

exquisite, star-studded “clouds.” Every time I see one of these incredible pictures, I think of how amazing is our God who created what they show. The Lord is “glorious and more majestic” than anything created!

And when I see these glimpses into the beauty of deep space, I can’t help but proclaim: “The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). If you haven’t seen the JWT photos, Google them. They may lead you to praise God!

Isaiah 57:3-13; Psalm 75; Galatians 5:25—6:10; Mark 9:14-29

by Nina George-Hacker

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Sunday, January 29

Hebrews 11:8-16 *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance, and he set out, not knowing where he was going.* (v.8 NRSV)

In 1995, we could identify with Abraham setting out in faith with no idea how it would turn out. I needed a break from my ministry, and my husband and I felt God leading us away from his hometown. We relocated to where I grew up, one state away. There, we had to buy a house immediately, because we’d been living in a rectory. And neither of us was employed. But within a matter of weeks, we both had jobs, and that summer, we could afford to take a long-postponed trip to visit my family in Greece. We ended up living there for 13 years.

Looking back, we saw how God was with us every step of the way. Even the day we moved in, heavy rain was forecast. We prayed, “Please don’t let it rain until the movers have finished unloading.” Just as the last item was carried in, the heavens opened with a powerful downpour! Thank You, Lord, that You know our needs, hear our prayers, and answer in Your wisdom.

Isaiah 51:9-16; Psalms 24, 29; John 7:14-31

Monday, January 30

Psalms 56 *Be gracious to me, O God, for people trample on me; all day long foes oppress me; my enemies trample on me all day long, for many fight against me. O Most High, when I am afraid, I put my trust in you.* (vv.1-3)

As I write this in 2022, it has been six months since Russia began an unprovoked war against Ukraine, brutally destroying a beautiful, cultured, peaceful nation. I wept as I saw exquisite churches in ruins and millions of people—with their pets—fleeing in terror. Having been raised Greek Orthodox, I felt an intense sorrow that Orthodox Christians were killing one another, and especially that the Patriarch of Moscow sided with the Russian aggressors.

So, whenever a psalm like this one comes up in the Lectionary, I pray it on behalf of President Zelensky and the Ukrainian people. I also donated to a rescue organization that was helping the refugees. Still, it seems so small an effort. And yet, our God is a God of infinite compassion. He’s aware of the suffering. I don’t understand why He allows it, but I’m trying to trust that a good reason will one day be revealed. Meanwhile, let’s keep praying for peace!

Isaiah 51:17-23; Psalms 57, 58; Galatians 4:1-11; Mark 7:24-37

Tuesday, January 31

Mark 8:1-10 *His disciples replied, "How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?"* (v.4)

I can empathize with Jesus' disciples' puzzlement about how to feed thousands of people with almost nothing. I am constitutionally incapable of making a meal for a large group. Growing up as an only child with a single parent, and then being married with no children, I've only ever cooked for two. Fortunately, we now live in an apartment that's so small we can't invite anyone over—we only have two dining-table chairs.

But the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 is one of my favorites, because often in my life I've seen the Lord do a lot with a little—myself being an example. So, on Sundays, whenever I bless the offering the ushers bring forward, I make the sign of the cross over the plate and say: "Lord, bless these gifts as Thou didst the loaves and fishes. Amen." I don't know what other priests say—there's no rubric in the Prayer Book—but I figure that's the best prayer, and not just over the offering. We can pray it for ourselves, too!

Isaiah 5:1-12; Psalms 61, 62; Galatians 4:12-20

Wednesday, February 1

Isaiah 54:1-17 *"For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the LORD, your Redeemer."* (vv.7-8)

I don't think there's a Christian alive who hasn't, at some point in his or her life, felt God had abandoned them. Even Jesus, as he died on the cross for our salvation, cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Yet even in those times when I wonder where God is, I believe in my heart that He will never forsake me—or anyone He loves, who believes in Him. Sometimes I need to exercise that trust daily, or I couldn't get out of bed.

The last few years have been very hard for many people, as we've had to endure the COVID pandemic; workforce shortages; supply-chain problems; inflation; natural disasters, you-name-it. I've also faced losses and unexpected changes in my own life, so it's too easy to fall into despair. Søren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher, said despair (not doubt) is the opposite of faith. Faith is trusting God even when we feel like we're drowning—because our Savior walks on water.

Psalm 72; Galatians 4:21-31; Mark 8:11-26

Thursday, February 2

Psalm 70 *Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you. Let those who love your salvation say evermore, "God is great!"* (v.4)

When I find myself getting despondent about everything going on in the world around us, or my own life and family, I've found that praising and

thanking God is a good antidote. If I listen to praise music on my computer while I'm working, or play a worship CD in my car as I commute or run errands, even though a smile may not cross my face, my heart does lift.

Gratitude can start small: "Thank You for the sunshine (or the rain) today." But then, if you look around and start thanking God for everything you can think of—from the sublime to the ridiculous—there's no question that an attitude of gratitude will improve your outlook.

If you still feel depressed even after immersing yourself repeatedly in praise, worship, prayer, and thanksgiving, please contact a professional counselor. It's not a sign of weakness. God gave us those helpers, too.

Isaiah 55:1-13; Psalm 71; Galatians 5:1-5; Mark 8:27—9:1

Friday, February 3

Mark 9:2-13 *Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling bright, such as no one on earth could brighten them.* (vv.2-3)

The church I serve was founded in 1729, with the present stone building dating from 1838. The architecture is Colonial, with high ceilings and plain glass windows that have plantation shutters. There is only one colorful stained-glass window behind the altar. It shows Christ with St. John (our patron), and two small children, surrounded by Easter lilies and a pastoral landscape. Jesus is wearing a white robe with a scarlet cape, while his "beloved disciple" is garbed in blue.

At a certain point in the late afternoon, this west-facing window is so brightly illuminated by the sun that Jesus' white robe literally glows! During one Lenten Stations of the Cross, as the participants reached the twelfth Station, everyone stopped and gasped at the radiant vision in the window. Complete silence followed, as we stood there in awe. We understood the Transfiguration!

Isaiah 56:1-8; Psalm 69; Galatians 5:16-24

Saturday, February 4

Psalm 76 *Glorious are you, more majestic than the everlasting mountains.* (v.4)

As I write this in mid-July 2022, the James Webb Telescope has begun transmitting photos of the universe from 7,600 light-years away. Since one light-year equals 6 trillion miles, I can't even begin to do the math. Moreover, the JWT has gone so far into deep space, it's looking at light from 3.8 billion years ago, which scientists say was shortly after what they call "the Big Bang."

I'm so excited to see these stunning photos of far-distant galaxies; "mountains" of colorful gases that are forming stars; and what appear to be