



Come and See!

Week of February 16, 2025

The Word ...

Thus says the LORD: “Cursed is the one who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the LORD”
(Jer 17:5-8).

“How blissful the destitute, yours is the Kingdom of God;
How blissful those who are now hungry, you shall feast;
how blissful those now weeping, you shall laugh;
How blissful when men hate you...and reject your name as something wicked, for the
Son of Man’s sake:

On that day, rejoice and leap: Your reward in Heaven is great; ...

“But alas you who are rich, you have your comfort.

As you who are now replete, you will be hungry.

Alas those now laughing, you will mourn and lament.

Alas you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers did the same things to the
false prophets”

(Lk 6:17, 20-26, literal Greek).

Pondering the Word ...

I am really struggling. I know I am not alone.

I work in social justice ministry, supporting volunteers who serve with local non-profits to help those in need. Most of my circle of contacts and friends, including those whose political leanings differ from mine, are also shell-shocked by what has happened to the USAID and other government agencies, not to mention many of the policies being rammed through by the current administration. I live outside of Baltimore, MD, close to Washington DC, and the home of Catholic Relief Services, so the impact is very real (<https://www.ncronline.org/news/exclusive-catholic-relief-services-lays-staff-cuts-programs-after-usaid-shakeup>). Most of our local non-profit partners are shoe-string operations, run by staff who are paid next to nothing, that rely on federal grants to keep their doors open. It is a scary world for them right now.

There is a saying in social ministry work: the goal is “to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable,” (of which I hasten to add, I am one). This is exactly what Jesus is doing in Luke’s Gospel today: giving comfort and hope to those afflicted by poverty, sorrow, or abuse as they try to bring Christ’s teachings to the world; and, making those of us who are well-off quite uncomfortable about our futures. We hear from Jeremiah that by trusting in human beings and putting our faith in things of the flesh, we are cursed.

But this is not a death-knell for those of us who have the means to make a difference, to bring about change. The real question is whether we will use our voices, our monetary and political power to bring about a more compassionate, caring country and world.

“Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”
(Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Living the Word ...

I will continue to use this forum, limited as it is, to try to speak, through Scripture, the truth to abusive power. How will you use your voice to do the same?

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Feb 17: *In the course of time Cain brought an offering to the LORD from the fruit of the soil, while Abel, for his part, brought one of the best firstlings of his flock (Gn 4:1-15, 25).* There's a small but interesting nuance here: we hear Abel brought "one of his best" lambs from the flock, while Cain brought "an offering." The text doesn't indicate Cain brought "first fruits," or the best of his crops. Was he just "checking the box," going through the motions? **Provision: Give God your best!** I'm embarrassed to say how often I fall into the trap of fitting God into my busy schedule, not giving my best to my Creator. I squeeze God into the nooks and crannies of my day. Now, I know God is in those nooks and crannies, available to me always. But let's see today if we can offer God our best, remembering that our "best" doesn't just mean our best behavior or accomplishments. Very often, it means our sincere, our best prayer for forgiveness and mercy.

Tue, Feb 18: *Jesus enjoined them, "Watch out, guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" (Mk 8:14-21).* I love this reading and how clueless the disciples are. I like to imagine how many times in his journal, Jesus resorts to eye-rolling emojis! 😏. But let's talk about the "leaven of the Pharisees." What do you think this means? Some say it is the hard and fast rule-bound teachings of the elders. Others suggest it is their skepticism about Jesus or has to do with their self-importance. It only takes a little bit of egotistical arrogance to taint an entire people. **Provision: Be cautious. Be aware of the leaven of those who claim to be God's chosen.** We've talked in the past about the importance of an informed conscience. Jeremiah warns us about putting our trust in human beings. True prophets call us to clean up our act and evaluate how our lives stack up against the law of love. Follow Jesus' great advice: "By their fruits you will know them," but remember, fruit takes time to ripen. Are these so-called "chosen ones" planting love and mercy?

Wed, Feb 19: *"As long as the earth lasts, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat ... day and night shall not cease" (Gn 8: 6-22).* God promises after the flood never to destroy all living beings "while the earth still remaineth." God will not destroy living beings again, but humans are on a course to do just that. While the universe and all its mystery are in God's hands, God grants us a choice between life and death. We can help our own little piece of Mother Earth by being frugal with the resources we use, helping poor communities revitalize their lands and streams, and passing laws that support a healthy earth. **Provision: Leave things better than you found them.** Those who were Scouts will remember this tenet: Leave the campsite better than you found it. I am praying my generation can do that; at least, more of us are aware of our impact on the earth, so maybe there's time to rectify the damage already done. Consider today how you might leave God's earth and God's creatures—including the other humans you encounter—better than you found them.

Thu, Feb 20: *"Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do" (Mk 8:27-33).* When Jesus refers to Peter as Satan because he thinks as humans do, is he saying that, as humans, we are inherently evil? In the OT reading today, God grants humans the right to eat animals. Scholars suggest this might be a way to channel humanity's violent nature. Ick. I need to pray with this, because, hey, I'm human. I think as human beings do. **Provision: Have the "mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16).** *"The unspiritual self, just as it is by nature, can't receive the gifts of God's Spirit. There's no capacity for them. ... Isaiah's question, 'Is there anyone around who knows God's Spirit?' has been answered: Christ knows, and we have Christ's Spirit"* (from *The Message* translation by Eugene Peterson, p. 1160). Let's strive to foster the mind of Christ by taking time in prayer, being courageous to speak out against evil, and to resist violence, even if that calls us to suffer.

Fri, Feb 21: *"He who fashioned the heart of each, he who knows all their works" "He fashions their heart one and all" (Ps 33).* The Hebrew word used in the second translation is יחד *"yahad,"* meaning "together," "in unity." The first translation makes us think about individuality, and indeed, God *does* know each of us in our uniqueness. Yet, there is something quite beautiful about seeing all our hearts created together, in union. This is different from our Western view, particularly in the US, of "rugged individualism." It answers the question Cain poses to God on Monday: "Yes, Cain, you ARE your brother's keeper, and your 'brother' is all of humanity." **Provision: Intimacy with God calls us into the world.** The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius invite us into a deep, personal, one-on-one relationship with Jesus. But we do not fulfill the purpose of the exercises if they keep us locked away. The only true result of a personal relationship with God is a call outward. For a few, that might be cloistered prayer for the world, for others, an active commitment to social justice amid the muck and mire of humanity. How does your relationship with God call you into the world?

Sat, Feb 22: *"In grass meadows God makes me lie down, by quiet waters guides me. My life God brings back" (Ps 23, Hebrew translation).* **Provision: Allow God to comfort you.** For those of us looking to gather strength for the challenges ahead, we would do well to allow our Shepherd to comfort us. It's still damp and cold where I live...not many grass meadows and quiet waters for relaxation, but walks in nature can be very healing. If you are part of a group or community that is united in its mission to be true to Christ's teachings (and I hope you are), think about scheduling some "mini-retreats"—an hour or two, not to vent or lament, but to rest in the Shepherd's arms. Let God bring us back to life and give us courage.