

Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Lent Week Four, 2025



Sunday, March 30: *"Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance, but the LORD looks into the heart"* (1 Sm 16:1, 6-7, 10-13). *"Live as children of light for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth. Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness; rather expose them, for it is shameful even to mention the things done by them in secret"* (Eph 5:8-14).

I love the Hebrew translation of the line from 1 Samuel: *"For man sees with the eyes and the Lord sees with the heart."* I take comfort in knowing God looks at my heart with the love of God's heart. God—Jesus—knows the trials and tribulations of the human heart so has great mercy on us. This is important as we try to live as children of the light and do what is pleasing to the Lord. We pray God's gaze upon us will open our hearts to see and share what is good and right and true. We pray for the courage to expose evil to the light and to not shy away due to embarrassment, apathy, or pressure from those who choose not to hear or see.

Provision: PRAY for courage. During these final weeks of Lent, we will read primarily from John's Gospel. Much of what we read details the growing conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. While he continues his healing ministry—twice he gets called out for healing on the Sabbath—the conflict intensifies as he ties himself more closely to the Father and calls out the blindness and hypocrisy of the elders. We pray to Jesus for the courage to be a bearer of light against the evil in our world. What are the "fruitless works of darkness" you see happening? How will you bear the light?

Monday, March 31: *"For I create Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight; I will rejoice in Jerusalem and exult in my people. No longer shall the sound of weeping be heard there, or the sound of crying; No longer shall there be an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not round out his full lifetime"* (Is 65:17-21).

This passage hits hard. Like everything else, the situation in Israel and Gaza is fraught with politics, but we know there is little joy in this part of the world. Regardless of one's political stance, who does not weep at the stories and images we see? An elderly Israeli hostage whose life ended in a tunnel somewhere; Palestinian mothers weeping (in Hebrew, "screaming"), their dead infants on their laps. The God I believe in is not rejoicing, not exulting at all right now.

Provision: FAST, PRAY, GIVE, ACT, HOPE. The Ramadan fast just ended; the Passover eve Fast of the First Born--*Ta'anit Bechorim* in Hebrew — is April 11. Good Friday is April 18. Consider a day of fasting for all those suffering in the Middle East: Muslims, Jews, Christians, everyone—because they are *all* suffering. It doesn't have to be fasting from food. Use time you might spend watching favorite programs or doomscrolling to pray for peace. Give money you plan to spend on something you want to a cause that helps *all* those impacted. Act by donating time to an organization that provides aid to the region; contact government representatives and ask them to vote for peace. And keep hope alive. Trust God will make this land a place of delight, a symbol of reconciliation and peace, a model for God's kingdom for the world.

Tuesday, April 1: *"There was now a river through which I could not wade ... "Have you seen this, son of man?"... "This water flows into the eastern district down upon the Arabah, and empties into the sea, the salt waters, which it makes fresh. Wherever the river flows, every sort of living creature that can multiply shall live...for they shall be watered by the flow from the sanctuary"* (Ez 47:1-9, 12).

This is a great story, a great metaphor for the power of God. The trickle of a stream continues to grow, down from Mount Zion east through the Jordan Valley to the Dead Sea (in Hebrew, "the sea of filthy water" where nothing can live). As it grows stronger, it brings life to what is dead and barren, nourishing the banks along the way. The angel of God brings Ezekiel back to the riverbank to explain the image and the lesson. I like to imagine Ezekiel then decides to ride the current. What does he see as he travels?

Provision: GIVE yourself over to Living Water. Last week, we talked about Mary giving herself over to God's will. Today, we picture allowing ourselves to be immersed in, swept up by God's living water. It might be scary, but we don't fight the gentle current, we ride it. Yes, we may encounter rapids along the way, bumping into a tree stump or two, but we trust the Spirit will sustain us and help us bring nourishment to everyone and everything we touch. What a wonderful call: to bring living water to that which is dying or dead! How is God asking you today to trust the Spirit and immerse yourself in living water? God knows, we need this river to rise!

Wednesday, April 2: *"Amen, amen, I say to you, the Son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for what he does, the Son will do also"* (Jn 5:17-30).

What do you think Jesus means when he talks about seeing what the Father is doing? What does he see? How does he look at the world around him and discern God's actions? Jesus went back to the words of the prophets, and we can do that too, if we dare. But we also have the gospels that describe what Jesus does, so given his statement today, we know what the Father is doing, right? Jesus heals. Jesus comforts. Jesus shows mercy. Jesus enjoys the company of good friends. Jesus teaches. Jesus confronts and challenges. Jesus empowers.

Provision: ACT. Do what Jesus does. I have a guided meditation I share around this time of year that asks us to reflect on Jesus' words: *"Love one another as I have loved you."* How has Jesus loved you? As you read the stories in the gospels, what stands out to you? Perhaps this is the way you are called to love, to do what the Father and the Son do. Reflect on the gospel stories that make you feel Jesus' love. Talk to him about it and thank him for his love. Ask the Spirit to guide you to love the way Jesus loves you. Then, *"go and do likewise."*

Thursday, April 3: *"You search the Scriptures, because you think you have eternal life through them"* (Jn 5:31-47).

Jesus is criticizing the elders, saying they pay attention to certain parts of Scripture, but not to others. They fall back on the hundreds of rules, thinking that by their adherence, they will gain eternal life. What about the words of the prophets that foretell the Messiah's coming? There are a few dynamics at work here. First, who wouldn't want a checklist to guarantee eternal happiness?! Let's face it, humans like control, so, for the elders (and some of us), why not a rigid compliance with the law? Second, folks don't like it when you compare them to sinful people in the past (see Lk 4 and Mt 23). Most of the prophetic references to the Messiah are when the community is really a mess. Third, we all tend to pay attention to the words in Scripture we "agree with" or with which we feel most comfortable (guilty as charged).

I love Scripture, but if what I read does not lead me to *metanoia*, a change of heart and mind, I've missed the point. If I don't take time to pray with passages that make me uncomfortable, I may be ignoring a message the Spirit has for me. If religious practice, church, or the rules become the focus of my worship, I am no better than the Israelites at Mount Sinai: *"(they) adored a molten image; they exchanged their glory for the image of a grass-eating bullock"* (Ps 106).

Provision: PRAY with Scripture. Start with one you really like and look beyond the words on the page to the meaning for these current days, for your life (e.g., Jn 8:1-11: who would the elders be throwing at Jesus' feet today?). Then, turn to one that gets under your skin (could it be Lk 6:27-30: to whom is the enemy I need to do good?). When you pray with Scripture, try to spend time reflecting on what you've read (Lectio Divina) or imagine yourself in the situation (Imaginative Contemplation). Then talk with—not to!—Jesus or the Spirit. What do you hear in your heart?

Friday, April 4: *"When [Jesus'] brothers had gone up to the feast, he himself also went up, not openly but in secret. ... Jesus cried out in the temple area as he was teaching and said, "You know me and also know where I am from. Yet I did not come on my own, but the one who sent me, whom you do not know, is true"* (Mt 21:38-39).

"Um, Jesus? If you want to keep hidden, I wouldn't be crying out at the Temple!" Here's part of this passage that isn't in the lectionary today: *His brothers [relatives] said, "Go to Judea, so your disciples also may see the works you are doing. No one works in secret if he wants to be known publicly." ...For his brothers did not believe in him. Jesus said, "My time is not yet here, but the time is always right for you. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I testify to it that its works are evil."* The time is always right for those who don't rock the boat. But Jesus cannot keep silent for long. He cries out...out of frustration, out of urgency, out of his hope that at least some will listen.

Provision: FAST from silence and inaction. Jesus is a fugitive. Let's not ignore that fact. His crime: sedition. If we pray with these chapters in John and put ourselves in the stories, would we have followed him? I'm not sure I would've (although as a woman, I would have been ignored... just saying.) Would we have been willing to rock the boat? What keeps us from following his teachings which are still as radical today?

Saturday, April 5: *"Nicodemus...said "Does our law condemn a man before it first hears him...?" They answered, "...Look and see that no prophet arises from Galilee." Then each went to his own house* (Jn 7:50-53).

(This is adapted/abridged from our reflection in 2020.) "The debate ends, and the Pharisees go to their own homes. ...I imagine a few open their scrolls to the words of the prophets; some stay up all night praying; some just go to sleep, deciding to follow the party line. I wonder about members of Congress in my own country, or in other democratic countries. Do they wrestle with themselves: "Do I go along with the party line; do I succumb to "groupthink" or do I allow my conscience to guide me?" It's a sorry state of affairs when party loyalty is given precedence over one's conscience.

Today's Provision: ACT on your conscience. The truth revealed here keeps me up at night. I look at how I live. I shudder to think of what Jesus sees when he looks at me. How often do I dismiss my moral compass for what is expedient or more acceptable or along the path of least resistance! Reflect on this tough assignment. Scholars say the Christianity practiced in the modern world would be unrecognizable to Jesus' early followers. *"Christianity should not be criticized. It hasn't been tried yet."* (G.K. Chesterton, adapted) Give true Christianity a try today."