

*Poetry*

**for the Liturgical Calendar**

**Dave Baldwin**

**December 2, 2018 | Psalm 25:1-10**

## Whatever Became of Sin?

The celebrated doctor Karl Menninger wondered,  
“Whatever became of sin?” Good question.  
The smart set today dismisses sin  
and God: they are dustbin notions as good as buried.  
Belief in God is a modern option, but sin  
through an array of names lives on to nurture guilt.  
Unacknowledged and unresolved guilt will out  
in untold unhealthy ways—escapism, rationalization,  
physical disease, mental turmoil—unless  
you speak to the one you wronged face to face,  
set the record straight and ask for grace.  
It is wholesome to somehow find a way to confess  
old lingering wrongs, and lift the weight  
of conscience groaning and wavering within the heart.

First Sunday of Advent, Year C

**December 9, 2018 | Baruch 5:1-9**

## Righteous Peace and Godly Glory

Jerusalem today is wearing  
the garments of sullen sorrow,

but will rise to righteous peace  
and godly glory tomorrow.

As day follows the night,  
Jerusalem shall rise again

and show the fullness of splendor  
everywhere under heaven.

Stand tall, Jerusalem,  
and look to the rising sun.

Your children who marched away  
in defeat are coming home.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Second Sunday of Advent, Year C

**December 16, 2018 | Luke 3:7-18**

## John the Baptist

Listen: You won't be saved because  
you claim the lineage of Abraham.  
God can raise up ordinary stones  
to be the children of Abraham.

If you do not produce good fruit,  
God is certain to cut you down.  
There is an axe lying at your feet;  
you will burn from toe to crown.

The people asked John the Baptist,  
"What then should we do?"  
"Share your goods with those in need;  
be fair to all, to Gentile and Jew."

John was a man sent from God.  
He came to testify to the light.  
He proclaimed good news to the people,  
but he himself was not the light.

He baptized with water, but one is coming,  
he said, to baptize with the Spirit and fire.  
The Messiah holds a winnowing fork  
to gather wheat into his granary.

Listen: John the Baptist proclaimed  
the imminent hour of the Anointed One.  
John declared, "I am not the Messiah;  
I was sent ahead of him."

Third Sunday of Advent, Year C

## **December 23, 2018 | Micah 5:2-5**

### Micah

The prophet Micah foretells the fall  
of the corrupt and faithless elite of Jerusalem;  
the fall and revival of the Kingdom of Judah;  
the Messiah's birth in the town of Bethlehem.

Because of Bethlehem, we honor Micah.  
We are mindful that the great and good  
often come from out of nowhere  
and not from the gilded houses of the world.

Born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth  
by ordinary folk Mary and Joseph,  
Jesus came from out of nowhere  
to shock the world into the Common Era.

Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year C

**December 30, 2018 | Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7**

## We Were Children

We were children, under the law.  
We were children, under guard.

We were children, still in school.  
We were children, following the rules.

We were disciplined. We were deprived.  
Until the day faith arrived!

Because of faith, we are free.  
Our Christian faith sets us free.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

First Sunday after Christmas, Year C

## **January 6, 2019 | Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14**

### Inauguration Day, 2021

The test of a great civilization is how it defends all its people, especially the needy, the weak, and the poor, who do not have a voice to speak against the wealthy and their well-connected friends.

We ask our new president to reverse the trend toward a serf society. Reset the national compass to bring about true righteousness and justice.

Lift up the lowly; bring a long-sought end to suffering throughout the land. Ensure that all may live in dignity—everyone, great and small. It's Inauguration Day and America is on the mend.

The Epiphany, Year C

## January 13, 2019 | Psalm 29

### The Voice of the Lord

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters  
and the waters tremble before the Lord.  
The voice of the Lord shakes the cedars.  
The Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

The Lord thunders and the wilderness quakes.  
He lashes the harsh wilderness of Kadesh.  
The mountains leap like wild oxen!  
Lebanon skips like a youthful calf!

The Lord loosens fire and flood.  
He sits enthroned as king for ever.  
The voice of the Lord is a powerful voice  
and we ascribe to Him the glory.

He is the Lord of earth and sky.  
He gives his people the blessing of peace.  
Glory be to God on high!  
Glory be to the king of kings!

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

First Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C



**January 20, 2019 | John 2:1-11**

## For the Good People of the Village

The wedding party in Cana was underway!  
There was music, dancing, laughter, and strong wine  
for the good people of the village. Suddenly, a sign  
the wine was running low threatened to ruin the day.  
The ancient rabbis say, “Without wine,  
there is no joy!” So Jesus told the servants  
to fill the stone jars with water, and then  
take to the steward this fortuitous fruit of the vine.  
The steward tasted it and thanked the giddy groom  
for saving the best wine for the very last.  
Jesus was a man of the people, and this was his crowd.  
For the good people of the village, there was always room  
for simple kindness. His love was unsurpassed  
for the salt of the earth, as much as love allowed.

Second Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C

**January 27, 2019 | 1 Corinthians 12:12-31**

## The Ideal Starting Lineup

Coaching college basketball  
is not an exact science,  
but you cannot have a lineup  
with five 7-foot giants.

Who will handle the ball  
and bring it up the court  
or pass to the open man  
or make the outside shot?

It's also true with short guys.  
You won't be crashing the boards  
or making the put-back shot  
with a lineup full of guards.

The ideal starting lineup  
is not a cryptic riddle.  
Success always begins  
with the big guy in the middle,

then add a pair of forwards  
with in-the-paint talent,  
a catch-and-shoot guard,  
and a guard to run the point.

Complementary skills  
are needed to win in sports.  
In basketball, the whole must be  
greater than the sum of its parts.

Third Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C

**February 3, 2019 | Luke 4:21-30**

## The Brow of the Hill

Jesus spoke after reading from the prophet Isaiah, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” The stunned silence was broken by one sneering villager who wondered, “What makes you so special?” (The Israelites claimed God was only on their side.) The villager asked, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” “No prophet is accepted in the prophet’s home town,” said Jesus. “The Gentiles are not to be denied: They are not created to fuel the fires of hell; Elijah sought out lodging with a widow of Zarephath and Elisha cleansed Naaman the Syrian of his leprosy.” For praising the Gentiles, the good people of Nazareth were furious. They led Jesus to the brow of the hill, but he passed through their midst to launch his ministry.

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C

## February 10, 2019 | Isaiah 6:1-13

### Isaiah's Vision

Holy, holy, holy! The Lord of hosts  
was seated high on a throne above the smoke.  
My eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.  
He set his eyes on me. And then he spoke:

*Who shall I send? Who will go for me?  
Here I am. Here I am, send me.*

The Lord declared: The nation fell away.  
The evil, godless people did not obey the Lord.  
The people laden with sin had their day.  
But now the nation is humbled by the sword.

*Who shall I send? Who will go for me?  
Here I am. Here I am, send me.*

The Lord declared: This nation can't be saved.  
Because they stop their ears and shut their eyes,  
the people are doomed to lose the life they craved.  
From the smoking ruin, a nation of faith shall rise.

*Who shall I send? Who will go for me?  
Here I am. Here I am, send me.*

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C

## **February 17, 2019 | Luke 6:17-26**

### Beatitudes (Updated)

Seeing the crowd, he climbed the stage  
and took a seat.  
His close advisers joined him there.  
He opened his mouth  
and began to speak.

Blessed are the rich;  
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who celebrate their good fortune;  
they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the arrogant;  
they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for power;  
they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the ruthless;  
they shall be treated with respect.

Blessed are the pure in ideology;  
they shall see God.

Blessed are the warmakers;  
they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are you when people praise you  
and honor you  
and speak all kinds of flattery  
about you on my account;  
rejoice and be glad  
for your reward will be great in heaven.  
This is how the rich and powerful  
were treated before you.  
God bless you and God bless America.

When the speaker finished these sayings,  
the crowd was astonished  
for he spoke to them as one who had authority  
unlike all others who had come before.

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C

**February 24, 2019 | Psalm 37:1-12, 41-42**

## The Good Life

Put on the armor of gentleness.  
Defend yourself with gentleness;  
stand your ground.  
Attack with gentleness;  
confound your foe.

Do not envy the self-indulgent.  
Self-indulgence  
is a basket of perishing fruit.  
For the self-indulgent,  
setting out to live  
is entering into death.

Refrain from anger;  
leave rage alone.  
Put your trust in the Lord—  
your heart will be at peace.

Always show your love!  
Only shadows  
that cast images  
of interleaving aimlessness  
are real  
in a world without love.

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C

**March 3, 2019 | Luke 9:28-36**

## Stay Awake

Jesus is on a high mountain, deep in prayer. Simon Peter and the brothers James and John are on the edge of falling asleep.

As he prays, Jesus' face begins to change and his clothes shine as bright as a lightning flash and the men are shocked to suddenly see the strange

sight of Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus about the road ahead to Jerusalem and the cross. Imagine if you are there in the company of Jesus.

Are you tempted to lose the plot? Would you suffer the loss of seeing the great hinge of history in the making as Jesus prepares to follow in his way of the cross?

The disciples witness glory by staying awake. Jesus is on the mountaintop and so are you. Stay awake! and testify to what is true.

Last Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C



**March 10, 2019 | Romans 10:8-13**

## Grace for All

The prophets Isaiah and Joel assure us  
that the matter of Law and achievement is flawed.  
Zeal for the Law of Moses won't save us:  
the word of faith is the way to God.  
This is echoed by the Apostle Paul.  
The end of the Law is grace for all.

Legalism is with us still. It is sad  
to see justification as a joyless chore  
for someone measuring good vs. bad,  
wishing and hoping for a plus score.  
Listen and learn from the Apostle Paul—  
the end of the Law is grace for all.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

First Sunday in Lent, Year C

**March 17, 2019 | Luke 13:31-35**

## Unrequited Love

I admired a worldly woman  
with children in her loving care.  
I made my plea for love;  
rejection was swift and sure.

I wanted to gather her children  
as a hen protects the brood,  
desiring to set their path  
for destiny great and good.

Her friends and close advisors  
convinced her I was a fraud  
because, they said, I flouted  
the Law and disrespected God.

I offered a transformation,  
but now it is time to leave.  
Her house is left to her.  
With a heavy heart I grieve.

However, I shall return  
when people with one accord  
declare, "Blessed is the one  
who comes in the name of the Lord."

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Second Sunday in Lent, Year C

**March 24, 2019 | Luke 13:1-9**

## The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

In nature's design, the rule of life is clear.  
The useful thrive, advancing from age to age.  
They manage to master time's turning page.  
The useless take up space for a while, then disappear.  
In God's design, uselessness is a grave offense.  
If we're not bearing fruit, what good are we?  
This is the lesson of the barren fig tree:  
If you take sustenance from the soil, you must produce.  
Unlike the natural world, in God's design  
there may be room for hope and a second chance.  
To achieve your promise, you might be granted grace.  
But even the patient planter draws the line.  
Take advantage of your one last chance  
before he orders the gardener to clear the space.

Third Sunday in Lent, Year C

**March 31, 2019 | Luke 15:1-3, 11-32**

## Jealousy

Your father's love is certain. This you know.  
All that is his is yours. You know it's true.  
If you are safe and sound in your father's love  
and all his blessings still belong to you,  
why resent the feast for the prodigal son?  
Why the sudden anger? Why the scorn?  
Your brother once was lost, but now is found.  
Your father must rejoice with love unbound.  
Your father cares for you: What has changed?  
All his goods are yours: What has changed?

For us, this tale is one we understand.  
We may be safely wrapped in our father's love.  
We may enjoy the gifts of his generous hand.  
But a rush of jealousy can make us doubt his love.  
We need to stop and ponder why we doubt.  
Why the anger? What is this about?  
Our father's grace extends to every child.  
It pleases him when all his children are reconciled.  
Our father cares for us: What has changed?  
All his goods are ours: What has changed?

Fourth Sunday in Lent, Year C

**April 7, 2019 | John 12:1-8**

## You Do Not Always Have Me

The flowing lake is always filling,  
but is never full.  
Once there was a true sense of fullness—  
of which all that now remains  
is an empty print and trace.  
The lake strains for completion  
with waters around it—  
seeking in things that are not there  
the help it cannot find  
in those things that are.  
Instead,  
there is a chronic ache  
that comes from feeling incomplete.

Fifth Sunday in Lent, Year C

## **April 14, 2019 | Psalm 31:9-16**

### Rescue Me

My times are in your hand, O Lord.  
Whenever my actions come to naught  
and I feel as useless as a broken pot,  
you rescue me.

My times are in your hand, O Lord.  
Whenever I sigh and waste in grief  
and flutter to earth like a falling leaf,  
you rescue me.

My times are in your hand, O Lord.  
Make your face to shine upon me;  
let your loving kindness flow free  
to rescue me.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Palm Sunday, Year C

## **April 21, 2019 | 1 Corinthians 15:19-26**

### The Ballad of the Sheaf of Corn

Bombs were falling all around  
in the darkest hour of the war.  
Bombs were falling in London town;  
death was in the air.

Within the city, there was a parish  
where the people soldiered on.  
The harvest festival was a time to cherish;  
the work of the church goes on.

The church was decked with local fare  
on a fateful Saturday morn.  
The smells of autumn filled the air.  
In the center—a sheaf of corn.

It wasn't long after that  
the Luftwaffe made a call.  
The festive church was laid flat.  
There was nothing left at all.

Rubble remained in the months ahead.  
Winter turned to spring.  
Green shoots rose from the dead  
as summer was on the wing.

The people of the church could see in the growth  
of the ruined sheaf of corn  
a sign that life is stronger than death,  
a sign of life reborn.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Easter Day, Year C

## April 28, 2019 | Revelation 1:4-8

### What is Truth?

Imagine truth is a sea where high above  
a man can see it all, at least the surface,  
but cannot hear or smell or taste or touch.  
The pilot knows a fraction of the truth.

The swimmer knows a fraction of the truth.  
With every nerve ablaze, he bodysurfs  
selected waves on a favorite patch of sand.  
His choice excludes a billion miles of beach  
and vast unfathomable truth that lies between.

And kneeling by the tide, a poet holds  
a chambered metaphor that seems to say it all.  
The poet speaks a fraction of the truth.

A Roman governor asked, perhaps in jest,  
“What is truth?” He did not wait for an answer.  
Like him, we often ask and do not wait.

We cannot know the truth, the whole truth,  
and nothing but the truth by ourselves.  
But we of faith have a fact witness. We put  
our trust in Jesus, the faithful witness of the truth  
of God, who is and who was and who is to come.

Second Sunday of Easter, Year C



**May 5, 2019 | Acts 9:1-20**

## Brother Saul

Ananias of Damascus was minding his own business when Jesus spoke to him in a vision: “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul.” “Wait, what?” said Ananias. “Lord, many of your followers are forced to hide from this evil dude. The last I heard he was muttering threats against the saints in Jerusalem, and now he’s coming for us here in Damascus. This guy is nothing but trouble.” The Lord said to Ananias, “Go, for Saul is an instrument I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel.” Ananias pushed back, then relented. Against his better judgment he went to Saul, laid on his hands, and said, “Brother Saul.” Because of him, Saul’s sight was restored. Saul got up and was baptized. After that, Ananias is out of the story, but think about it: where would we be today without such courage?

Third Sunday of Easter, Year C

**May 12, 2019 | Acts 9:36-43**

## Holy People, Different People

What is a saint? The Gospel word “hagios” is often rendered as holy, but the root definition of the Greek word is different, meaning the Christian is set aside from all others. God chose

at first the nation of Israel to do his service, to be his holy people, different people. The plan foundered because proud people forgot that service, not honor, was the purpose.

We are different not because we deserve greater honor. That is not the reason. We are the least of persons. We are chosen for a greater service to God. We are saved to serve.

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year C

## May 19, 2019 | Revelation 21:1-6

### Hope

John of Patmos imagined a transformation  
of the first heaven and the first earth  
into a new heaven and a new earth;  
but little has changed since the emperor Domitian.

Advances in personal comfort are commendable.  
We've seen great progress by the peoples of earth  
in science and engineering and in public health,  
and yet the masses are still expendable.

Egregious wealth for the fortunate few  
contrasts with millions who lack a home.  
It was just like this in ancient Rome.  
Write this: these words are trustworthy and true.

When most of the people are trying to cope,  
when most of the people live without hope,  
John proclaims the Christian ethos  
that life is good: God is with us.

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year C

**May 26, 2019 | John 14:23-29**

## Why Things Happen

What is our aim in life?  
Snowflakes have a noble aim:  
to melt.  
But first,  
they cloak the world in white.

The beach is bare.  
The perishing sun is lighting up  
the bottom half of thunderheads.  
The day is done,  
and Earth depends on us again  
To electrify the night,  
To cheer the globe  
with love's outrageous light.

A multi-colored young life died  
so we could see  
the whiter-than-white,  
sun-white face of God.

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year C

## June 2, 2019 | Acts 16:16-34

### Annoyed

Paul was annoyed.  
A slave girl with divination powers followed him around in Philippi, crying out, “These men are slaves of the most high God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.” She was mentally ill, but her ability to foretell the future made a lot of money for her owners.

She annoyed Paul for many days. Finally, he said to her spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” The spirit left her immediately and she was healed.

Her owners were annoyed because she was healed. She lost her powers and no longer made them any money.

The authorities in Philippi were annoyed when the annoyed owners dragged Paul and Silas before them for the crime of robbing them of an income.

Everyone was annoyed  
except the imprisoned Paul and Silas,  
who prayed and sang hymns  
throughout the night,  
and the grateful slave girl,  
no longer imprisoned  
in mental darkness.

Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year C

## June 9, 2019 | Psalm 104

### All We Have

*A Setting for Choir*

Clothed with honor, wrapped in a robe of light,  
you stretch out the heavens like a mighty tent.  
You set the beams of your chambers on the waters.  
You ride the gliding clouds on wings of the wind.

You make the land; the earth shall never be shaken.  
You cover the earth with water like a cloak.  
Waters stand above the highest mountain.  
But then the waters flee at your rebuke.

*O Lord, all we have comes from you.  
In death, all we have returns to you.*

At the sound of thunder, the waters take to flight.  
They roll down to the valleys designed for them.  
You set the boundaries that waters may not pass.  
Never again will waters cover the earth.

Springs pour out of the ground. Rainwater falls  
for the animals and birds and every wild beast.  
These waters enable grass and crops to grow.  
The earth is satisfied with the fruit of your works.

*O Lord, all we have comes from you.  
In death, all we have returns to you.*

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle in the field.  
You grow the plants so people can bring forth  
food from the earth and wine for cheerfulness  
and daily bread to strengthen the human heart.

The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly.  
Birds build their nests in the cedars of Lebanon.  
The stork finds his home on the highest branches.  
Wild goats are free to roam the mountains.

*O Lord, all we have comes from you.  
In death, all we have returns to you.*

You made the ivory moon to tell the seasons.  
The sun knows its time to rise and set.  
You made the night when all the forest animals  
come creeping out and return at the break of day.

The young lions seek their food from God.  
When the sun rises, they lie down in their dens.  
People go out to their labor until the dusk.  
In your wisdom, O Lord, everything is arranged.

*O Lord, all we have comes from you.  
In death, all we have returns to you.*

Our world is full of the disparate things you made.  
Yonder is the vast expanse of the emerald sea,  
filled with living things both small and great.  
The Leviathan is playing. Ships go to and fro.

All creatures look to you to give them food.  
You open your generous hand and they are filled.  
When you hide your face, they grieve. When you take  
away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

*O Lord, all we have comes from you.  
In death, all we have returns to you.*



May the glory of the Lord endure to the end of time.  
May the Lord always rejoice in his wondrous works—  
he who looks on the earth and it trembles,  
he who touches the mountains and they smoke.  
I will sing to the Lord for as long as I live.  
I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.

*O Lord, all we have comes from you.  
In death, all we have returns to you.*

Day of Pentecost, Year C

**June 16, 2019 | John 16:12-15**

## The Kindly Tutor

“I like history,” said the boy to the tutor.  
“I think it would be nice to know everything  
that ever happened.” The kindly tutor

looked up from his computer. “Everything?  
Why?” “When someone has a question,  
I could answer without a lot of thinking.”

“My friend, the study of history is a progression.  
History is always being revised  
and you can’t learn everything all at once.”

The tutor held up a thumb drive.  
“Suppose we put every truth  
of history we know for sure on this drive

and downloaded the contents for you  
into your brain. You still must look  
at everything and work your way through

all the data—just like reading a book.”  
The tutor added, “All the information  
is there right now for you to take,

but you’re not ready yet. Education,  
be it history or some other field,  
is one long process of revelation.”

The curious student was not dismayed.  
Revelation was key. He would let it play  
and let his tutor show the way.

Trinity Sunday, Year C

**June 23, 2019 | 1 Kings 19:1-15**

## Elijah Blues

A mighty wind was blowing, but the Lord wasn't there.  
An earthquake shook the mountain, but the Lord wasn't there.  
I am zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts.

Fire followed the earthquake, but the Lord wasn't there.  
In the sound of utter silence, the Lord was there!  
I alone am left; they seek my life.

The Lord is not the wind, the Lord is not the quake,  
the Lord is not the fire. But listen to the quiet:  
I AM WHO I AM, the God of hosts.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Second Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

**June 30, 2019 | Luke 9:51-62**

## Make America Great Again

*Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*

When the Leader puts his hand to the plow,  
insisting on steering while looking back,  
he cannot plow a straight furrow.  
The result is row after crooked row.  
Our Sacred Honor is under attack.  
Every patriot needs to know  
the Leader is conning his credulous claue:  
the good old days won't come back.

Third Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

## July 7, 2019 | Galatians 6:1-16

### Family of Faith

Welcome to the family of faith.  
Listen up: these are the rules.  
The Holy Spirit is the boss.  
Got that?  
Your job is to pay attention  
to what the boss has to say.  
When the boss encourages you  
to do something, you do it.  
Always do as you are told.  
There may be times you think  
you have a better idea,  
but, trust me, that never works.  
You are just asking for trouble.  
In the family of faith,  
we bear each other's burdens.  
When someone slips up,  
you need to do what you can to help out.  
Don't be judgmental; we are family here.  
Respond with a spirit of gentleness.  
And don't take comfort  
in that person's misfortune.  
No one is perfect—not even you.  
Be humble.  
Your time could be next.  
Each member of the family  
has strengths and weaknesses,  
and we have unique responsibilities.  
Don't fall into the trap  
of comparing yourself to others.  
The boss takes a dim view of that.  
Do you understand?  
You may think you are doing good work.  
Even so, you could probably do better.  
Right?  
Be mindful of that.  
We are playing the long game here.

We won't grow weary in doing what is right  
because we hope to reap at harvest time  
if we don't give up.

Whenever we have an opportunity,  
let us work for the good of all,  
and especially for those  
of the family of faith.

OK, are there any questions?

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

**July 14, 2019 | Amos 7:7-17**

## The Plumb Line

With a plumb-line, the wall of Israel was erected  
with closely-fitted, well-joined stones.  
These perpendicular stones were the very bones  
of a great nation, but a careless people neglected  
their promise to the Lord. They failed to stay the ruin.  
And now the Lord is holding a line and plummet  
against the wall. It is used for building up;  
the line is also used for tearing down  
as the demolition crew decides how much to raze.  
The Lord bears long, but the Lord won't bear forever.  
The herdsman Amos foretells the coming days  
of desolation for an errant nation who lost its way.  
The bowing, bulging wall is put to the measure;  
by the sword of justice, the edifice is swept away.

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

**July 21, 2019 | Amos 8:1-12**

## You Trample on the Needy

Someone once said, “There are no second acts,”  
but here I am. I am the prophet Amos of Tekoa.  
I walked the earth one hundred generations ago.  
Because of you, the Lord brought me back.  
The most devout nation in the western world,  
I am told, is America. I find that hard to believe.  
Do you really think the Lord is that naïve?  
You offer thoughts and prayers, but your hearts are cold.  
Nothing has changed: the rich and famous are greedy.  
You have the power because you have the wealth;  
you have the wealth because you have the power.  
Nothing has changed: you trample on the needy.  
Your actions deny that persons are created equal,  
and for your callousness, the Lord will lay you low.

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C



## July 28, 2019 | Colossians 2:6-15

### Keep It Simple

You don't need all this extra stuff.  
You were buried with Jesus Christ in baptism,  
and you were also raised with him  
through faith in the power of God,  
who raised him from the dead.

That's it.

You have people telling you  
that the simple truth preached by Jesus  
and preserved in the Gospel  
is not enough.  
They want you to add  
an elaborate system  
of pseudo-philosophical thought  
and accept a system of astrology  
in addition to Jesus.

Then you have another group  
seeking to impose circumcision  
and all sorts of rules and regulations  
in addition to Jesus.

People, you don't need special knowledge  
and you don't need a badge of the flesh  
to be faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.  
Keep it simple.  
Ignore these distractions  
and trust in the Good News.

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

**August 4, 2019 | Luke 12:13-21**

## The Parable of the Rich Fool

He who dies with the most toys wins,  
a rich man said.  
Today he is dead.  
What do you win when death begins?

When death steals you before the dawn,  
what is the measure  
of stored up treasure?  
Who honors you when you are gone?

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

**August 11, 2019 | Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16**

## Defining Faith

The world we live in was once a lightless void.  
Out of nothingness, the Lord created the world.

From things not visible, the Lord made the earth.  
From a divine spark, the Lord gives us birth.

We live on the edge from dust to dust again,  
yet by our faith, we understand there is a plan.

The patriarch Abraham of Ur was promised a place  
where he and his seed could live at last in peace.

Obedient Abraham never doubted his descendants  
would grow to be as many as the stars in the heavens.

He never touched the soil of the promised land.  
He died in faith before enjoying his claim.

Hope is looking forward with wistful longing.  
The outcome is unknown when fate comes calling.

Faith is looking forward with absolute surety.  
Faith is a hope that has turned into a certainty.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

## August 18, 2019 | Hebrews 11:29–12:2

### Dialog Between Athlete and Coach

A duet: Athlete (alto or tenor) and Coach (bass)

I ran my best, but failed to place.  
My legs were dead the entire race.

I don't have wind. I don't feel strong.  
Tell me: What am I doing wrong?

*Unless you change, you'll never win.  
You are running races with the weight of sin.*

*The weight of sin drags you down.  
A change of heart wins the crown.*

I like the pleasures that come from sin.  
*Unless you change, you'll never win.*

*Defeat or victory is yours to choose.  
The life you live is yours to lose.*

(Speaking to the congregation in unison)

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

## August 25, 2019 | Jeremiah 1:4-10

### Excuses

We waste a lot of time making excuses. The Bible is full of them. Some are good like Moses saying, correctly, he is not eloquent. The Lord enlists brother Aaron to speak for him, and that is enough to do the job. But most excuses are offered out of indolence. For every Isaiah who says, “Here am I, send me,” many more can’t be bothered. Jeremiah is just a kid when the Lord calls on him. Now the Lord is a master salesman who knows how to handle every objection. He has heard them all! He tells the kid not to worry—He will provide the words to say, and will protect Jeremiah at all times. The Lord says to him, “Now I have put my words in your mouth. Jeremiah: see, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build up and to plant.” In our era, everything is totally different in every way except for the one dishonest excuse that never goes out of style, “I’m busy.”

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

**September 1, 2019 | Luke 14:1, 7-14**

## The High Achievers

A single mom gave everything she had to her children. She took care of their urgent needs at all hours. She worked in a stressful job to put food on the table and clothes on their backs. Because of her, there was peace and harmony at home. The day came when she suffered a stroke and died. Nothing was the same again. The children devolved into anger and bitterness. Selfishness ruled the day.

The team was losing. The starting point guard was bringing the ball up the court and taking all the shots. His teammates were standing around watching—hoping to do something useful. The frustrated coach benched his leading scorer and put in an unselfish pass-first reserve who got the whole team up and running. Soon the team was pulling away for a win. The leading scorer sat at the end of the bench.

A major company wanted to increase its profits by reducing payroll, so they laid off thousands of competent older workers. The new people struggled to find their footing. Investors were glad when the stock price and quarterly earnings went up. But the company lost its edge and never recovered because of lagging productivity and the great loss of institutional memory that left with the severance checks.

The high achievers make things better, not worse, by their presence. Be honest: are you a high achiever?

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

**September 8, 2019 | Jeremiah 18:1-11**

## Spoiled in the Potter's Hand

The potter was weary of throwing ordinary pots.  
For the longest time, he sat at the potter's wheel  
crafting useful pots with a bland appeal.  
None of these pots satisfied his heart of hearts.

Each pot was slightly different, but basically the same.  
I want to make a vessel, the potter allowed,  
of the highest quality—something to make me proud!  
The potter began his masterpiece, and gave it the name

Israel. Nothing happened according to plan.  
The clay refused to cooperate. It wobbled on the wheel.  
The potter could never get the proper feel,  
and the flawed clay spoiled in the potter's hand.

The potter's fail unveiled a hopeful sign.  
He was not able to pull the perfect from the good,  
but the spoiled clay taught a lesson of what should  
be done to fully achieve his true design.

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

**September 15, 2019 | Luke 15:1-10**

## The Parable of the Lost Coin

Imagine a father whose child is lost  
in a busy mall at Christmas time.  
All is well when she is found.  
You too would say, "Rejoice with me!"

Imagine a wife desperately searching  
every room for a precious ring  
until at last she holds it up.  
You too would say, "Rejoice with me!"

Imagine lovers breaking up,  
but won't accept that love is lost.  
How sweet it is to reunite!  
You too would say, "Rejoice with me!"

Imagine God's determined search  
to find the lost and bring them home.  
This is the parable of the lost coin.  
You too would say, "Rejoice with me!"

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C



**September 22, 2019 | Luke 16:1-13**

## We All Live on Borrowed Time

The road I am traveling rises  
into the arid western hills  
and vanishes,  
moving like my thoughts  
toward an unknown end.

Soldiers die or win acclaim,  
but over time it's all the same.  
Oblivion shrugs at fear and fame.

Lives who touch my life  
are tributaries.  
They empty out their names;  
in me, names are neither here nor there.

Glistening drops of dew  
are strung on strands of a spider's web:  
how quickly youth passes  
in the turning day.

They hoard the most  
who want the most;  
they lose the most  
who hoard the most.  
Contentment is knowing  
when to stop.

Like trembling leaves  
are you and me.  
Autumnal yellow is trembling,  
trembling in the wind,  
trembling, then quickly gone.

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

**September 29, 2019 | 1 Timothy 6:6-19**

## Godliness Combined with Contentment

We bring nothing into the world;  
we leave the world with nothing.

Whatever comes our way,  
we are renting—and never owning.

We should learn to be content  
with gifts of food and clothing.

If blessed with more than that,  
we must be tireless in sharing.

Godliness is the reverence of persons  
who never stop believing

that we live in the presence of God.  
Do all you can in storing

up treasures of a good foundation  
for the future—for life everlasting.

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

**October 6, 2019 | 2 Timothy 1:1-14**

## Advice for Timothy

Knowledge is the direction for action;  
action is the effect of knowledge.  
Knowledge is the beginning of action;  
action is the completion of knowledge.

Action does not flow from knowledge;  
knowledge does not flow from action.  
Knowledge and action are one.

The world does not shape the mind.  
The mind gives reason to the world.  
The mind is the source of all reason.  
Your inner light is an innate moral goodness  
and an understanding of what is good.

Be ever constant in your knowledge  
that Jesus Christ is Lord.  
Consequently, two actions are at one  
with your constancy of knowledge:  
you will never slacken in faith  
and you will never slacken in love.

NOTE: Hat tip to Chinese neo-Confucian philosopher Wang Yang Ming (1472-1529) for the content in the first three stanzas.

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

**October 13, 2019 | Luke 17:11-19**

## The Alpha and Omega of Gratitude

Giving thanks in your heart is the alpha of gratitude.  
Gratitude is the sum of what you sense and say.  
Remembering to offer your thanks is the omega of gratitude.

Longing for things you lack is a flawed attitude.  
Always be thankful for what you have today.  
Feeling grateful in your heart is the alpha of gratitude.

Do not devalue the goods you currently hold.  
What you have today was only hoped for yesterday.  
Remembering to offer your thanks is the omega of gratitude.

Lust for things puts you in an anxious mood.  
You'll find your happiness in the persons you most enjoy.  
Giving thanks in your heart is the alpha of gratitude.

The lives of those you love will increase in magnitude  
as you count your blessings and walk with them in the Way.  
Remembering to offer your thanks is the omega of gratitude.

The ungrateful person is one who journeys in solitude.  
Appreciation is the greatest kindness, far and away.  
Giving thanks in your heart is the alpha of gratitude.  
Remembering to offer your thanks is the omega of gratitude.



Hanny Naibaho, Unsplash

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

**October 20, 2019 | 2 Timothy 3:14–4:5**

## In the Company of Nonbelievers

I wander through life in the company of nonbelievers.  
My closest friends follow the Golden Rule,  
but the sayings of Jesus fall on barren soil.  
I am selling, but no one is buying a Redeemer.  
Oddly, I am less distressed by my circle of friends,  
these secular saints who truly care for the marginalized,  
than the haters who, in the name of Jesus Christ,  
selectively search the scriptures for churlish outcomes.  
We need to heal the sick, feed the hungry,  
and care for the weak among us—and always remember  
we cannot love God and hate our neighbor,  
for where our hearts are, there will be our treasure.  
Not everyone believes in the sweet by and by,  
but my thumb is on the scale for Christlike behavior.

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

**October 27, 2019 | Luke 18:9-14**

## The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

I'm feeling special standing in the temple.  
I'm such a sight to see!  
I lift my words to you my Lord.  
Behold: take a look at me!

Indeed, I have risen above the rest.  
Lord, you know it's true.  
Unlike these fools, I mind your rules.  
My bearing says, "Better than you."

[Chorus]

*Better than you,  
better than you.  
Lord knows  
he is better than you.*

Who needs to ask? I tithe and fast.  
My piety's beyond compare.  
It makes me proud to show the crowd  
how to strike a righteous air.

My public look is by the book.  
My face is pale and wan  
and I raise my hands at the proper times.  
I show the people how it's done.

[Chorus]

*Better than you,  
better than you.  
Lord knows  
he is better than you.*

The temple is blessed to witness the best;  
it's all about the show.  
I'll close my hour on the temple floor  
with this, a truly grateful prayer:

Thank you, Lord, that I am spared  
from living a life of sin  
like that tax collector over there  
and all the others in this room.

[Chorus]

*Better than you,  
better than you.  
Lord knows  
he is better than you.*

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

**November 3, 2019 | Luke 19:1-10**

## You Must Change Your Life

Rilke wrote, *Du mußt dein Leben ändern*, which is this command: “You must change your life.” It is a powerful and famous line, but what does it mean? Change to what? Rilke does not say.

The poet says this of the statue of Apollo: “For here there is no place that does not see you.” Is it fear and trembling in the presence of archaic numinousness? Does he perceive divinity in chiseled stone?

The imperative “You must change your life” suggests you have lost your way. To say you are lost implies you were once on the right path, but wandered off. The lost have already experienced the right path.

The Son of Man came to seek and to save the souls who were lost—those who wandered off. Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector in Jericho. He was a son of Abraham; he knew right from wrong.

He was rich from cutting corners and cheating the people. In the presence of Jesus, Zacchaeus understood that he had strayed. Jesus did not command, “You must change your life.” Zacchaeus was not

doomed or damned. He was simply in the wrong place, and he changed immediately to get right with God. On the spot, he gave half of his possessions to the poor and he made four-fold payments to those defrauded.



Turnabout was more than words—it was backed by deeds  
to guarantee sincerity. You must change your life!  
Once again, Zacchaeus took his rightful place  
as a generous, obedient child in the household of his Father.

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

## November 10, 2019 | Haggai 1:15–2:9

### America in Decline

*Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing?*

It's like the air went out of our balloon  
in 1989. The last time  
we were this self-absorbed  
was during the Hoover presidency  
before the great depression.  
The stock market crashed  
and there was a national failure  
of imagination for three years.  
FDR rallied our spirits  
and asked us all to pull together  
for the greater good.  
Meanwhile, in Europe,  
Hitler was on the march,  
invading his neighbors.  
He rounded up the Jews  
and others who were not members  
of the Aryan Master Race.  
He sent innocents to death camps  
and stole their properties.  
When he threatened  
to crush Great Britain,  
America quietly lent a hand,  
then jumped in with both feet  
when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.  
Everyone served,  
one way or another,  
in this national emergency,  
and we won a two-ocean war.

After the war,  
we helped to build  
the enduring architecture  
for international peace.  
We did not back down  
during the ascent of the Soviet Union,  
but rose to the challenge.  
At home, a single worker  
could support his or her family.  
Company presidents and CEOs  
had modest lifestyles.  
We enjoyed peace abroad  
and prosperity at home.

America leaned into the sixties.  
Descendants of Negro slaves  
demanded equality.  
Half the population was female,  
but women—who built the weapons  
of war a few years earlier—  
were unfairly treated in the workplace.  
Asians incarcerated during the war  
were told, “Sorry about that.”  
Still, the country moved forward  
as a unit.  
We continued to have a sense  
of national purpose.

This sense of national purpose  
led us astray in the Vietnam War,  
but it also enabled us to put  
a man on the moon,  
possibly the greatest achievement ever  
by the American government.  
It’s been 50 years since that moment.  
What happened?

After a presidential resignation  
and the end of an unpopular war,  
we lost faith in our leaders.  
Some people were quick to say  
government could do nothing right.  
We elected a president to serve  
as head of our government who said,  
“Government is not the solution  
to our problem;  
government is the problem.”  
This was the national mood  
when the Soviet Union fell apart  
in 1989—the year we lost our edge.  
“We won!” was our triumphal coda.  
We bought the popular idea  
that unrestrained capitalism  
was superior to any kind  
of government planning.

So here we are today:  
the moon landing plus 50 years.  
We are ruled by a reality TV star  
who never reads anything,  
who only cares about money  
and his brand.  
His mouth is a firehose of insults.  
The common good means nothing to him.  
Congress wallows in paralysis.  
People reading their phones  
bump into each other on the streets.  
Anonymous avatars  
post their hateful messages  
on Facebook.  
The captains of industry  
reap outrageous sums of money  
while two-income families  
are on food stamps.

Does it really take a national crisis  
to bring us together again—  
another great depression,  
a war for our very survival,  
a space race,  
an ideological struggle?  
Can't we the people  
with clear minds and kind hearts,  
men and women of every origin,  
come together naturally  
for the good of the country?  
America is in decline,  
but it is not too late  
for a new, inspired zenith.

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

## November 17, 2019 | Psalm 98

### After the Storm

The bearded mountain  
rippled and flexed  
his enormous triceps  
and challenged  
the many-armed sea

to a wrestling match.  
Howling winds whistled  
through the trees  
and ravaged the watershed,  
rushing down ragged cliffs

to the breakers.  
Joining the fray,  
sky crackled with electricity—  
illuminating at intervals  
roiling thunderheads

and setting fire  
to tinder pockets  
of dried-up understory.  
Exhausted,  
the land, sea and heavens

turned their eyes to the judge  
of the world. Weary of conflict  
they sued for peace,  
and suddenly all was calm  
in the presence of the Lord.

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

## November 24, 2019 | Luke 23:33-43

### Decisions

*One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'*

Luke 23:39-42

#### *Penitent Thief*

if  
(condition: believe Jesus is the Messiah, yes/no)  
yes  
then  
(result: consolation, hope, contentment)  
end if

#### *Impenitent Thief*

if  
(condition: believe Jesus is the Messiah, yes/no)  
no  
else  
(result: anger, self-pity, nihilism)  
end if

Last Sunday after Pentecost: Christ the King, Year C

**This concludes Liturgical Year C**

**December 1, 2019 | Romans 13:11-14**

## Conversion of St. Augustine

In a little while, I'll make up my mind  
to turn away from a life of sin,  
but not right now.

I have the want, but not the will.  
I ask, O Lord, how long until?  
Why not now?

*Tolle lege! Tolle lege!*  
is rendered as, "Take it up and read it!"  
You are free

to break the bonds that keep you accursed.  
Open the Book and follow the first  
verse you see.

Not in carousing, drunkenness, debauchery,  
not in sensuality, quarrelling, or jealousy—  
put on Christ as a woman or man  
puts on a garment.

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ;  
make no provisions for the flesh  
to find fulfillment.

NOTE: In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine credits this specific passage in Romans as the scripture that finally prompted him to convert to Christianity.

First Sunday of advent, Year A



## **December 8, 2019 | Romans 15:4-13**

### Bond of Unity

The weak in faith and the strong in faith  
and the honest skeptic are bound as one.

The Easter Christian and the everyday saint;  
the Jew and Gentile; every man,

woman, and child without regard  
for homeland, language, or color of skin:

many differences, but one in faith.  
In loyalty and love, we are one.

There is one Christ for all peoples;  
the bond of unity is loyalty to him.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Second Sunday of advent, Year A

**December 15, 2019 | Psalm 146:4-9**

## Our Responsibility

The Lord created the heaven and earth.  
He created the seas, and all that is in them.  
Man had nothing to do with this.

The Lord gives justice to the oppressed,  
sets the prisoners free,  
opens the eyes of the blind,

lifts up those who are bowed down,  
cares for the stranger,  
sustains the widow and orphan,

and frustrates the ways of the wicked.  
How are these things done?  
They are done by those who love the Lord,

by those who follow his commands.  
Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their help,  
whose hope is in the Lord their God.

Third Sunday of advent, Year A

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## December 22, 2019 | Matthew 1:18-25

### Passages

Passages  
from tarn to tide—  
a post-amble  
to the old transformation,  
a preamble to the new.

If I am only  
what I am becoming,  
I wonder  
what matters  
before I get there.

Assuming that God's existence  
might be proved  
through logic,  
would you and I believe  
in such an elegant God?

Fourth Sunday of advent, Year A

**December 25, 2019 | Isaiah 9:2-7**

## Long Night's Journey into Day

In former times, we toiled at night.  
We toiled in shadows from black to gray.  
But then, behold! The emerging light!  
In our long night's journey into day.

In our long night's journey into day,  
the light of the Lord is beaming bright.  
We praise the Lord and dance for joy.  
The Lord of Hosts relieves our plight.

All the boots of tramping warriors  
and bloody garments torn asunder  
are burning now in pungent fires.  
We exult like a people dividing plunder.

A child is born; a son is given;  
authority rests in Him today.  
We thank the Lord for sins forgiven  
and our long night's journey into day.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Christmas Day, Year A

**December 29, 2019 | John 1:1-18**

## Son of Man

The son of man comes to earth.  
Like you and me, he draws a breath.  
His life is much like ours: a birth,  
a coming of age, and then a death.

The son of man is the suffering servant.  
He shoulders sins for a world in pain.  
It is his role to lift our burden.  
He suffers, he dies, he comes again.

The son of man is the sovereign power  
to come in glory on judgment day.  
No one knows the date and hour  
our floating world will pass away.

The son of man is all in one:  
person, servant, magistrate.  
The faithful are one with the son of man.  
He governs all, both small and great.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

First Sunday after Christmas, Year A

## January 5, 2020 | Jeremiah 31:7-14

### Come Together

Come together,  
come together  
people of faith  
from all the farthest parts of earth.

Come together  
you who suffer  
and you who weep.  
A hopeful future lies ahead.

Come together  
you with child  
and you in labor.  
With consolations, I'll lead you back.

Come together!  
The young women  
rejoice in the dance  
and young men and old are merry.

The Lord who scattered  
the remnant of Israel  
is gathering us now  
as a shepherd keeps an errant flock.

Come together!  
Our old mourning  
turns to joy.  
The people of faith are one again!

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Second Sunday after Christmas, Year A

## January 6, 2020 | Matthew 2:1-12

### Herod the Great

A popular belief was abroad in the kingdom of Judea. Scholars concluded that seventy-six generations had passed since the Creation, and that the next, the seventy-seventh, would gift to Israel the Messiah who was destined to deliver the nation from foreign rule.

A child born in Bethlehem would be the king of the Jews—as foretold by the prophet Micah. The Magi spoke these words to Herod the Great. Herod was frightened, but he feigned excitement. He said to the Magi, “Go and search diligently

for the child; and when you find him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” At the time, he was terminally ill with a hideous disease. His career was one with many bold accomplishments; it was also one of cruelty, vengeance, and paranoia,

traits in overdrive at the time of the birth of Jesus. Herod was thoroughly Roman in murdering each and every rival to his rule, including his wife and three of his sons. He murdered hundreds more real and perceived enemies in his final years

as he assured his lasting legacy in the line of succession. In the end, nothing happened to the child of Bethlehem. No one mourned for Herod, a converted Jew—the son of an Edomite father and an Arab mother—who did the dirty work for the hated Roman state.

The Epiphany, Year A

**January 12, 2020 | Isaiah 42:1-9**

## All the Way to the Coastlands

Isaiah's camera lens is zooming out  
from a close-up shot showing the rubble and despair  
of occupied Israel to a wide-angle view,  
a cosmic view, of all the nations of the world.  
God is not a tribal deity who assures  
military mastery or material success for Israel.  
He created the heavens and stretched out the earth.  
He cares for all living and breathing creatures.

Isaiah promises a spirit-filled servant—  
not a conqueror or a tyrant. The servant is the face of justice.  
Hard power is swept aside by justice!  
The servant will persist until a sense of fairness  
holds sway all the way to the coastlands.  
Even in this hour as it endures a humiliating plight,  
Israel should look beyond itself and serve as a light  
to the world by inspiring justice in every land.

First Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A



## January 19, 2020 | 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

### Cædmon's Vision

*In the Old English Style*

I ken a cross      cleaving clouds  
high in the heavens      of purple hue  
the mark of my liege      in the middle of morning  
suddenly streaming      strange ray-daggers  
fiery flames      from Wayland's forge  
burnishing war-bucklers      baring souls  
loosening artifice      from feckless lives  
who lack conviction      leaving at the last  
grim cobble-ground      the gut of groundlings  
daring discernment      on judgment day

### Who was Cædmon?

Cædmon (d. ~680) was the earliest writer of Old English literature who lived in seventh century according to Bede's "Ecclesiastical History of the English people." Bede wrote his history in Latin. He translated "Cædmon's Hymn" from the Northumbrian dialect into Latin, and praised Cædmon as the most inspiring writer of the sacred verse. Unfortunately, most of the poems written by Cædmon are not found. But according to Bede, Cædmon wrote on Christian themes like creation of the world, origin of man, Exodus, Jesus' incarnation, resurrection, preaching of apostles, terrors of future judgment, pains of hell and delights of heaven.

My poem on this page is based on a story about one of Cædmon's poems. His actual poem is lost.

Second Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A

## January 26, 2020 | Matthew 4:12-23

### Leaving Home

Jesus set out from the pinched, provincial town of Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, one of many towns near the Sea of Galilee.

A fertile region with edible fish in the lake, Galilee was a prosperous crossroads for trade.

It was also a fertile region for new ideas where opinions mingled in the heated crucible of debate.

Jesus did not look back. He began his ministry of teaching, of proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and of the healing of bodies and souls for those who asked.

By his example, we know that leaving home can lead to liberating the best version of ourselves.

A hometown is more than a place: it is a state of mind.

What would it take for you who read these lines to set out to be the best version of yourself?

Third Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A

## February 2, 2020 | Hebrews 2:14-18

### What Kind of God?

The gods consume nectar and ambrosia on Olympus and amuse themselves by looking down on us dispassionately. Cool detachment is a sardonic business. Hellenism insists we see things as they are. For right thinking, the body and its desires are a barrier; we are cautioned to keep the mind completely clear.

Hebraism counters that the body and its desires are a barrier to right action. The Lord requires clarity of thought chastened by strictness of conscience. The principal rubric of the Law is studied obedience to the will of God. The Lord has a vertical presence—aloof except to chastise with corrective fires.

The unknown author of the book of Hebrews crystalizes the Christology of Paul by defining a different kind of divinity in which the pioneer of our salvation identifies with the human condition. Jesus is wholly man as well as divine and, thus, he thoroughly understands what it means for us to live imperfect lives.

But there is more. It is well and good to know the Lord has empathy, unlike the dispassionate pantheon or the distant God of Moses. It begs the question: what can be done about our suffering and sorrow? The pioneer of our salvation has come to earth to show us exactly what we need for true consolation.

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A

## February 9, 2020 | 1 Corinthians 2:1-12

### The Way

*What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him—these things God has revealed to us through the spirit.*

The way eludes the snare  
of language. It is hard to catch the wheeling birds  
scurrying up helixing stairs,

but harder still to catch the way with words.  
The heart that hangs stretched and framed  
is not the heart of hearts;

the way that can be named  
and then defined is not the way.  
The way conceals itself by being nameless.

Abundantly clear from far away,  
the mountain up close fades to shades of white;  
such vastness mirrors the way.

The patient, widening eye controls the night.  
Eventually, patterns emerge,  
defining themselves with immanent light,

suggesting a subtle demiurge  
behind a shadowy veil  
behind another veil on heaven's edge

behind the tangible veil  
of earth; for earth is the pattern for humanity,  
then heaven for earth; and through the farthest veil,  
the way spins out our destiny.

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A

**February 16, 2020 | Deuteronomy 30:15-20**

[haiku]

planting a dogwood sapling,  
four hands pat down the compost...  
commitment

[tanka]

we are on our knees  
in the garden;  
I am weeding, you are planting...  
honey bees  
move pause move pause

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A

**February 23, 2020 | 2 Peter 1:16-21**

## On Prophecy

How do we know if a prophecy is actually true? Peter says, “No prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation.” The fakers flatter themselves by promoting their own private views.

The Lord uses the prophet as a tool of his trade. God is the inspired writer—the prophet, the pen; God is the concertmaster—the prophet, the violin. Trust the Holy Spirit to show you the way.

Last Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A

## March 1, 2020 | Matthew 4:1-11

### This is a Test

The verbs *to tempt* and *to test* are not the same. God did not tempt Abraham to sacrifice his one and only child, Isaac. For it is written, “After these things God tested Abraham.”

The devil tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread to prove he is the son of God.

The devil tempted Jesus to leap from the façade of the temple and force the angels to cushion his bones.

The devil tempted Jesus with his biggest and best offer: the splendor of earthly kingdoms if he, in turn, would worship him; Jesus refused.

Temptations bedevil us every hour of every day as befits our nature, but do not be confused when the Lord requires your service: *This is a test.*

First Sunday in Lent, Year A

**March 8, 2020 | Romans 4:1-5, 13-17**

## A Father's Love

A father's love does not depend  
on good behavior by his child.  
Bad behavior does not suspend  
a father's love for his child.

A father's love is not transactional—  
a running score of tit for tat.  
A father's love is not conditional—  
give me this, I'll give you that.

A father's love is never earned  
where deeds pile up like points in a game.  
He won't give up when love is spurned;  
he patiently waits and won't cast blame.

A father's love is an act of grace  
freely given, no strings attached.  
The child is sheltered in the sure embrace  
of the gracious gift of love unmatched.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Second Sunday in Lent, Year A



**March 15, 2020 | John 4:5-42**

## Breaking Bigotry

He broke a rule by talking to a woman.  
Women are not to be diminished!  
With the woman at the well, he shows us how  
to break the rules of gender bigotry.

He broke a rule by talking to a Samaritan.  
The woman at the well was part Assyrian.  
With the woman at the well, he shows us how  
to break the rules of racial bigotry.

He broke a rule by promising a schismatic  
Israelite the gift of living water.  
With the woman at the well, he shows us how  
to break the rules of religious bigotry.

Jesus broke all the rules  
that soured his world—and ours today.  
Breaking bigotry is job one;  
Jesus shows us how it's done.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Third Sunday in Lent, Year A

**March 22, 2020 | 1 Samuel 16:1-13**

## God Knows the Heart

We judge our fellow humans by what we see.  
We cannot know for sure what's in the heart.  
God ignores what works for you and me.  
God knows the honest truth in every heart.

All of Jesse's sons were tall and strong.  
On looks alone, they set themselves apart.  
Samuel was sure that one would be the king,  
but God discerned in each a wavering heart.

Samuel anointed Jesse's youngest son.  
For God, David was the future still untold.  
David promised to always be at one  
with God—and return all sinners to the fold.

Create in me a clean heart, O Lord,  
and bring to me a new and willing spirit.  
Restore to me the joy of your accord.  
Sustain in me forever your Holy Spirit.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Fourth Sunday in Lent, Year A

**March 29, 2020 | Ezekiel 37:1-14**

## In the Valley of the Ghost Christians

The hand of the Lord came upon me  
and led me on an uncertain mission  
to a valley full of ghostly shapes  
lying lifeless on the cold ground  
in the sullen dawn. When he set me down  
amid the valley, I was amazed to hear  
the Lord's voice calling me,  
"Mortal, can these ghost Christians live?"  
I answered, "O Lord God, you know."

I began to speak at the Lord's command.  
Shapes rose like twisting smoke  
with the rushing sounds of the four winds  
as bones came together and flesh  
took shape atop the bones, and skin  
covered the flesh, and the ghost Christians  
once again began to breathe.  
The sun broke through the morning haze.  
Ghost Christians shimmered in the light,  
attentive, as if waiting for instructions.  
Then the Lord said to me,  
"Prophecy to these ghost Christians:  
listen, hear the word of the Lord!"

I heard my voice fill up the valley.  
"I do not promise you a land of your own  
or sacred soil in our troubled world.  
Put aside your worldly concerns  
for living in comfort, buying and selling,  
securing your place, displacing others.  
Remember your baptism, your call to service.  
Turn your attention to those in need.  
Give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty,  
clothe the naked and welcome the stranger,  
heal the sick and visit the prisoner.

Now is the time to renew commitment  
to the spirit of Christ, which dwells in you.”

When the last echo of my last words  
settled into silence, I lowered my eyes  
from the distant mountains and witnessed emptiness  
in all directions. All of the silence  
in this rib-cage valley undergirded  
the wings and arc of a solitary raptor.

Fifth Sunday in Lent, Year A

**April 5, 2020 | Matthew 27:11-54**

## A Moment of Kindness

It was a long time ago,  
when I was young and in my prime.  
I was entering the city for Passover. Lo and behold,

prisoners were leaving the city at the same time  
for their executions. One was Jesus.  
He was weak from scourging as he struggled to climb

to the place Golgotha while carrying the cross.  
Seeing that I was a Jew,  
a Roman soldier tapped me aside the face

with the flat of his sword, and said, "You."  
Pressed into lethal service for the Roman  
state, I knew what I had to do.

"Brother, let me lift your burden,"  
I said, as I hoisted the wood shoulder high.  
Together, we walked the hill to his certain

death. I wonder why  
happenstance put me in that time and space.  
Why me? Of all the events under the sky,

why I was plucked to show some grace?  
I was in the right place at the right time.  
A moment of kindness can last a lifetime.

Palm Sunday, Year A

**April 12, 2020 | Luke 24:13-49**

## Ordinary

Their eyes were opened with the breaking of bread,  
an ordinary loaf in an ordinary home.  
Until that moment, Cleopas and his companion  
only knew him as an inquisitive stranger.

They could have let him go his way,  
but, no, the men invited him to stay  
and share with them an ordinary meal.  
By inviting him to stay, they made a choice.  
You, too, are free to choose.

The communion table is not the only  
place where a meal is shared with the Lord.  
He is not just the host at the table;  
he is the guest invited into the home.

Easter Day, Year A

**April 19, 2020 | John 20:19-31**

## Thomas the Twin

Faith is trust in the things you cannot see.  
Love is service to the least who are plain to see.

Faith without love is life without compassion.  
Love without faith is life without a mission.

You honor the Lord by giving your best to others.  
Do all you can to help your sisters and brothers.

Walk by confident faith, not by sight.  
Trust the Lord to bring you into the light.

Faith and love inspire both head and heart.  
This is how the saints are set apart.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Second Sunday of Easter, Year A

**April 26, 2020 | 1 Peter 1:17-23**

## You Have Been Born Anew

Deep grasses choke  
the broad path  
we used to walk;  
our past is lost  
in a seamless field of green.



Ricardo Frantz, Unsplash

Third Sunday of Easter, Year A



**May 3, 2020 | John 10:1-10**

## Job Posting: Shepherd

We have an opening for a shepherd of human beings.  
Are you tough enough for the task?  
People are not that bright. They are always leaving

the area for greener grass  
and it's your job to track them down  
and bring the bumblebees back to the home pasture.

People need to be watched: you must be around  
at all hours, night and day,  
always close to ground.

Like sheep, people wander off and are prey  
to metaphoric wolves who wait patiently  
for suckers to come their way—

you are constantly correcting for human naïveté.  
Compensation comes in the intangible of knowing  
you are keeping blameless people from carelessly

endangering themselves. Apply now:  
it's a job fit for a king  
if you have a passion for doing the right thing.

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year A

**May 10, 2020 | Acts 7:55-60**

## Mettle

Our first martyr defied the Fates.  
Stephen was not resigned and broken.  
Stephen faced his trial unbroken.  
He stood in the docket for the Christian faith.

Stephen Martyr showed his mettle.  
He spoke with courage and affirmation  
about his faith to a sour Sanhedrin.  
His face looked like that of an angel.

Stephen showed us how to cope.  
Even after two thousand years,  
we look to him to guard our fears.  
Stephen's mettle gives us hope.

No matter how your life is designed,  
mettle makes your own renown.  
Mettle is how your worth is known  
to the men and women you leave behind.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year A

**May 17, 2020 | Acts 17:22-31**

## Perennial Philosophy

Streaming from the prism between the people and God  
are seven point seven billion slivers of light.  
A stunning diversity of color is flowing from the white.  
Each sliver is unique on the limitless color wheel.

Red, orange, yellow, green, blue,  
indigo, and violet are at one with the original whole.  
The rainbow is one continuum, like branches and the bole,  
connecting people with people and the people with God.

Extinguish the light source and the colors disappear!  
All human diversity is part of a greater unity.  
Our sense of a separate self is a functional necessity,  
but the focus on the separate self is the cause of suffering.

Focus instead on the infinite divine self,  
which represents true reality, and you will find  
the source of light for the life of all mankind  
beyond the prism between the people and God.

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year A

**May 24, 2020 | 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11**

[tanka]

the blacktop road  
comes to an end here  
at the edge  
of the wilderness...  
I am not afraid

[tanka]

looking ahead to the past  
remembering the future  
one datastream  
the road from home  
is a road leading home

Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year A

**May 31, 2020 | 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13**

## You Don't Need to Be a Superhero

No, we are not characters in comic books,  
in movies, or in video games  
in which the superheroes crack the crooks,

where each character has a claim  
to fame—a special superpower that complements  
every other character in the gang's

fantastical array of tools to fight crimes.

No, we are not like that.

All our spiritual gifts come

from the same Holy Spirit—

who gives us knowledge, faith, healing, and wisdom;  
who enables miracles; who inspires the prophet;

who grants spiritual discernment to some  
and to others proficiency in speech.

No, you don't need to be a superhero to earn

your place. You don't need to preach or teach  
or do anything. Unwavering faith will suffice  
to be a member of the body of Christ.

Day of Pentecost, Year A

**June 7, 2020 | Genesis 1:1–2:4a**

## Wheel of Water

Grass emerges from the winter snow.  
Blades lengthen. Flowers grow.  
Trees in the wind sway and sough.  
The summer of life is all we know!

Autumn breezes start to blow  
and all of life begins to slow.  
Brown turf is snuffed in snow.  
Life and death come and go.

Clouds roll in over the plain.  
The clouds release their drops of rain.  
The drops are lost in the narrowing drain  
to the sea. Only to rise again.

The wheel of water is an endless chain,  
an infinite loop of wax and wane.  
The land upholds this loss and gain.  
Yet the land itself cannot sustain.

Dust is molded, dust restored.  
Not even the land can say: *Never*.  
But for children of light who love the Lord,  
the love of the Lord lasts forever.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Trinity Sunday, Year A

**June 14, 2020 | Matthew 9:35–10:8**

## When Jesus Saw the Crowds

When Jesus saw the crowds,  
he felt the world's pain—  
for the sick, the blind, and the troubled  
trapped in the grip of demons.

When Jesus saw the crowds,  
he felt the world's sorrow.  
He wanted to wipe away  
tears from every eye.

When Jesus saw the crowds,  
he felt the world's hunger.  
The tired and hungry sheep  
looked up, waiting to be fed.

When Jesus saw the crowds,  
he felt for those cut off.  
He cared for the lonely leper  
banished from the village square.

When Jesus saw the crowds,  
he felt the world's bewilderment.  
The people, longing for God,  
were given rules instead.

The people were harassed and helpless  
like sheep without a shepherd.  
When Jesus saw the crowds,  
he was moved by divine compassion.

The world has greatly changed  
since Jesus saw the crowds.  
But we still have pain and sorrow;  
we still have hunger and loneliness;

and we still have bewilderment.  
The Gospel remains the same.  
He is moved by divine compassion  
for the crowds of the dispossessed.

Second Sunday after Pentecost, Year A



## June 21, 2020 | Romans 6:1-11

### Dorm Room Bull Session

“Where sin increases, grace abounds all the more,” said Paul to his roommate, the sophomore philosophy major who offered this devil’s-advocate wager.

“I propose to you: the more we sin, the more

God’s grace shall abound. Thus, we should sin with gladness so grace abounds all the more. By sinning more, we are doing God a favor since he loves granting grace to those who sin.”

Paul frowned and countered the jest with commonsense.

“Once we die to sin, why would we stay in that condition? Why would the emancipated slave stay with an abusive master? Does that make sense?

If you were released from prison, would you go back to your cell or would you choose to live free?

The question answers itself. If you won the lottery, would you continue to live in an old shack?”

Paul’s interlocutor loved to bedevil and astound, especially in a deep discussion of sin and grace.

He said, “I just like to see you red in the face.”

Paul was laughing as they wandered out for a round.

Third Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

**June 28, 2020 | Romans 6:12-23**

## Benedictine Habit

Although I wear the garments of righteousness,  
my old clothes of sin  
remain in the closet. I can always dress

as I did before. I may put them on  
and walk away at any time I desire  
and no one but God is the least concerned.

I am given a year to choose the attire—  
clothing for the path of sin or the path of piety—  
to wear for all eternity.

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

**July 5, 2020 | Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

## The Yoke

The yoke you wear is the load you bear.  
Who will make the yoke you wear?

The yoke you wear is yours alone.  
Will you design and build it on your own?

Will you fashion failure for your load?  
Will fear burden you on the darkened road?

Will you shoulder anger on the morrow  
or shoulder some remembered sorrow?

A worker in wood has a better way  
to lighten your load in every way.

You can trust the carpenter's son.  
He knows why and how it's done.

Jesus knows the grain of oak.  
He will make you a gentle yoke.

His heart is humble—learn from him.  
Take his yoke and walk with him.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

**July 12, 2020 | Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

## The Parable of the Sower

He sowed the seed on the barren path.  
The seed on the path was trampled down,  
trampled down and plucked by birds,  
plucked and eaten by birds of the air.

He sowed the seed on rocky ground.  
The plants sprang up between the rocks.  
The quickening plants had shallow roots.  
They withered and died in the rising sun.

He sowed the seed among the thorns.  
The thorns grew up and blocked the sun.  
The thorns took over and choked the crop.  
No yield was there at harvest time.

He sowed the seed on fertile soil.  
Because the soil was deep and rich  
and free of weeds, the yield was good:  
thirty, sixty, a hundredfold.

A sower went out to sow his seed.  
Each seed is the trusted word of God,  
but how it grows depends on you.  
How it grows depends on you.

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

**July 19, 2020 | Psalm 139:1-11, 22-23**

Embraced

Front and back, up and down,  
side to side—embraced in a warm wave,  
I am floating forward from cradle to grave.  
God is present in all six directions.

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

**July 26, 2020 | Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52**

## The Parable of the Mustard Seed

The kingdom of God began  
with a solitary man.

The solitary man  
was a tiny seed of one.

Growth began the hour  
Jesus revealed his power.

The kingdom of God grew  
when Jesus added two.

The kingdom grew some more  
when followers numbered four.

There were twelve until the day  
a follower fell away.

A handful grew into thousands  
and thousands into millions.

Nothing on this earth  
is fully formed at birth.

From a tiny seed of one  
a mighty tree was born.

We rose from the garden sod:  
behold the kingdom of God.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

## August 2, 2020 | Genesis 32:22-31

Hap

A lost transcript was the origin  
of a life-changing event when I hoped to go  
up the interstate to the University of Oregon.

I enrolled instead at a smaller school in Idaho.  
The break from home was my firm desire,  
but little did I know

this chance course correction would square  
the circle. I was a nobody in the kitchen crew  
at Sun Valley when the school year

closed out, and was quite sure  
my floating world would persist.  
But then, there she was, traveling through

as a guest. Fifty-seven years have passed  
since we met at the Lodge.  
Who knows which moment is meant to last?

Who knows! From the vantage point of age,  
I could be looking back with ruefulness  
at a listless river in a featureless landscape

or a hellscape of conflict or a life of emptiness  
like the wave-polished shell  
abandoned by the creature who used to dwell;  
or enjoy a different contentment with someone else.

Devil-may-care at the time of first action,  
my initial moves belong  
to a thousand-piece puzzle near completion.

We make informed decisions, but life is long.  
For happiness, there is no map,  
and often it is simply the result of hap.

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A



## August 9, 2020 | Psalm 85:8-13

### Shalom

The Lord restored the trickster Jacob  
and the Israelites who bore his name  
whenever they fell into trouble and woe  
time and time again.

Whenever the people went astray,  
wrath begot forgiveness.  
How sweet it was to be restored,  
receiving loving kindness!

Life is more than staying alive;  
the wholeness of life is *shalom*.  
Peace is more than the absence of war;  
the presence of God is *shalom*.

Restore us now to full communion  
and save our generation.  
Show us now your steadfast love  
and grant us your salvation.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

## August 16, 2020 | Genesis 45:1-15

### On Slavery

Joseph, the son of Jacob, was sold  
into slavery by his jealous kin  
to merchants passing through. Eventually,  
he belonged to the captain of Pharaoh's guard.  
Summoned to interpret Pharaoh's dream,  
Joseph became Egypt's vizier  
when he predicted seven long years  
of abundance followed by seven of lean.  
He suffered in slavery, thanks to his brothers,  
then rose in Egypt to privilege and power;  
and yet in Egypt's darkest hour  
he had no problem enslaving others  
including his own people, the Israelites,  
for the next four hundred years.  
During the seven famine years,  
he took the people's money, their livestock,  
and even their land in exchange for food.  
Joseph "enslaved the Egyptian people  
from one end of Egypt to the other."  
All Egyptians were rendered equal.  
It was a slave state like no other  
as the people forfeited freedom for food.

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

## August 23, 2020 | Isaiah 51:1-6

### Look Forward by Looking Back

Sarah and Abraham were an odd pair  
for nation building. They were old and childless  
when the Lord made Abraham a promise:  
*Look towards heaven and count the stars,*

*if you are able to count them...*  
*So shall your descendants be.*  
And so it came to pass that he  
fathered a nation in the land of Canaan.

Faith in God was the quarry and rock  
from which the nation of Israel came.  
When faith fell away, the flame  
of national purpose was snuffed out.

The strong grew from few to many;  
they left their home to follow the Lord.  
In Isaiah's telling, by failing the Lord,  
the people squandered the land of plenty.

Our story begins in Mesopotamia  
when Abraham leaves for the promised land.  
A renewed spirit reclaims the coastlands  
as the nation returns from Babylonia.

Righteousness in the coastlands is coming back.  
Look back to Abraham and Sarah's foretelling  
and how they created something from nothing.  
Look forward by looking back.

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

**August 30, 2020 | Matthew 16:21-28**

## Adversary

Jesus was tempted to power not once but twice—  
before his ministry by the arch enemy Satan  
and a second time by Simon Peter, his friend.  
Both offered similar career advice:

give the people bread and material things  
and they will follow you wherever you go;  
and put aside your thoughts of the cross and go  
along with the religious police to get along.

An Adversary is any force who seeks to deflect  
our good intentions away from the way of God.  
It is doubly sad that Simon Peter allowed  
himself to innocently mimic the force of darkness.

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

**September 6, 2020 | Matthew 18:15-20**

## On Selfish Prayer

The Germans were fond of the slogan, *Gott mit uns*.<sup>\*</sup>  
They wore these words on belt buckles and helmets  
and they hoisted them on a sign in the Great War.  
The British responded, *We got mittens, too*.  
Jason and Jamal each prayed to win  
the state championship, but for opposite teams.  
Jamal's team won and he was chosen MVP.  
After the game he said, *I give thanks to God!*

When you pray for victory, what answer do you expect?  
Prayer is not a zero-sum game.  
The scripture says, *Again, truly I tell you,  
if two of you agree on earth about anything  
you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.*  
When two or more pray for a selfish purpose,  
it does not matter if the group agrees or not.  
Nothing will be done by your Father in heaven  
except what God decides is best for you.

<sup>\*</sup>God is with us.

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

**September 13, 2020 | Romans 14:1-12**

## My Moment in Time

Curving through a basalt cut,  
the slim-waisted river brings  
waters from the Two Oceans Plateau

at Jackson Lake to the faraway waters  
out west, all the way to Astoria.  
Cache Peak is due south.

Smooth-sanded alluvial fans  
are tan with flecks of sagebrush teal.  
To the north, the massive Craters of the Moon

lava fields lie between the river  
and the distant mountains of central Idaho.  
I stand alone in this isolated spot.

Civilization is nowhere in sight.  
Little has changed since the Bonneville Flood  
scoured the Portneuf River Valley

at the end of the Ice Age or even  
when the first people arrived more  
than ten thousand years ago.

This moment by the river—my moment  
in time—is a one-of-a-kind snapshot  
in the millions of years that some version

of the Snake River flowed to the Pacific.  
This tiny stretch of river is not  
the complete river any more than lives

exists in isolation apart from all the brothers  
and sisters of the past, present, and future.  
Like the island in the stream parting the waters,

it isn't you who travels forward.  
The small measure of time meant for you  
travels toward you and beyond you.

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

## September 20, 2020 | Matthew 20:1-16

### The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

I was an L.A. kid. My favorite sport was baseball. The weather was always kind enough for a game. My friends and I knew the batting averages and the earned run averages of the players in the PCL, and all the major league stats. I followed the Angels. It was always a treat to go to Wrigley Field with my dad and watch the Angels play ball. I never went without some friends from school.

One Saturday, my dad took me and two of my friends to an Angels game. We sat near the back of the lower section overlooking first base. There was a section in front of us right by the visitors' dugout completely empty. These seats were the most expensive in the park, but today, those ticket holders did not show up.

Wrigley had a custom to let the local kids into the stands after a couple of innings, just to fill up the ballpark. It was a neighborly policy with the surrounding community in south L.A. and it helped to boost the noise for the home team.

When a boisterous group of black kids commandeered the seats in the coveted section down below, a man sitting near us began to grumble about them in a loud voice. This same man was telling his companion at the start of the game how pleased he was with his seats at the ballpark. He did have great seats, but it made him angry when poor kids sat closer to the action.



The man complained and muttered racial slurs for two innings before my father finally had enough. Dad was sure the commentary was ruining the experience for me and my friends. After one racist rant too many, my father turned to him and said, “Hey, knock it off. We’re trying to watch the game.” The man was caught off guard, “Well, it isn’t fair. I paid good money for these seats, and those kids don’t deserve the luxury box.” Dad said, “I heard you bragging about your seats when you came in. You said they were perfect. What happened? Relax,” he said gesturing toward the buoyant fans in the stands, “enjoy the game with the rest of us.”

It worked. We never heard another word. Later, my dad explained it this way: “It is a gift just to be there at Wrigley Field where the sun is shining and the Angels are winning. Be happy. It doesn’t matter where you sit.”

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

## September 27, 2020 | Philippians 2:1-13

### Jesus Christ is Lord

The oldest creed is a simple creed:  
*Jesus Christ is Lord.* These words can fit  
on a bumper sticker. The need

for theological precision marginalizes the spirit.  
By laying down doctrinal stumbling stones,  
we make it easy to trip.

*Jesus Christ is Lord* feels right in the bones.  
We aren't concerned about the heretic or the fool  
when heart's love is the rule.

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

**October 4, 2020 | Matthew 21:33-46**

## The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

Hear a parable! The Lord created a vineyard.  
No other estate in the realm was quite so grand.  
He planted a thorny hedge on the outer edge  
to keep the thieves and animals from breaking in.  
He built the perfect winepress for the grapes.  
He raised a tower to house the vineyard tenants.

Before he leased the land, the Lord commanded  
that the tenants care for the land and pay their rent.  
He then withdrew to live in a distant land.  
At harvest time, the Lord dispatched a messenger  
to ask the tenants to pay the Lord a share  
of the produce. The messenger was beaten and sent away.

The patient Lord sent more messengers,  
one after the other, to collect the promised rent.  
But the result was always the same—all the messengers  
were beaten, stoned, or killed by the wicked tenants.  
Finally, the Lord decided to send his son.  
The Lord declared, “The tenants will respect my son.”

Instead, the wicked tenants seized the son.  
They murdered the son and cast him out of the vineyard.  
By this they hoped to gain the son’s inheritance.  
The Lord was furious the tenants killed his son.  
His patience spent, he vowed to purge the vineyard.  
He expelled the tenants and gave the vineyard to others.

It was Jesus himself who said: *Hear a parable!*  
The chief priests and the elders of the people knew  
exactly who the wicked tenants were.  
They knew the messengers represented the prophets.  
They knew what Jesus meant when he quoted the psalm,  
*The stone the builders rejected became the cornerstone.*

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

**October 11, 2020 | Matthew 22:1-14**

## The Parable of the Great Banquet

The wedding feast was ready.  
Musicians were tuning up.  
The table was groaning with food  
and wine filled the cups.

The king invited the best  
of subjects, but all withdrew.  
They turned him down because  
they had better things to do.

One was busy with his oxen.  
One was peddling his wares.  
One was recently married.  
They turned to their own affairs.

The king opened his doors  
to all, both good and bad,  
to the poor, the crippled, the blind,  
and the lame—and they were glad!

They were glad to eat and drink.  
As persons, they were the least,  
but the king was glad his guests  
were grateful to join his feast.

Christian, are you prepared  
for the king's banquet fare?  
Prepare your heart for God  
and open your heart to the poor.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

**October 18, 2020 | Isaiah 45:1-7**

## When Religious Pluralism Was the Law

Cyrus the Great was not a modest man. He called himself the king of the world. His quest for power began in Anshan, and then he marched west to conquer Persia, Media, Lydia, and Babylon.

The Decree of Cyrus mandated religious pluralism. Little did Cyrus care that the prophet Isaiah pronounced him the *anointed* of God—that is, the Messiah. He regarded himself the messiah for everyone.

Wouldn't it be great if our country had a Decree where every group could practice its own religion and no one group was favored? Oh, wait. The Constitution of the United States of America provides this guarantee.

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

## October 25, 2020 | Deuteronomy 34:1-12

### Sally, Barb, and Moses

Sally and Barb died a good death.  
It has been a hollowed year since the winter last  
that our friends of St. John's Church passed.  
Families were there for one last breath.

These women of faith had the time and the grit  
to make their peace with God, settle their affairs,  
mend old sorrows, shed wholesome tears,  
and accept that certain hopes won't be met.

It is argued the prophet Moses died  
a good death because he was given the time  
to pass the torch to Joshua; but when he climbed  
to the top of Nebo and saw the promised land

laid out before him and realized he would not  
be alive to kiss the soil, Moses wept.  
We all have expectations. Why was Moses kept  
from this? Did forty years come to naught?

What does it mean to die a good death?  
According to legend, Moses was buried by God  
and no one knows for sure where he is laid.  
God was there for one last breath.

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

## November 1, 2020 | Psalm 24

### Snoqualmie Valley

Atop Rattlesnake Ridge:  
I hear the faint rumblings  
of the eighteen wheelers  
going through the gears.

The thin meander of Moon Valley Road:  
tiny cars nudge along  
the edge of the known world.

The Valley of the Moon:  
Holstein dots populate  
the rumples green of dairy farms.

Jade foothills in the cloud shadows:  
like a logger's rough stubble,  
third-growth Douglas fir  
straddles two counties.

The North Cascades:  
the bruise-purple ridge rises  
to a sky of cornflower blue.

All Saints Day, Year A



## **November 8, 2020 | Matthew 15:1-13**

### The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids

You do not know the day and hour.  
Behold! The bridegroom is coming now!  
Here is the bridegroom! Come and meet him!  
Are you ready for your moment?  
Are you prepared?

The final exam comes tomorrow.  
Too bad you didn't crack a book  
until this hour, the night before.  
Are you ready for your moment?  
Are you prepared?

You want to make the final roster.  
While others worked to hone their skills,  
you chose to hang with indolent friends.  
Are you ready for your moment?  
Are you prepared?

For years you skipped the extra study,  
but now you find the perfect job,  
the dream career you always wanted.  
Are you ready for your moment?  
Are you prepared?

Marriage and family sounds like fun.  
Are you aware how much it takes  
of true commitment to make it work?  
Are you ready for your moment?  
Are you prepared?

Will you make the most of the time you have?  
Will you deliver when the pressure is on?  
Does your character pass the test?  
Are you ready for your moment?  
Are you prepared?

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

**November 15, 2020 | Psalm 90:1-12**

A Tale that is Told

The storyteller tells our years.  
For each of us, the events are new.  
The storyteller gives us tears  
and laughter, and love false and true.

The days unfold from birth to death.  
We cannot keep from growing old.  
Our lives are over as in a breath.  
Our journey ends as a tale that is told.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

**November 22, 2020 | Matthew 25:31-46**

## Showing Your Love

The way you show your love  
is to help the suffering soul  
crowding into your space  
as if this person is the Lord.

The way you show your love  
is to help the suffering multitudes  
(the collective face of the Lord)  
wherever they are in the world.

You can help the suffering soul  
directly on your own;  
to help the suffering masses  
requires political will.

Wherever suffering appears  
on the corner or in the world,  
imagine the face of Jesus  
crowding into your space.

Last Sunday after Pentecost: Christ the King, Year A

**This concludes Liturgical Year A**

**November 29, 2020 | Mark 13:24-37**

Evening, Midnight, Cockcrow, Dawn

Watchman, wake. Awake and rise!  
You must be ready when the master comes.  
Don't let him catch you by surprise

in the evening,  
at midnight,  
at cockcrow  
or at dawn.

Watchman: this charge is yours to keep.  
The master comes in a sudden rush.  
Don't let him find you sound asleep

in the evening,  
at midnight,  
at cockcrow  
or at dawn.

Watchman, wake. Open your eyes!  
You cannot know the urgent hour,  
the hour when the master of the house arrives

in the evening,  
at midnight,  
at cockcrow  
or at dawn.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

First Sunday of Advent, Year B

**December 6, 2020 | 2 Peter 3:8-15**

## Into a World Without Hope

We come from nothing; we go to nothing.  
Our world is a deep darkness. The afterlife is a lie.  
Extinction is the end of everything.  
Callimachus summed it up, “We perish utterly.”

To think there is no goal  
beyond mathematical extinction—individually  
and for the world—can sour the soul  
and allow us to accept this deep darkness  
and crass indifference for a sorrowful cost.

The pilgrim without a destination is lost.  
Cherish life with the everlasting Yes.

NOTE: Callimachus (310/305-240 BC) was a Libyan-Greek poet affiliated with the Library of Alexandria. He was one of the most influential scholar-poets of the Hellenistic Age. His ideas were much admired by the Roman poets of the first century. The emerging Christian church offered a distinct contrast to the philosophy of Callimachus.

Second Sunday of Advent, Year B

**December 13, 2020 | Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11**

## Doing the Work

God does see. God does care.  
The needy, the weak, and the poor are blessed  
when good people in power press  
for equal justice in the public square.

God directs, but people do the work  
by flagging injustice to make things right.  
It's up to the righteous to shine a light  
on unjust suffering, then get to work.

God does not have the hands  
to comfort and succor those in pain,  
to lift the burden of the common man.  
The just ruler provides the hands.

God does not have the feet  
to walk about looking for evil.  
Let compassion for the least of us prevail!  
The benevolent ruler provides the feet.

In a nation under God, everyone  
is joined. There are many beating hearts,  
but one body with equal parts,  
and the righteous ruler sets the tone.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Third Sunday of Advent, Year B

**December 20, 2020 | 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16**

## To Build a House

The Lord lifted the Israelites from slavery in the land of the pharaohs to settle in the sacred place of their own promised to Abraham and Sarah; and David, the shepherd, was lifted from humble pastures to his mighty throne. King David lamented to Nathan, the prophet, that he, the king, now lived in a house of cedar while the ark of God was housed in a portable space. (The Lord deserves better than a tent or tabernacle.) Nathan said to David, “Go, do all that you have in mind, for the Lord is with you.” But the word of the Lord came to Nathan in a dream: Go and tell my servant David: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? Since the days in Egypt, I have moved about in a transient tent or tabernacle. Did I complain? Say this to my servant David: There is no doubt we will build an everlasting house—but not for me. I will build the House of David as a perpetual honor. I will establish a home for my people and plant them firm that they can dwell secure and tremble no more.

Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year B



## December 25, 2020 | Titus 3:4-7

### Cause and Effect

Spirit is the engine that drives grace and love.  
Imagine passenger cars in the railway station  
tastefully appointed with the finest leather chairs,  
gleaming brass brightwork throughout the cabins,  
deep pile carpeting with an elegant pattern,

and convivial, courtly passengers at the open bar.  
But without the engine, these cars are idle on the track  
going nowhere. Passengers are marking time.  
For grace and love, the Holy Spirit is the cause;  
three effects flow from the fundamental cause.

When the train of grace and love moves forward,  
the old rudderless life of error recedes  
into a vanishing point in the diminishing horizon.  
We leave the shades-of-gray world of the past  
and enter a purposeful landscape, full of color.

The grace and love of God gives meaning to the present  
and best of all for the faithful there is hope for the future.  
Grace and love power the engine that pulls  
the train from coast to coast along a set  
of tracks designed for you by the Holy Spirit.

Christmas Day, Year B

**December 27, 2020 | Psalm 147:13-21**

## The Power of the Word

The primal power of the word invokes creation:  
before language, before the human race,  
before the earth was a fiery ball in space,  
before the spark that set the cosmos in motion.  
The power of the word can wreak an astonishing show  
of rare snow, frost, hail, and sleet  
to desert places accustomed to withering heat.  
He makes his wind blow and the waters flow.  
The power of the word makes it clear that no one  
in the city of God is ever excluded—except the excluders.  
All are welcome; there are no profane intruders.  
The Lord's creation and the Lord's redemption are one.  
The promise to Sarah and Abraham is the power of the word  
and it is thrown open to all who love the Lord.

First Sunday after Christmas, Year B

**January 3, 2021 | Luke 2:41-52**

## Discovery of Purpose

At his first Passover feast  
at the temple in Jerusalem,  
Jesus knew.  
He discovered who he was  
and what he had to do.  
Jesus saw the priests prepare  
Passover lambs for sacrifice.  
He knew, suddenly,  
the ritual revealed  
the crux of his own purpose.

He was a son of the law  
in his Father's house—  
his special purpose found.  
But when his parents scolded him,  
it brought him back to ground.  
The family returned to Nazareth.  
Jesus grew to be a man,  
ever obedient,  
but faithfully aware  
of God's emergent plan.

Second Sunday after Christmas, Year B

**January 6, 2021 | Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14**

## Laozi Advises the Board of Directors

The best manager is a gracious guest in my house.  
As host, I am pleased to do my best.  
We both get what we want.

The best manager is hardly recognized.  
Good results come naturally  
and the workers say, “We did it all ourselves!”

The worst manager is known too well:  
from below—resentment, hatred, fear;  
from above—a ruthless rising star.

Results destroy the worst manager.  
Until that day, how many broken lives  
will litter the shop floor?

If managers have no further desire  
than to embrace and protect, the workers  
will have no further desire than to enter and serve.

The Epiphany, Year B

**January 10, 2021 | Genesis 1:1-5**

## The Lake

Intuitive images of truth  
from out of the liquid eye

are writ in stagnant brown  
when scuttling winds are shy

or lush voluptuous blue  
erotic as a lover's sigh

or red on twilight orange  
where the blood syllables fly.

The poet dreams his life  
as the lake dreams the sky.

First Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B

**January 17, 2021 | John 1:43-51**

## Can Anything Good Come Out of Nazareth?

The students at Cana High School looked askance at their boondocks rival, Nazareth High. Cana was college prep all the way; the Nazarenes studied the trades as well as books. Cana derided the neighbors, and it was no surprise they took to fleering and flaunting, deploying the epithet, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” As it happened, Nazareth High won a coveted prize as the best secondary school in the entire state because it uplifted every student in town and not just the affluent college bound. How painful it was for Cana to bend the knee to Nazareth! The lesson learned is do not denigrate ignorantly, but follow the counsel, “Come and see.”

Second Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B

## January 24, 2012 | Mark 1:14-20

### Simon, Andrew, James and John

Time is fulfilled; prepare for the dawn.  
The Lord enlists his first followers—  
Simon, Andrew, James and John.

The law and the prophets have reached an end  
as John the Baptist is handed over.  
Time is fulfilled; behold the dawn.

The first followers are ordinary men,  
unlettered fishermen—two sets of brothers:  
Simon and Andrew, and James and John.

The good news is now proclaimed  
to a world weary of jot and tittle.  
Time is fulfilled; welcome the dawn

as the hinge of history is about to turn.  
The suffering servant is in the middle  
as Simon, Andrew, James and John

are stunned by the gravity of the Lord's command,  
and drop everything to be his followers.  
Time is fulfilled; embrace the dawn  
with Simon, Andrew, James and John.

Third Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B

## January 31, 2012 | Psalm 111

### The God Guy

Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.  
How is that?  
Fear is the *feeling of terror*  
in a frightening event.  
It is *respect* a servant shows  
for the master's vision.  
It is *reverence* one feels  
in the presence of greatness.  
Those who fear the Lord  
continually are aware of him.  
Those who fear the Lord  
have a deep reverence for him.  
Those who fear the Lord  
are committed to obey him.

Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,  
but the fool despises wisdom and instruction.  
The fool seeks wisdom  
while ignoring the Lord  
and yet the Lord is the source of wisdom.  
The fool has no foundation  
on which to build wisdom.  
Without a fear of the Lord,  
the fool makes decisions  
based on faulty human understanding.  
The fool despises the Lord's instruction  
and cannot be told what to do.  
The fool neither glorifies the Lord  
nor gives him thanks.



Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.  
We are ruled by a man  
who does not fear the Lord.  
He arrogates himself to the Lord's throne  
in the chain of being.  
We are not *terrified* by his power.  
We do not *respect* him.  
We do not feel *reverence* toward him.  
He is a fool,  
but because of self-referential ignorance,  
he is the last to know.  
His time in power will pass away.  
The Lord's path of righteousness  
is the path to wisdom.

NOTE: I wrote this poem in March 2019. My preferred candidate for president at the time, Kamala Harris, is now the vice president.

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B

## February 7, 2021 | 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

### Inclusion

Inclusion comes through love. Love makes it real.  
In the name of love, barriers pass away.  
When Jesus walked the earth in the imperial day  
of Tiberius, gentiles were shunned by society in Israel  
and a wall divided the people with dreams unclear  
from those who lived in the hope of a promised lord.  
Love joined the two. As Isaiah said,  
“Peace, peace to the far and to the near.”

How much has really changed since Caesar’s day?  
We live in times when hate is in the air.  
We seek a certain solace in the tribal fold,  
but mindfulness cancels hate; inclusion is the way.  
Instead of disputations to win over the neighbor,  
we offer the power of love to embrace and hold.

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B

**February 14, 2021 | Mark 9:2-9**

## The Shining Man

Ablaze in dazzling white  
on Hermon's height,

the Lord's luminous light  
shines as bright

as the golden glare of sunlight  
we shield from sight.

This is my Son, the beloved; listen to him!

### **Bonus poem:**

[haiku]

ice storm  
good-for-nothing deciduous trees  
become church windows

Last Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B

**February 17, 2021 | Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

Fade to Black

Beware of practicing piety to please the crowd.  
Helping others in need is not a show.  
Truly, hypocrites are honored in public life.  
They have their reward on earth, but not in heaven.  
Give alms in secret, out of the public eye.  
Only your Father in secret needs to know.

Whenever you pray, leave the crowd behind.  
Go quietly to your room and shut the door.  
Turn your thoughts to God, who listens in secret.  
He knows your every need before you ask.  
Your fame will fade to black when the crowd is gone.  
Give the glory to God and you shall live.

Ash Wednesday, Year B

## February 21, 2021 | Mark 1:9-15

### From Wonder to Certainty

At first, it was pure wonder. It all began in the Temple at Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve. The thought stirred lightly: that God might have extraordinary hopes for him, a special plan. Wonder simmered for a long time while he grew in wisdom and in years in quiet little Nazareth. Wonder opened wide when the son of Zechariah baptized Jesus. In that moment, Jesus knew! He was in the water, praying, with arms wide to the world (in an unintended foreshadowing) when starry shards of light filtered down from above and the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and a gentle voice confirmed the wonder, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”



*The Baptism of the Christ with Dove* is a painting by Daniel Bonnell

First Sunday in Lent, Year B

**February 28, 2021 | Mark 8:31-38**

## Mission Impossible

Good morning, Simon Peter.  
The son of man is not  
the warrior king you think

he is. He is a suffering servant  
who comes in peace and love.  
Rejected by those in power

and sentenced to death on a cross  
of shame, he will rise again  
three days later.

The son of man has explained  
this course of events to you  
and your friends several times,

but you do not listen.  
Do you not yet understand?  
Your mission, should you decide

to accept, is to take up the cross  
of Christ and follow him;  
for it makes little sense

to gain the whole world  
only to lose life eternal.  
This tape will self-destruct  
in five seconds. Good luck, Peter.

Second Sunday in Lent, Year B

## March 7, 2021 | Psalm 19

### Without a Thought

*The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge.  
There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;  
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world.*

Psalm 19:1-4

Without a thought  
the sea-green rhododendron  
suddenly sprouts pink blossoms  
in the emeraldness of May.  
Hot pink fronts the green  
until the gardener snips  
the summer-roasted buds.  
It's a show for the higher brain.  
Plants don't know  
the meaning of words  
like pink and green  
or note the nanosecond  
when spring arrives  
or understand the importance  
of timely pruning.  
The rhody does its thing  
without a thought.

Without a thought,  
the sweltering sun ambles across  
Seattle's cloudless sky  
like a super slow-mo  
flame-encircled dragster  
popping wheelies  
on the silent strip overhead.  
Do you like the classics?

Apollo's wingéd car  
cleaves the Ionian dome.  
Still, our clueless star  
knows nothing whatsoever  
of chariots or charioteers,  
ancient or modern.  
It does its daily thing  
without a thought.

Without a thought,  
the uncarved block reveals itself  
to the carver.  
The carver, a thinker,  
is keen to see  
into the true nature  
of the uncarved block,  
though truth can only be known  
without a thought.  
That annoying pedagogue consciousness  
is chased away  
and carver and wood are one.  
Carving starts when thinking stops;  
thinking stops when carving starts.  
All this  
and only this  
without a thought.

Third Sunday in Lent, Year B



## March 14, 2021 | Ephesians 2:1-10

### A Free Gift

#### *A Fable*

Once there was a wealthy real estate developer who accomplished all his life goals and was ready to retire. He decided to leave the big city where he made his fortune and return to the small town in the mountain valley where he grew up. He had no idea what his hometown was like after so many years.

He was shocked to find it in a rundown state. The local manufacturing plant was closed. Unemployment was high. Drugs and alcohol were a problem. There were rumors of domestic violence in some homes. The local schools were falling apart; there was no money for maintenance and repair. Generally, the local politicians helped their friends and cronies, and ignored everyone else.

The rich man bought a beautiful piece of acreage overlooking the town and valley. He built a mansion for himself. In doing so, he was able to employ a small army of construction workers. Business picked up for hardware stores, lumber yards, and building supply companies.

People in town noticed their new resident. But no one knew who he was since all his childhood friends had died or had moved away.

One day, the rich man rented the high school gymnasium to hold a town meeting. He put a notice in the newspaper and posted meeting advertisements around town. The meeting was titled *Fresh Start*. All the townspeople attended the meeting.

The rich man spoke.

“I was born and raised in this town. I moved away after high school and have been gone for a long time. Before I die, I want to initiate a restoration project to fix up this town.

“Unemployment is high. I will see what I can do to bring in some manufacturing jobs. I know a few investors who might be interested in occupying the old plant.

“I notice there are problems with drugs, alcohol, and domestic violence. I intend to set up clinics to address these issues. The schools are falling apart. I want to help with that, too.

“Finally, many of the houses here could use home improvements. I am willing to help homeowners free of charge on a case-by-case basis.

“I am an old man now. I don’t have any heirs. I want to invest my wealth in your community. In return, I would like people of the community to see this as a fresh start.

“In exchange for my contribution, I would ask each one of you to view every other person in the community as a family member, and not as a stranger. Further, as new people move into town, be sure to accept them as members of the family—regardless of race, ethnicity or religion. Welcome the newcomer. Please be kind to others in your family. We are all in this together. Follow the golden rule: Do unto others as you would have them do to you. Can I count on you to agree to that?”

The gymnasium rocked with shouts of affirmation.

Fresh Start began. The next day, a work crew cleaned up the junk and debris lying about the town. Construction workers began repairs on the school buildings and had everything ready for the next school year. Individual homeowners and renters had their homes upgraded, reroofed, and painted. The rich man made good on his promise of employment. He found an investor to bring jobs to the community. The old factory was torn down and a new one was raised up. Clinics set up shop to help those with addictions and emotional problems.

All of this was a free gift to the people, who did not have to do anything except live by the golden rule. It was truly a fresh start. Members of the community were encouraged to identify their best talents and live up to their full potential.

When the rich man died, there was an overflow crowd at his memorial service.

Gradually, backsliding began in the town. Not by everyone, of course, but it was evident that some persons forgot their promise to live by the golden rule. Perhaps they thought the rich man's passing nullified the promise. Also, a new generation of children needed to be taught about the community promise. That did not always take place. Old problems resurfaced and few members of the community stepped up to take responsibility.

Time passed. Eventually, the town was much the way as it was when the rich man returned home for his retirement.

Fourth Sunday in Lent, Year B

**March 21, 2021 | Jeremiah 31:31-34**

## Imprint of the Law

Word-of-mouth dictation of the Law  
from God's lips to man's ear  
is amended or corrupted over time

as oral tradition is less than perfect.  
Scholars and teachers of the Law have differing  
theories from one generation to the next.

The mind reacts to the word of God  
by carving sacred scripture into stone  
or writing on clay to be baked in a kiln,

but these are things that can be smashed.  
The Law fades when parchment rots.  
The Law is ash when papyrus burns.

Bronze Age media are perishable  
and speech is like a game of Telephone.  
The time is near when the imprint of the Law

is stamped on every human heart,  
so each person, from the very least  
to the greatest, shall know the Law intuitively.

Fifth Sunday in Lent, Year B

## March 28, 2021 | Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

### Rejection

*The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the chief cornerstone.*

Psalm 118:22

The great American poet was gravely ill.  
Confined to home, he was game enough for an interview.  
As I was ushered into his august presence,  
I noticed letterhead papers taped to the walls  
of the rooms, corner to corner from floor to ceiling.  
Each was a version of, “Sorry, not for us.”  
Of course, I started to laugh, which was the point.  
The old man’s voice was soft but clear:  
“The rejection letters keep me humble,” he said.  
“I often wonder where the editors and publishers—  
these gatekeepers—are today with their insights.  
The uncharted path is hard to follow at first.  
I get that. Sometimes it takes a while  
for the world to come around to the unforeseen reality  
that a loathed new idea despised by the authorities  
will be the conceptual capstone of the coming age.”

Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday, Year B

## April 4, 2021 | Isaiah 25:6-9

### Feast

A shroud beclouds all the peoples of the earth.  
A sheet obscures the disparate nations of the world.  
Shrouds and sheets will be lifted by the Lord  
and on that day the Lord shall swallow up death  
forever. The Lord destroys every disorienting veil,  
every false story the nations are told  
and every false security the peoples hold.  
No barrier blocks the mind of God from the world.  
The Lord of hosts is prepared to judge and save,  
but he does this with the most unusual of signs  
by inviting all the peoples and the nations to a feast  
filled with rich food and well-matured wines.  
Everyone is invited, from the greatest to the least.  
Attendance informs the measure of judge or save.

Easter Day, Year B

**April 11, 2021 | John 1:1–2:2**

## Black

The driven leaves are gone  
and skeletal woods are rising from the dead  
to clothe the black with flesh again.

Spilt ink on a blank page:  
ragged black clouds feather downward,  
diminishing the white sky.

Suffering gives birth to happiness, happiness  
to suffering. Separately, they are black ink  
on black paper or white on white.

The evil and the good define each other.  
They love one another as pure black ink  
loves the purity of whiteness.

Like all opposites, black and white  
produce each other, imply each other  
and conceptually are yoked together.

Second Sunday of Easter, Year B

**April 18, 2021 | 1 John 3:1-7**

## Adoption Into the Family of God

Adoption in imperial Rome was not about compassion for orphans. It was all about name and inheritance. Childless parents could claim lawfully that the family's future was not in doubt. The adopted son—whether free, servant, or enslaved—severed his ties with blood, and any burden of debt was canceled. He was a whole new person, beholden to an inextinguishable line. The son was saved. Through no good work or design by any of us, we are called to spiritual adoption by Jesus Christ to join the family of God where debts of the past are cleared away; and hope extends to us who abide in him, the Lord and savior Christ, to give our hearts to the transformative path of righteousness.

Third Sunday of Easter, Year B



**April 25, 2021 | 1 John 3:16-24**

## The Critical Tell

Righteousness is neither vague nor undefined.  
Conduct is the critical tell for humankind.

Love and boundless generosity support  
the definition. Stinginess and hate thwart

a just life. Fine words  
cannot salvage meanspirited works.

Every Christian learns to love.  
Every Christian learns to give.

Every Christian knows the difference:  
to love your neighbor is righteousness.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year B

**May 2, 2021 | Acts 8:26-40**

## Upside-down Kingdom

The kingdom of Jesus is upside down.  
Table-servers are the ones who rule,  
not the ones reclining at the table.  
He flips the hierarchy of Master and Man.  
This is the story of Philip the Evangelist,  
a high-energy Hellenist in the early church.  
He is chosen to help the Hebrew apostles  
who devote all their time to prayer  
and preaching the word, which leaves them  
no time at all for the distribution of food  
and goods to Greek-speaking widows.  
Philip and six others are chosen  
as tables servers—like the Lord himself.  
The Hebrew homeboys rarely leave  
Jerusalem, although they are the ones  
Jesus entrusts with the Great Commission:  
*Be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea  
and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*  
Philip flees Jerusalem immediately  
after the murder of the protomartyr Stephen.  
He is the first follower to preach the gospel,  
heal the afflicted and baptize in Samaria.  
The fold increases because of Philip.  
After Samaria, he spreads the gospel  
to the continent of Africa! A court official  
to Candace, the queen of Ethiopia, is puzzled  
by the prophet's poetry about the suffering servant.  
Philip, the ever-resourceful interpreter,  
tells the foundational story of the death  
and resurrection of Jesus Christ.  
And then he baptizes the first African.  
Inclusion is the upshot of Philip's love.  
Sometimes, the wrong people reach out  
to other wrong people to get  
the right results. The Lord Jesus

is a foot-washer and table-server.  
Though we wish to put him there,  
the Lord himself never insists  
on the best seat at the high table.  
For all the passion for preaching and prayer,  
few of the worthies in Jerusalem fulfill  
the Great Commission better than Philip.

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year B

**May 9, 2021 | John 15:9-17**

## Clicking Hyperlinks

Above all, love is seen in the love of the Father. When we click on the word *Father*, it opens on the Father's love for the Son. When we click on the word *Son*, it opens on the Son's declaration that he shows his love for the world by laying down his life for his friends. When we click on the word *friends*, we learn they are friends of the Son for as long as they follow the commands of the Father to love one another. Reading the unfolding message of the Gospel of John is an endless explosion and expansion of hyperlinks where all words are interconnected and self-referential, summed in the seamless command of *love*.

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year B

**May 16, 2021 | Acts 1:15-17, 21-26**

## The Disciple Not Chosen

Joseph Barsabbas was not chosen  
to take the place of Judas Iscariot.  
Scripture says, “they cast lots  
for them, and the lot fell on Matthias,”  
and Matthias was added to the eleven apostles.  
What does it mean to cast lots?  
Did they flip a coin? Roll the dice?  
Draw names out of a hat?  
Did they play rock paper scissors  
where Joseph put down two fingers  
and lucky Matthias put down a fist?  
Joseph was the disciple not chosen,  
but he was not to be deterred.  
Tradition has it he became the bishop  
of Eleutheropolis at the end of his life,  
which is quite the accomplishment since  
Eleutheropolis was not founded for another  
two centuries. But never mind.  
He was with the Lord from the beginning  
and played a role in the rising church.  
We all cope with the not-chosen  
experience. Not winning the election.  
Not winning the beauty contest.  
Not accepted to the favored university.  
Not earning the promotion. Take heart:  
famous people faced adversity,  
but like Joseph were not deterred.  
They soldiered on. For example,  
Michael Jordan was cut from the varsity  
in his sophomore year at Laney High  
because he was not tall enough  
and then was chosen a risible third  
in the draft of '84 behind  
Sam Bowie, who was the worst pick  
ever in all professional sports!

Does anyone remember Barack Obama losing to Bobby Rush in the year 2000 by a margin of two to one? The strong consider the chance defeat as the starting point for a new success, a bright second chance for greatness.

Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year B

**May 23, 2021 | Psalm 104:25-35, 37**

## Into the Winter

*When you hide your face, they are dismayed;  
when you take away their breath, they die  
and return to their dust.*

Psalm 104:29

In a far field of broken turf and mud,  
a quarter horse stands statue-still.  
The sunless sky trades its feathery mist  
for twisting steam from out of the pasture thaw.  
A puff of breath betrays a living death.  
The horse is dying; legs are stiff as stone.  
Where once he raced from line to picket line  
of ragged timber that rims the rolling farm,  
today he labors long at standing still.

Day of Pentecost, Year B

**May 30, 2021 | John 3:1-17**

## Images of Wind

1.

a waxing moon rises  
in the indigo sky;  
stars wait offstage...  
the freezing wind  
combs through my bones

blackbird rises  
to the treeline like an ash  
in the wind

dream murmurs:  
the idea of the holy...  
ghost grass  
is billowing;  
there is no wind

prairie grass  
flattened by the wind  
clouds in a hurry

to the east,  
news crawler clouds  
scrape the Cascades  
skeletal woods  
are pencil black

night winds  
ruffle the lake  
moon shards



sodium vapor lamps  
cast a warm white  
over fresh snow  
rubbed smooth  
by the arctic winds

chattering leaves:  
windblown trees glance warily  
at skies promising rain

she is the wind;  
she cares for nothing...  
he is the grass;  
he cannot move  
without her

like trembling leaves  
are you and I  
autumnal yellow is trembling,  
trembling in the wind,  
trembling, then quickly gone

mixing bowl—  
wind, rain, and sunlight turn,  
turn again

soughing away from the trunk,  
then sighing back,  
the willow in the wind  
is a tidal pool  
flowing in and out

2.

Wind over the lake—desiccate leaves  
scrape indolently at our feet, like the years.  
We feel the chill of the restless wind.

First Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

**June 6, 2021 | 1 Samuel 8:4-20, 11:14-15**

## Like Other Nations

Nothingness and being build a natural bridge.  
Without the humble hole,  
the arch is just another ridge.

Solid rock and emptiness are flesh and soul.  
While every eye admires the stone,  
emptiness plays a role.

The invisible Lord occupied their throne  
since Joshua, but the elders of Israel were impatient:  
they wanted a king of body and bone

like all the other nations.  
Samuel warned the elders that such a man  
would deliver a different set of frustrations.

In these conditions, monarchy began.  
Kings supplanted the theocratic state—  
the invisible was replaced by visible men.

Trusting only the visible is tempting fate  
because so much is shaped by the numinous wind  
and the power of faith.

Second Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

**June 13, 2021 | Mark 4:26-34**

## The Parable of the Growing Seed

The kingdom of God is like a seed  
the farmer pushes into the soil.  
Seed and soil produce themselves,  
but growth quickens through the farmer's toil.

After the planting, the farmer waits.  
He sleeps and rises night and day.  
The seed will grow; he knows not how.  
He watches and waits for the wakening day.

First the stalk, and then the head,  
and then the full grain at the top.  
When the grain is full, the farmer goes  
in with his sickle to harvest the crop.

Seed and soil produce themselves.  
The patient farmer may water and weed  
for myriad days without a sign.  
It is just this way when you plant the Word.

Planting the Word is never enough.  
You cannot plant and walk away.  
While the Word and Faith produce themselves,  
our work goes on to the wakening day.

Be patient, be strong: Do not lose heart.  
Wait for the rains, early and late.  
We are God's servants, working together.  
Let us rejoice on the harvest date.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Third Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

## June 20, 2021 | 1 Samuel 17:32-49

### David

I am David. I kept the sheep on my father's land.  
My role in the family was to guard his flock of sheep  
near Bethlehem for long hours and with little sleep  
and keep the sheep safe from bears and lions.  
Because the Lord was with me, I had no fear  
when they attacked. I was able to strike down  
and kill these beasts. Why should I fear a man?  
The God of the armies of Israel is always near.

I am set for single combat with mighty Goliath  
armed only with a sling and five smooth stones,  
but the Philistine champion is outnumbered two to one  
as the Lord protects me from the giant's wrath.  
With God's help, I shall aim for brittle bone  
and bring him low with a perfectly cast stone.

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

**June 27, 2021 | Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-15, 2:23-24**

## We All Start at Zero

The practiced hands of the good-humored doctor  
pull the infant out of the warm duskiness  
of an amniotic ocean into the unfamiliar glare  
of delivery room lights. It is a rough business,  
coming into the world, but every person  
in the room is pulling for the startled new arrival  
to survive, grow, thrive, and come of age.

In this instant, we align ourselves with God  
to affirm the wholesome generative forces of the world.  
We all start at zero. Look at the face  
of the newborn child. Where is the theological construct  
of original sin? Do you see it? No?  
The swaddled baby is laid on the mother's chest  
and begins to learn the ambivalent ways of humankind.

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

**July 4, 2021 | Mark 6:1-13**

## Is Not This the Carpenter?

God does not necessarily choose the qualified.  
He qualifies the chosen. The people of the village asked,  
“Is not this the carpenter?” as if the past  
of the humble homeboy Jesus of Nazareth proscribed  
his mission to be a rabbi with followers in tow.  
Their question to him, “Aren’t you the son of Mary,”  
was another way of taunting, “Who’s your daddy?”  
They wanted to know: *Who do you think you are?*

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

**July 11, 2021 | Amos 7:7-15**

## The Politics of No

No, we are not bewhiskered woodsmen posing  
with a fabled misery whip 12-feet long  
emerging from the sepia history of real men

or frugal, gaunt survivalists riding out  
the Great Depression or the khaki war machine  
fighting to the death against the Axis powers

or fearless astronauts landing on the moon.  
As the swaggering first citizens of a unipolar world,  
we are soft from indolent years of privileged ease.

We are soft without a great enemy to fight  
so we look within and fight among ourselves.  
We harden into corpulence and intellectual sloth

as nimbler nations strive to take us down,  
not by the savagery of war, but with whispered lies  
designed to divide us into two contending camps

dueling to the death of the great American experiment  
of broad-shouldered accomplishment of big things.  
No, my friend, we are not that nation anymore.

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

## July 18, 2021 | Ephesians 2:11-22

### Those People

1.

The Paleo-Indians, the first Americans,  
are checking out the neighborhood.  
Woe to mammoths and mastodons.

Life is good in 1491.  
Conquistadors from faraway Iberia  
claim land for the king of Spain.

Driven away by the Church of England,  
Pilgrims, Puritans and Roman Catholics  
are free to worship on the eastern shore.

French explorers are moving in  
to the river valleys of a vast continent,  
all the way north to Labrador.

The Delaware people are pushed aside  
as the Dutch build New Amsterdam.  
The merchant class is riding high.

Germans create farms and towns,  
but refuse to learn the English language.  
Ben Franklin is very upset!

Scots-Irish come to America,  
gambling on a promise of opportunity.  
They travel west to the hills of Appalachia.

The potato famine is forcing the poor  
of Ireland to emigrate to the new world.  
The Irish are judged as less than human.



Much the same is said of the Italians  
who come to America and take employment  
that proper Americans will not accept.

*Those people* are coming ashore.  
*Those people* are moving in.  
Life was better before they came.

2.

From the very beginning of colonial life,  
captive slaves from out of Africa  
power the economy for southern whites  
and struggle for equity in the north.  
Free at last! They are still despised.

Native Americans are dispossessed,  
deprived of their game and forced to move  
to plots of land drawn up by whites.  
Broken treaties! A trail of tears!  
Though first, they are treated as the last.

Seniority on the land matters only  
for those Americans with roots in Europe.  
To this day, Indians and blacks  
are still regarded as *those people*.

3.

*Those people* are coming ashore.  
*Those people* are moving in.  
Life was better before they came.

Do you really believe that?  
Have you forgotten how your own  
ancestors were advised to show respect  
to those who settled earlier in America?  
Remember, there was a time when  
your people endured hostility and hate.  
Your people were *those people*.

It is a declaration and a promise:  
“All men are created equal.”  
*Those people* are coming ashore.  
*Those people* are moving in.  
Welcome: out of many, one.

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

**July 25, 2021 | 2 Samuel 11:1-15**

Spring

In the spring of the year,  
kings go out to battle.  
Summers are too hot  
and no one likes to fight  
in the ice and rain.  
Good weather  
is the best time for killing  
don't you agree?

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

## August 1, 2021 | Ephesians 4:1-16

### Care for the Body

Icy winds. Comfortable pace. Concentrate on rhythmic breathing, rhythmic stride. Concentrate on going the distance. Alone in energy, I blink in the freezing rain. Alone in discipline, I run the sanded surface streets. Doubled sweats retain the body heat, but marrow-cold December air grips my face like a vise. Now, in my eighth decade, I am chuffing steam on every fourth step as I force the pace. Beads are sweating into drops, gleaming on my brow, while dreaming brows along the drive are about to wake. Then entering the blacktop trail atop an abandoned shortline railroad, active when Washington's timber industry was in its glory, I am running down the middle of Wall Street with towering third-growth Douglas fir and cedars forming columns left and right. Leaving the lights of the neighborhood, my eyes adjust to the grass-wrapped blacktop of the Centennial Trail. Small brown rabbits scurry about, hopping along, barely faster than me, their white tails a perfect target for predators. I'm settling in to my go-forever pace. All is smooth and comfortable—I could go for miles! My head governs the whole body, and I am set to keep the body in top condition even in my final years. Joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, the whole body promotes the body's growth in building itself up. Whether I am a boy of 10, a man of 25, a master at 50, or old at 80, I am determined to be the best I can be until the candle gutters out.

The go-forever pace is long gone  
as I jog under the road to Granite Falls,  
climb a slope, enter Catherine Drive,  
and struggle at looking good in the neighborhood.

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

## August 8, 2021 | Ephesians 4:25–5:2

### Anger

Mother wakes up  
disoriented  
until she visualizes  
the face  
of her enemy

again  
I make a list  
of slights and snubs  
by those  
now dead

events gone awry  
in the faraway past  
linger  
like cat urine  
on an old rug

tonight  
she climbs inside herself  
and shuts the lid  
your session has ended;  
try again later

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

**August 15, 2021 | 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14**

## Wisdom

*Ask what I should give you.* As the king,  
Solomon could have asked for anything—

wealth, fame, palatial splendors,  
death to all the royal pretenders.

He looked beyond the trappings of court,  
and asked instead for a listening heart

and an understanding mind. For the people of Israel,  
he wanted to know good from evil.

The Lord puts this question to everyone.  
When queried, how will you respond?

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

**August 22, 2021 | 1 Kings 8:1, 6, 10-11, 22-30, 41-43**

## The Ark of the Covenant

In the red morning on the umber sea,  
none of the tall ships, wind or lee,  
is lovelier than you, proud lady.  
O, wandering bark, come home to me!

The storm is passed. Sailors rest.  
The People are safe, no longer oppressed.  
The Lord is calling: Be my guest.  
You are the chosen. You are the blessed.

The throne of God is in this space.  
The Holy of Holies is now in place.  
From tent to temple, the race is over.  
You are safe at last in Yahweh's grace.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B



## August 29, 2021 | Song of Solomon 2:8-13

### Arise, My Love

Let's be honest. The moon does not think  
of itself as an agent of love, nor the tower  
a phallus. They are what they are and nothing more.  
The lovers in the Song of Songs are not actors  
in allegories of Israel and God or Christ and the church  
in the mind of the randy poet who wrote the lines.  
Theologians of temple and church ignore signs  
so obvious: the absolute joy of monogamous sex.

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

**September 5, 2021 | James 2:1-17**

## Inherit the Kingdom

Give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty.  
Clothe the naked. Welcome the stranger.  
Heal the sick. Visit the prisoner.  
Our selfless servants inherit the kingdom.

*Care for the least in the human family.  
When you help the least, you do it for Him.*

Give from the heart when you help the least.  
Do not expect a prize or praise.  
Do it because you know it's right.  
Give of yourself to inherit the kingdom.

*Care for the least in the human family.  
When you help the least, you do it for Him.*

When a person is naked or hungry or sick,  
don't say, "Be well," and go your way.  
What profit is faith without good works?  
How good is your faith on the judgment day?

*Care for the least in the human family.  
When you help the least, you do it for Him.*

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

**September 12, 2021 | James 3:1-12**

[haiku]

in my dream,  
mother scolds a waitress  
the coldest hour of the night

[tanka]

hidden in the trees,  
hundreds of birds deliver  
their talking points  
of the day  
to no one in particular

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

**September 19, 2021 | Mark 9:30-37**

## He Called a Little Child

When little children play their games,  
they mix the brown, the black, and the white.  
Foreign accents and alien speech  
are muted by squeals of pure delight.

The little children aren't wise enough  
to tell the girls apart from boys.  
They greet their playmates with open hearts.  
Without guile, they share their toys.

The little children do not compete.  
In time, they'll learn to lose and win.  
Knowing nothing of money and fame,  
they look to parents for everything.

As a little child depends on parents,  
we must be humble and trust in God.  
Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?  
The very opposite of the way of the world!

Jesus called a little child.  
He set the child among the crowd.  
How can a person enter the kingdom?  
You must unlearn the way of the proud.

Give up your claims to power and status.  
Become a child once again.  
Unless you change and be like children,  
you cannot gain the kingdom of heaven.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

**September 26, 2021 | Mark 9:38-50**

## The Cheerful Agnostic

*Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1952)*

“Do you believe in God?” *I don’t know.*

He startled the hiring team with his casual candor to a predictable question—*de rigueur* for the next director of church music. The committee struggled to show

polite Anglican tolerance for skepticism. They moved from questions and answers to organ proficiency, which was good enough, to assurances of choirmastery second to none, as the candidate ably proved.

It was here the cheerful agnostic got his start.

He called the London vicarage “this damned place” in a letter to von Holst. The doctrine of unmerited grace and his own lack of faith were far apart.

It was never his intent to follow the pilgrim path, but to mend Victorian hymnody’s risible reputation of banal text and artless tunes. The creation of the English Hymnal was a priceless gift to faith.

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

**October 3, 2021 | Job 1:1, 2:1-10**

## Gospel of Prosperity

Look at the world around you and judge for yourself.  
Prosperity is a certain sign of the favor of God  
and suffering is a sign of a person out of favor.  
Our human conduct receives its just reward  
and just punishment from God. Good conduct  
leads to favor; weakness and sin do not.  
The gospel of prosperity has been around forever.  
It is an old explanation that fails to explain.

Consider the plight of God's servant Job.  
Then, as now, the harsh syllogism applies:  
only the sinful suffer; X suffers;  
therefore, X who suffers must be a sinner.  
The friends of Job hammered on this point.  
They said to him: Look within and repent.  
But Job insisted he had done nothing wrong.  
He wasn't even guilty of evil thoughts.

He told his friends he did not merit misfortune.  
Job challenged his friends to think again.  
Look at the world around you and judge for yourself.  
Explain the nexus between a person's acts,  
good or bad, and fate. Is life fair? Or just?  
All of us know of innocent people who suffer.  
The motives of God are hidden behind a veil.  
Our human understanding cannot explain.

This we know for sure: God sends  
the rain to fall on the just and unjust alike.  
The gospel of prosperity is the laziest of lazy thinking.  
It allows the rich and powerful to scorn the poor  
and never give the matter another thought.  
For fairness and justice, the prosperous have it wrong.  
It is the business of humankind to lift the poor.  
It is up to us to care for those who suffer.



*The Last Just Upright Man is Laughed to Scorn*  
Wordcut by William Blake

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

**October 10, 2021 | Hebrews 4:12-16**

## On the Bridge

The word of the Lord is an oscillating dialog  
of course-corrections from the officer of the deck to the helmsman  
as the helmsman utters “Aye,” repeats the command,  
and turns the helm and tiller to the new heading.

Except the *word* is a quiet voice within  
and not a person bellowing over the main.  
Brothers and sisters, it connects God with man—  
a constant conversation for those who choose to listen.

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B



**October 17, 2021 | Mark 10:35-45**

## The Ballad of Constituency Service

Joshua declared his run for office.  
He hired James and John  
to craft a compelling media message  
and manage a clean campaign.

James and John planned their game  
to star on Joshua's team,  
to get themselves rank and fame  
by building Joshua's dream.

On the day the boss won election,  
the two hatched a scheme.  
Now was the time to raise the option:  
to manage the political team

and stand with him on his left and right.  
Joshua had a hunch  
they really wanted the media lights  
and the three-martini lunch.

Joshua said: "I have plans for you.  
I cannot grant your ask.  
Instead," he said, "I am giving you  
the most important task.

Constituency service is the top of the list  
of all Congressional affairs  
and you are the best equipped to assist  
those with urgent cares."

James and John earned preferment—  
they got what they deserved.  
Redemption comes from being a servant  
and not from being served.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

## October 24, 2021 | Psalm 34:1-8

### Taste and See

What does it mean to taste and see?  
“You will not die,” the liar said  
referring to the garden’s forbidden fruit.  
“Your eyes will open; you’ll be like God,  
knowing both evil and good.”

What does it mean to taste and see?  
God delivered the fugitive David  
to a safe encampment under guard  
by a watch angel of the merciful Lord.  
O taste and see the Lord is good!

What does it mean to taste and see?  
What synesthesia connects our food  
with vision? Two men on the road  
to Emmaus discovered the risen Lord  
when the stranger blessed and broke the bread.

What does it mean to taste and see?  
What does it mean for you and me?

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

**October 31, 2021 | Ruth 1:1-18**

## The Grafting of a Nation

When we graft the tissues of plants,  
they continue to grow as one.  
The lower part is the stock;  
the upper part, the scion.

If the grower does it right,  
the new improves the old.  
The aging stock revives.  
A spurt of life takes hold.

Strangers come to our shore.  
They worry if they belong.  
Our nation is grafting, too.  
Are we doing it right or wrong?

Parents work to the bone  
so their children are free from fears.  
It's always been this way—  
for four hundred years.

When we graft the tissues of people,  
they continue to grow as one.  
It's up to us to perfect  
the grafting of stock and scion.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

## November 7, 2021 | Ruth 3:1-5, 4:13-17

### Imago Dei

When the kinsman of Boaz learned he had to take Naomi's daughter-in-law Ruth as part of the deal for the land once belonging to Elimelech, he balked. "I will have nothing to do with her," he hissed with scorn. Boaz asked, "Why?" "Moabites do not belong in Judah." Boaz was not displeased to hear these words. He desired the land and Ruth for himself.

But Boaz braced his kinsman in front of the elders with a quote from scripture: "*God created mankind in his own image; male and female he created them.* Who are you to say a woman of Moab is different from you and me? Unlike the animals, each person on earth resembles God, with reason and moral choices. You cannot claim to love God and despise a child of God."

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

**November 14, 2021 | 1 Samuel 1:4-20**

## Priesthood of All Believers

*Every individual has direct access to God without ecclesiastical mediation and each individual shares the responsibility of ministering to the other members of the community of believers.*

Merriam-Webster

Her private plea to God  
is a perfect model for prayer.  
Brave Hannah makes  
a plain appeal to the Lord,  
and God listens to all: priests  
and persons without regard.

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

**November 21, 2021 | 2 Samuel 23:1-7**

[tanka]

old friends part:  
they promise to meet again  
some day...  
each knows  
this is the last time

Last Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

**This concludes Liturgical Year B**

## About the Poet

Dave Baldwin retired in 2017 as senior technical writer at the Walt Disney Company after 40+ years as a technical writer and editor. In his career, he also worked for Boeing, Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard, and Amazon. He has been a naval officer, college teacher, real estate broker, and masters track and field athlete.

He is the author of a book about the history of track and field.

Track and Field Record Holders, McFarland & Co, 1996,  
338 pages

He is the proprietor of the website Grammaticus ([www.saxogrammaticus.com](http://www.saxogrammaticus.com)), which is designed to help software engineers improve their writing skills. A version of Grammaticus is posted on Disney's technology division website under Best Practices.

A poet for many years, he is the former national secretary for the Haiku Society of America.

Dave is a member of St. John's Episcopal Church in Snohomish, Washington, and lives in nearby Lake Stevens.



St. John's, Snohomish, WA