of Nags Head.

With the colonists was Manteo, a Native American of the Algonquian nation and resident of Croatoan, who had traveled to London in an earlier expedition to become a liaison between the English and the Native Americans.

On August 13, 1587, Manteo was baptized, the first recorded baptism of the Church of England in the American colonies and the first recorded baptism of a Native American person in the Church of England. On August 18, Governor White's daughter Eleanor and her husband Ananias Dare celebrated the birth of their first child, Virginia. The first child born to English settlers on the North American continent, Virginia's baptism on August 20 was the second recorded baptism in the Church of England in North America.

Governor White returned to England in late August 1587 to obtain badly needed supplies. It was understood that if the colonists were forced to abandon the settlement in White's absence, they would carve the name of their destination on a tree. If their departure were due to attack, a Maltese cross would be carved beneath. Delayed by events beyond his control,

## **Day Hike –4**

White was unable to return to the colony for three years. It was not until August 18, 1590, that White finally arrived at the site of the village. White found the word “Croatoan,” with no carved cross or other signs of distress, carved into a post of the fort. Little certainty surrounds the fate of the English settlers, who remain known to history as the “Lost Colony.”

*A Great Cloud of Witnesses, 2018*

## **August 17: Artemisia Bowden, 1969**

The Rt. Rev. James Steptoe Johnston, Bishop of the Missionary District of Western Texas (1888–1916), desired to provide education and skill development for newly emancipated blacks in the mission field. Bishop Johnston traveled to Raleigh, North Carolina, in search of a young, black, female teacher. In 1902, Ms. Artemisia Bowden courageously accepted Bishop Johnston’s invitation and assumed leadership of the St. Philip’s Vocational Day School for Colored Children in San Antonio, Texas.

She began with less than ten students. After leading the school for 52 years, a small day school was transformed into a fully accredited junior college offering over 100 degree and certificate programs. In 2016, St. Philip’s College has an enrollment of over 11,000 students. St. Philip’s College carries the dual designation of being a Historically Black College and a Hispanic Serving Institution. Bowden’s work, which began more than 110 years ago, continues to be an essential piece of the educational system in South Texas.

Her participation in various social causes included the Texas Commission on Interracial Relations, the Negro Business and Professional Women’s Club, the City Federation of Clubs, the Southern Conference of Christians and Jews, the Coordination Council of Juvenile Delinquency in the Texas Social Welfare Association, the American Friends Service Commission, the Texas T.B. Association of Bexar County, and the National Association of College Women’s Clubs.

Her visionary leadership at St. Philip’s, as well as in the community, earned her honorary degrees, and recognition as one of ten outstanding women in the field of education by the National Council of Negro Women in 1946; she was honored as Zeta Phi Beta’s Woman of the Year in 1955. Dr. Bowden died in 1969, after a full and rich life of faith in Christ and fidelity to Christ’s Church, having served both the School and St. Philip’s Church in the Diocese of West Texas for more than sixty-seven years.

*A Great Cloud of Witnesses, 2018*