



Come and See!

July 23, 2017

The Word...

There is no god besides you who have the care of all,
that you need show you have not unjustly condemned.
For your might is the source of justice;
your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all...
But though you are master of might, you judge with clemency,
and with much lenience you govern us;
and you taught your people, by these deeds, that those who are just must be kind;
and you gave your children good ground for hope
that you would permit repentance for their sins.
(from Wis 12:13, 16-19)

Pondering the Word...

Have you ever heard the expression, "The Old Testament God?" When people use this term, it's usually to point out the vengeful, punishing God they often cite as the reason for not believing in God. Yes, there are lots of stories in the Old Testament that speak of God destroying the enemies of the Israelites and taking revenge on those who cross him. But it is so very important to remember the historical context in which the Old Testament books (and actually, the whole Bible) were written, and cultural realities of the world at that time.

But then we stumble upon the Book of Wisdom and passages like the one we hear today: "*your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all.*" Boy, that's a counter-cultural statement if I've ever heard one! There are very few leaders in recorded history for whom power and mastery has led to greater compassion and leniency (we might consider the Old Testament gentile King Cyrus to be one of the few). Then again, none of them were God, even though they might have viewed themselves that way.

Several of the readings this week speak of the one true God's unending patience, fidelity, and mercy. We are reminded God's ways are not our ways. God has given us good ground for hope. God's compassion and his kindness are for **all**.

Living the Word...

"And you taught your people, by these deeds, that those who are just must be kind."

What is your image of God? If you see God as judgmental and vengeful, then it may be a struggle for you to see how justice can be kind, or how you can be forgiven. This God-image might manifest itself in an "either/or," "right or wrong" view of yourself, others, and the world in general. And it might stem from your earliest experiences with humans in your life. But as Christians, the only human we need to look at to see God is Christ. The man who forgives, who heals, who instructs without harsh judgment, who looks at us and loves us, even when we walk away. The man who sacrifices all for us, who is the source of justice and our hope.

If you struggle with a difficult God image, seek the help of spiritual guide or pastor. Take God out of the box in which you have him trapped, and let his abundant love and mercy fill your life.

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

Jul 24: *When it was reported that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his servants changed their minds. "What have we done! Why, we have released Israel from our service!" ...The children of Israel complained to Moses, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt?...Far better for us to be the slaves of the Egyptians."* (Ex 14:5-18)

One thing the Book of Exodus teaches us is that people back then had very bad short-term memories. "Hello! Did you guys just conveniently forget about the plagues and the first-born male child debacle?" We see this same tendency today: failure to learn from history, even recent history; decisions made on the fly without a thought of consequences or costs; the latest, greatest threat becoming old news as quickly as it arose. When we are confronted with misfortune or fear, our ego and need for control kick in, so we may have to force ourselves to step back and look back: "When I have faced difficulty in the past, did God abandon me?" "Was I given the strength, or the love of others, to help me through?" This is a crucial lesson to teach our kids, and for us to remember as well. God is always faithful. Don't ever forget that.

Jul 25: *"So death is at work in us, but life in you. Since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, 'I believed, therefore I spoke,' we too believe and therefore speak..."* (2 Cor 4:7-15)

A good follow-up to yesterday's reflection. Paul quotes the psalmist who speaks of his belief even in the face of affliction and betrayal (Ps 116:10). Paul too confirms the disciples' willingness to speak of their faith even though they know torture and death await them. They are confident the one who raised Christ will raise them as well. This is our hope, the essence of our faith. Don't be afraid to let your life speak for what you believe.

Jul 26: *"I will rain down bread from heaven for you. Each day the people are to go out and gather their daily portion; thus will I test them, to see whether they follow my instructions or not."* (Ex 16: 1-5, 9-15)

The Israelites test God at every turn, so he gives them a taste of their own medicine. God is going to see if the people pay attention to his command to gather only the bread they need for the day. The Israelites have been starving, so they'll be tempted to hoard more. Even after they've seen God's mighty deeds, they are still wary, still worried this good thing they have going won't last. Haven't I done the same thing? "God has always been there, but what if this time, he doesn't come through?" Oh, me...ye...we of little faith! "Give us this day our daily bread, the grace we need for today to trust in your love and protection."

Jul 27: *The LORD told Moses, "I am coming to you in a dense cloud, so that when the people hear me speaking with you, they may always have faith in you also."* (Ex 19:1-2, 9-11, 16-20)

God is THE Eternal Optimist. He's confident the Israelites, despite their grumbling, have faith in him, and he wants them to have faith in Moses, too. That's not to say God doesn't come close to throwing in the towel 12 chapters later, but Moses bails the people out yet again. Often, I think the dense cloud is not where God is, but where I am! Pray with me that we can live this day confident in God's fidelity and our own faith!

Jul 28: *"You shall not carve idols for yourselves."* (Ex 20:1-17)

God knows the world in which the Israelites live. God knows it's a human trait to want to fit in. And God knows there are idols and altars to Baal all over the place. But God is specific: *you shall not carve idols for yourself*. There are slabs of stone and forests full of timber that will entice you. Your neighbors might even give you an idol as a gesture of welcome and friendship. The temptations abound, but it is up to you to choose. Today's idols are everywhere. You can try to avoid them, but you can't really change that they exist. Is any idol tempting you these days? Pray for the strength to resist from the only God who can grant it.

Jul 29: *"Lord, do you not care that my sister left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me."* (Lk 10:38-42)

I like Martha and her commitment to hospitality. I particularly like the relationship she has with Jesus. She's not timid or afraid to question Jesus, and she's open to learn what he has to teach her. He's challenging her to think differently. He wants her to see that when serving others becomes an obligation, it loses its meaning as gift. He also wants her (and us) to recognize there are times to step back from the busyness and look and listen to what's going on right in front of us. Take a break today to sit at Jesus' feet.