

Provisions for the Journey to Pentecost

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Fifth Week of Easter, 2026



Sunday, May 3: *"To you who have faith, therefore, it is precious; but to those who do not have faith, 'A stone that the builders rejected, this has come to be the capstone of the corner;' and: 'A stone of stumbling and a rock of faltering;' they stumble on the word, which they indeed, being unpersuaded, were set on doing" (1 Pt 2:4-9, literal Greek,).*

The NABRE translation I typically use reads, *"They stumble by disobeying the word, as is their destiny."* That last phrase really bothers me, as if God has predestined who will stumble and who will not. I know there are a range of views on predestination among Christian denominations, but I personally can't square the idea of a merciful God with one who would damn certain of God's children ahead of time. Scholar David Bentley Hart explains the Greek words this way: *"Not that is, that some were 'appointed to stumble' in the sense of 'preordained' by God, but rather that some have, by their disobedience or mistrust, set themselves to stumble"* (The New Testament: A Translation, p. 472). What is your opinion? We say God is all-knowing, so assume God knows who will build the Kingdom as "living stones" and who will stumble. Where does free-will enter the picture? How does, say, an adverse childhood experience or mental illness factor in?

Provision: "Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you" (Ps 33). I mentioned last fall the book, *Cherished Belonging*, by Greg Boyle, SJ, the founder of Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles. It is a challenging read even for open-minded believers. Greg mentions the two "unwavering principles" that underpin Homeboy Industries: *"1) Everyone is unshakably good (no exceptions); and, 2) We belong to each other (no exceptions)."* Most of those Greg ministers to have had not just adverse, but harrowing, abusive childhoods. Many suffer from severe mental illness. Some inevitably fall through the cracks; others soar like eagles in recovery. But Greg and his staff place complete trust in God and God's mercy. No one is predestined to damnation. In our current environment of unforgiving judgment, of statements of who is good and who is evil, let's try to model God's mercy, to build up the Kingdom by welcoming those "stones" that we might want to cast aside.

Monday, May 4: *There was an attempt in Iconium by both the Gentiles and the Jews to attack and stone Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:5-18).*

Iconium was in Asia Minor, in what is now modern-day Turkey. The population was diverse, so the Gentiles and the Jews in the city probably lived mutually beneficial, albeit segregated lives. They were quite happy with the way things were, doing business with each other, worshipping in their own ways when these rabble-rousers show up in the name of Jesus to unite everyone under one God. The Gentiles are to rid themselves of their idols and gods, and the Jews are to accept the Gentiles as God's people as well. So, as strange bedfellows, they join in the common goal of eliminating anyone who might disrupt the status quo. Jesus' mission to unite all as one runs afoul of our human tendency to define ourselves by labels and groups. It happened back then. It happens today. It even happens in Jesus' name.

Provision: What's the status quo you defend? While we might not realize it, most of us defend the status quo, whether it be in our religious practice or in our secular life. Do we resist the work of the Spirit in our churches to be more welcoming and inclusive? Do we continue to buy products that are harmful to our earth or from businesses that exploit workers? Do we tacitly support ill-advised and even toxic policies and government actions because we can't be bothered by activism or even by voting, or because we benefit in some way—financially, perhaps—from policies that in practice harm others and the future? Am I willing to look closely at the things I do that defend an unholy, unhealthy status quo?

Tuesday, May 5: *"Your friends make known, O Lord, the glorious splendor of your kingdom" (Ps 145).*

Are you God's friend? If you are, are you a "good" friend? By that, I don't mean someone who acts "good" or does "good." I mean someone who is there for their friend in good times and bad, who listens, who is willing to sing their friend's praises or to challenge them when necessary.

I did an internet search: "What attributes make for a good friend?" Lots of sites came up, but I decided instead to define it for myself. And now, you get to do the same!

Provision: How are you God's good friend? This is a fun prayer experience. Think about good friends you have had in your life, past or present. What makes you define them as a good friend? What attributes do they have that make them special in that role? Are you a good friend to others? It might seem strange to think about God needing or even wanting friends especially if your devotional God is the Creator or the Spirit. So perhaps imagine Jesus instead. Ask him what he looks for in a good friend and see what you can do to be a better friend to God.

Wednesday, May 6: *"I am the vine, you are the branches"*(Jn 15:1-8).

Without the vine, the branches are nothing. They wither; they die. But without the branches, the vine can only do so much. It cannot propagate. Its reach is limited, its fruit for only a select few.

Provision: Expand "The Vine's" reach. I love the imagery of this passage. There is SO much you can take from this reading: the importance of pruning, the desire for good, sweet fruit, the need for branches willing to grow. I've been on winery tours and have tasted wines from the same type of grape grown in different soils with various sun exposure and watering schedules. Same grape, diverse and delightful tastes. Exactly what Jesus would want! So how can you best expand Jesus' reach? First, be a willing branch. Allow for some pruning. Get rid of any dead or burdensome things weighing you down. Second, be true to your own experience of bearing fruit. Not everyone is called in the same way. Use your unique relationship with "The Vine" to inspire unique growth in others.

Thursday, May 7: *"God made no distinction between us [Jews] and them [Gentiles] for by faith he purified their hearts. Why, then, are you now putting God to the test?" ...The whole assembly fell silent* (Acts 15:7-21).

I'm sure there have been several dramatic reenactments of this event (the Council of Jerusalem which is said to have occurred c. 50 CE). I imagine the raised, irate, indignant voices being heard from within the room stopped passersby in their tracks. It is difficult to overstate both the dissention this debate caused and the importance of the decisions made. But what I find most intriguing is the statement, *"The whole assembly fell silent."* Gosh, what would that look like today? Would it even be possible to find a voice that could speak over the clamor and vitriol to silence us that we might listen?

Provision: LISTEN to voices of peace. Act on what you hear. As of late, Pope Leo XIV has added his voice, his pleas for peace to those of The Dalai Lama, Vijay Mehta, Malala Yousafzai, Kathy Kelly, to name a few. We clearly need more voices on the world stage to drown out the drumbeats of war. But even more so, we need people from all walks of life; people of goodwill to act on the voices we hear, to take peace work into the ravaged communities around the world, to bring peace, dignity, and respect to those who have been abused by the powers that be. What will you do today to act on the voices of peace you hear? (Access this link to read a challenging article: <https://tinyurl.com/mudwzxp>). *"When there is peace among religions, there will be peace in the world"*The Dalai Lama.

Friday, May 8: *"Awake, O my soul; awake"*(Ps 57).

This is a prayer I need right now. Not only do I need my soul to awaken from its fitful, fever dream brought on by too much of this world, but I need it to arise as well, to fulfill the call we talked about yesterday: to act on the voices of peace that beckon me. But I also recall a verse from the Sufi poet, Rumi, that adds another important facet to this psalm verse: *"Awake, my dear, be kind to your sleeping heart. Take it out into the vast fields of light and let it breathe!"*

Provision: Breathe in the Light! Perhaps you too are feeling world-weary. Perhaps you too believe you should be doing more to bring comfort and peace to your community, to the world. These are the feelings and thoughts of a compassionate heart, a Spirit-infused soul. But before we go to rouse our souls to attention, let's listen to God's voice inviting us to be kind to ourselves, to spend time in nature, to feel the Light's warmth, to pray, to breathe. Breathe.

Saturday, May 9: *Day after day the churches grew stronger in faith and increased in number* (Acts 16:1-10).

What do you think this looks like? Paul and his companions are running all over known creation spreading the Good News. I don't know this for a fact, but it doesn't seem like they are spending all that much time in these new outposts of faith. Not sure there is much theology being taught or detailed analysis of Scripture happening. They may swing back around to check on things during their travels, but they surely trust the Spirit to do what the Spirit does best. And in my experience, the Spirit doesn't seem too concerned about checklists and rules!

Provision: Focus on what's essential. I was reading an article earlier today about how the fall of the Roman Empire served to make the institutional church a more political organization, moving its focus from the radical message of Jesus Christ into something more palatable to the secular world. I get so incensed when I hear Catholics, particularly high-ranking government officials, criticizing Pope Leo for getting involved in "politics." No, he is not. Wake up! You just want that worldly Church of the past! Leo is preaching the Good News to the poor, the oppressed, the immigrant; he is preaching the gospel of peace. *Jesus says to us, his disciples: "If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you. ...they do not know the one who sent me"*(Jn 15:18-21). Do not be deceived by those who present themselves as faithful who are in fact "polluted by idols" of power and greed.