



Come and See!

Week of January 26, 2025

The Word ...

Nehemiah and Ezra said to all the people:
“Today is holy to the LORD your God. Do not be sad, and do not weep”—
for all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law...
Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the LORD must be your strength!”
(Neh 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10).

“Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker
are all the more necessary, and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable
we surround with greater honor ...
If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it”
(1 Cor 12:12-30).

Pondering the Word ...

Wow! So much here to unpack given events happening across the globe these days!

In the first reading, we hear the people are weeping. Why? Well, could it be they've prostrated themselves "from daybreak till midday?" That would make me weep! More likely, they are lamenting their ignorance of the law during the long exile. Or might they be weeping because Nehemiah and Ezra are keen on enforcing the law to the letter now, including an ethnic cleansing, driving out foreign wives and children whose "purity" does not meet the standards of the law. Hmmh. (<https://time.com/7178744/donald-trump-family-separation-border/>). I wonder how many spouses were willing to put love and mercy above the law.

"The parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary." "Our results indicate that a larger proportion of foreign-born workers are essential frontline workers compared to native-born workers and that 70 percent of unauthorized immigrant workers are essential frontline workers" (from October 27, 2022: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9614593/>). Hmmh. Do we suffer with them?

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord" (Lk 4:14-21).*

Living the Word ...

Those who know me know there is not much that renders me speechless, but it is hard for me to find any words to share with "Christians" who support the heartless, draconian policies of "the right." I'm sorry, but "the right" in this case is wrong, if we claim to believe in Christ's teaching. If nothing else, stop sullyng the name of Christ by calling yourselves his followers. The golden calf of nationalism and greed is the altar at which you worship. I don't like being so harsh, and I know Christ calls me to be compassionate, but his life also calls me to take a nonviolent stand.

Undocumented people guilty of serious crimes should, of course, suffer the consequences, but do we punish the whole for the sins of the few? We do so at our own risk, both practically in terms of our economy and spiritually, in terms of our common humanity. Let's pray about this. Look at tomorrow's reflection. Is God the source of your decision-making or has the "angel of light" in fact obscured your vision?

Personal Reflections and Ideas ... _____

Mon, Jan 27: *"By the prince of demons he drives out demons"* (Mk 3:22-30). In his Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius of Loyola references a term from 2 Cor 11:14: "an angel of light" (in Latin, *Lucifer*, the morning star). He warns us to pay close attention to this. As the scribes suggest today, can something good come from evil? **Provision:** **Discern the source.** This is tricky. We love stories about good coming as a result of tragedy or misfortune (although natural disasters and such should not be viewed as having evil as the source). We celebrate "resurrection" stories, people emerging from addiction to a new life of sobriety and hope (again, human weakness does not equate to evil). The "angel of light" is subtle, showing up when we feel good or satisfied about something that is not of God: revenge, "schadenfreude," our egos. Reflect on what you are feeling today, good or bad. Consider decisions you have made. Is God the source?

Tue, Jan 28: *"Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother"* (Mk 3:31-35). Once the crowd gets over the shock of Jesus "dissing" his mother, what do they do? I imagine some moms in the group becoming indignant, even walking away: "Does this guy have any respect for the commandments?!" Jesus is teaching an important lesson: "family" goes way beyond blood, ethnic, or religious relations. **Provision: Broaden your definition of community.** What does doing the will of God mean to you? For some, it means believing what I believe and worshipping the way I worship. I think Jesus' definition is much broader. Jesus respected and gave dignity to lots of people who didn't fit the established mold. With whom will you model Jesus' inclusivity?

Wed, Jan 29: *"A sower went out to sow. Some seed fell on the path, and the birds ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground...it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it"* (Mk 4:1-20). In the past, I've questioned the sower on the scattershot approach they use to sow the seed. But today my thoughts went to this: What if there were people whose role was to follow the sower and to protect and nourish the seeds that fell on the path, onto ground that has, for years, been trodden underfoot by poverty and discrimination? Or on ground strewn with the "rocks" of addiction or mental illness? Or the seeds sown amid the "thorns" of evil and violence? **Provision: Could "seed nourisher" be your call?** We hear stories of all types of seed nourishers: Missionaries and others of good will who minister where violence is rampant, willing to be wounded by the thorns of hatred; those who learn how to walk amid rocks, to aid those suffering dysfunction; everyday people who accompany the poor and oppressed to lead them to places of growth. Where might you be called to help "The Sower" achieve the dream of a great harvest?

Thu, Jan 30: *"Let us hold unwaveringly to our confession that gives us hope... consider how to rouse one another to love and good works. We should not stay away from our assembly... but encourage one another"* (Heb 10:19-25). How can we encourage one another if we separate ourselves from community? We've talked about the breakdown of community; we know the decline in religion is part of it. In her book, *"The Amen Effect,"* Rabbi Sharon Brous quotes Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who *"a half century earlier... offered a scathing critique of American religious life: 'Religion declined, not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. What young people need is not... religion as diversion... but spiritual audacity, intellectual guts, the power of defiance!'"* **Provision: How audacious is your community?** Go back to Tuesday's reflection: Do something to shock them!

Fri, Jan 31: *"By the Lord are your steps made firm... Though you fall, you do not lie prostrate, for the hand of the LORD sustains you"* (Ps 37). **Provision: The hand of the Lord sustains us.** I've been preachy this week, and it always leads me to look at how often I fall, how often I fail. We all do. Lie prostrate to rest if you must, but don't weep like the people on Sunday. *"Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the LORD must be your strength!"*

Sat, Feb 1: *A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up. Jesus woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Quiet! Be still!" The wind ceased and there was great calm* (Mk 4:35-41). This is a great story. Jesus wakes up and saves the day! But I want to point this out: The wind dies down and the waves stop breaking over the boat. But there's still water in the hull that needs to be bailed out. The disciples still have some work to do to right the ship. **Provision: We are to finish the job!** The Spirit empowers us to continue the work Jesus began. We can look at this as a burden or we can see it as an honor. What will you do today to help right the ship in which *you* sail?