



The Word...

“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me... And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because the little one is a disciple— amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward.”
(from Mt 10:37-42).

Pondering the Word...

When I first reflected on this passage several years ago, it seemed contradictory. The first part sounds really harsh, even more so if you read it in Luke 14 (*“hating father and mother, daughter and son”*). I would think for many of Jesus’ early followers this would be a hard thing to accept, and likely confusing, given the fifth commandment. The cup of cold-water route, though? “Lord—no problema! I’ll even throw in a meal and a place to sleep! And I’ll still get my reward? Easy-peasy!”

But we recall who Jesus is speaking to here: the Apostles who have been commissioned as missionaries in the Jewish tradition of the *shaliah*, an emissary sent to speak for and act on behalf of the master; the ones who have been with him from the outset and should at least be starting to get an idea what following Jesus is all about (although Peter’s statement of Jesus as the Messiah doesn’t happen until Chapter 16. Perhaps Peter starts to get a clearer picture in tomorrow’s gospel.)

These guys have been around for some of Jesus’ healings, the raising of Jarius’ daughter, and the driving out of demons, and here, Jesus is sending them out to do the same! Wow! That’s heady stuff, and even though Jesus warns them of persecutions to come, I wonder if they really get what it means to follow Christ.

I wonder if I do. Do you?

Living the Word...

There are several readings this week, some from the prophet Amos (you know, that shepherd and dresser of sycamore guy!) about justice and paying attention to what it means to be a disciple. He lambastes the leaders and the people for all the rites and rituals they perform while at the same time ignoring justice and righteousness. Like Jesus, the Old Testament prophets have no room for hypocrites who think that by their pious deeds, their injustice, violence, and greed will escape God’s notice.

Spend time reflecting on what you think it takes to be a true disciple today. (In the past, I’ve recommended Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship*, an admonition from one who put love, life, and limb aside for God.) There are people today who have given their lives (e.g., in the US, Renee Good and Alex Pretti) to fight against injustice, and people all over the world risking and giving their lives for the earth and its creatures. How are you called from your every day “sycamore-dressing” life to prophesy for God as a disciple?

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

Mon, Jun 29: *"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.... Not a word nor a discourse whose voice is not heard; through all the earth their voice resounds, and to the ends of the world, their message"* (Ps 19). I live in the mid-Atlantic region in the US, and I write this on the first day of summer. Spring this year, aside from a few hot days, has been glorious. I sat outside this morning listening to the birds, but also to the silent voices of the trees, their "discourse" resounding in hymns to the glory of God! **Provision: Spend time in God's cathedral.** Without words, nature speaks volumes about the splendor of the universe. "Lectio Divina," the prayer practice of praying with words from scripture or poetry has a counterpart called "Visio Divina" – praying with sacred images. Well, there's no more sacred image than God's creation. Pray today, listening to the voice of the heavens and the earth. *"I have read all the holy books but one, the one that opens itself to me this day."*

Tue, Jun 30: *"Therefore I will punish you for all your crimes. Do two walk together unless they have agreed? Does a lion roar in the forest when it has no prey? ...Does a snare spring up without catching anything? The lion roars-- who will not be afraid! The Lord God speaks--who will not prophesy!"* (Am 3:1-8, 4:11-12). I'm not sure I can capture what the Spirit is saying to me today, but I'll try. This passage is about cause and effect. I believe two issues that divide Christianity (and other religions) are these: what do you consider to be a sin and what prophets do you heed? Some see God's punishment (effect) caused by *sins of commission*, violations of the Ten Commandments, and what Pope Leo has referred to as "sexual ethics" (<https://tinyurl.com/ycxpuh2s>). These people tend to hear prophets who preach doom and gloom and hell-fire for *what we do wrong*. Others see God's wrath as being about *sins of omission*, ignoring the Beatitudes and issues of social justice and freedom; they tend to heed prophets who warn us about *what we fail to do*. I'm not dismissing either side; both have merit, but this divergence calls for deep reflection. **Provision: How will you be a "repairer" of this breach?**

Wed, Jul 1: *"I hate, I spurn your feasts. I take no pleasure in your solemnities; your cereal offerings I will not accept...Away with your noisy songs! ... But let justice surge like water, and goodness like an unfailing stream* (Am 5: 14-15, 21-24). *"Why do you recite my statutes, and profess my covenant with your mouth, though you hate discipline and cast my words behind you?"* (Ps 50). Perfect follow-up to yesterday's reflection. Discipline matters. So does justice. It's not an either/or; it's both/and. Jesus reminds us not everyone who calls him "Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who do God's will. **Provision: What is God's will for you today?**

Thu, Jul 2: *"Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven, or to say, 'Rise and walk'?"* (Mt 9:1-8). A dear priest friend gave me the Sacrament of the Sick this week to prepare for my upcoming surgery. He chose this passage to read. While I've always focused on the phrase "Jesus saw their faith" as a reminder of what it means to be a pastoral care giver, listening to it that day, the line about which is "easier" spoke to me. It made me reflect: Which is easier for me...for you to *accept*? What does it mean for me, for you to rise up and walk?" **Provision: Accept forgiveness. Then, get movin'!** While we marvel at the reports of Jesus' miracles, we might find these easier to accept because...well, nothing is impossible for God. But our sinfulness...now that might be a different story. Do you hold onto your sins and fail to forgive yourself, even as you claim to believe in God's mercy? That's due to shame, the contrite face of pride. Let go of what holds you back. Jesus wants you to rise up from the mat of shame and walk in joy, letting the world see what forgiveness and mercy can do!

Fri, Jul 3 *"Through (Christ Jesus) the whole structure is held together"* (Eph 2:19-22). I think this could be the answer to the provision question posed on Tuesday, at least for Christians. We need to always go back to the life and words of Jesus of Nazareth who came *"not to abolish the law but to fulfill it"* by demonstrating the love, mercy, and justice of God.

Sat, Jul 4: *"The Lord speaks of peace to the people"* (Ps 85). A beautiful image to end this leg of my writing journey. I wish for myself, for you and those you love, indeed, for the whole world, the Lord's peace, the peace the world cannot give. **Provision: Spread peace and joy wherever you go!**

Note: "There was one Teacher, who spoke and it came to pass. And the deeds which He has done in silence are worthy of the Father. The One who is truly master of the spoken word of Jesus is able also to listen to His silence." (Ignatius of Antioch). None of us is or will be a master of Jesus' word, but it's also fruitful for us to listen to His silence. Thank you for listening all these years.