



Come and See!

Week of September 6, 2020

The Word...

Thus says the LORD: “You, son of man,
I have appointed watchman for the house of Israel;
when you hear me say anything, you shall warn them for me.
If I tell the wicked, ‘O wicked one, you shall surely die,’
and you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked from his way,
the wicked shall die for his guilt, but I will hold you responsible for his death.
But if you warn the wicked, trying to turn him from his way,
and he refuses to turn from his way,
he shall die for his guilt, but you shall save yourself.”
(Ez 33:7-9)

Pondering the Word...

Well now, Ezekiel is zapping us yet again! With so much unrest in our world and people taking to the streets to protest injustice, inequality, and malfeasance... where are we? Where am I?

“What?” you might say. “The Lord has not appointed me watchman or prophet!” “Just leave me alone. Who I am, the sinner that I am, to speak out against wickedness and inequity?” “I don’t want to be involved.” “Nothing is going to change even if I do speak out.” “I don’t see anything wicked happening around me!”

Any of these excuses sound familiar? “Oh, that if today, you would hear his voice: Harden not your hearts...” (Ps 95)

Living the Word...

“We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Wherever men and women are persecuted because of their race, religion or political views, that place must -- at that moment -- become the center of the universe.” Elie Wiesel (1928-2016) writer, Nobel peace prize winner, humanitarian, activist, and Holocaust survivor

“Neutrality in a situation of oppression always supports the status quo...Justice is the goal, and that may require an acceleration of conflict as a necessary stage in forcing those in power to bring about genuine change.” Walter Wink, from *The Powers That Be*)

If any of *this* sounds familiar, it’s because it is exactly what Jesus did. He accelerated conflict nonviolently – using what Walter Wink calls Jesus’ Third Way (as opposed to “fight or flight”) – to bring about change in both secular society and his faith practice. It was the way of Martin Luther King, Jr., of Gandhi. And we pray it will be the way of the fight we have in front of us now: to peacefully but resolutely bring justice to the poor and heal the earth, to welcome the stranger and the disenfranchised, to end the persecution worldwide by recognizing the humanity of ALL people and those of goodwill, not just those who look and pray and think like us.

Seek to hear God’s voice calling you today. Open your heart. Take action. Speak out against wickedness.

Personal Reflections and Ideas...

Mon, Sep 7: *“Lead me in your justice, Lord.”* (Ps 5)

We talked yesterday about speaking out. This can be scary. One source of fear in doing this is realizing that people who espouse the same faith have very different views about God’s justice entails. Self-doubt lurks: “Who am I to think what I speak is God’s will?” Like Jeremiah, we might want to turn away. But, as we talked about last week, if our relationship with God is one of intimacy, we cannot turn away. We trust in God’s providence. If our hearts are open, the Spirit will lead us to work for justice as the Lord wills for us.

Tue, Sep 8: *“...he shall be peace.”* (Mi 5:4)

This verse might seem strange in light of the reflections from the past two days. Why does the peace of the long-awaited Messiah still elude us, especially those of us who believe he lives in our midst? Perhaps, like ancient Israel, we don’t understand what this peace really means. We look for God to flip a switch so the other guy sees things our way. We look for peace to be imposed from the outside, but in the words of peace activist, Thich Nhat Hanh, *“To work for peace is to uproot war from ourselves and from the hearts of all men and women.”* The only way Jesus can be the Prince of Peace is if we allow him to change our hearts. *Take a close look at people, situations, or topics that foster peace in you and those that disrupt your sense of peace. Consider both without judgment. The things that disrupt our peace are often the very things we need to address rather than avoid.*

Wed, Sep 9: *Raising his eyes toward his disciples Jesus said: “Blessed are you who are poor...”* (Lk 6: 20-26)

I love little nuances in Scripture. In Matthew, this passage starts the “Sermon on the Mount” (chapters 5-7). Jesus is the great Teacher atop the hill looking down upon the crowds of eager disciples -- an image that would play well with Matthew’s audience. But Luke’s version is called the “Sermon on the Plain.” Jesus comes to a stretch of level ground filled with the poor and infirm. We hear Jesus *raises his eyes* to speak. This is a reflective Jesus who has spent time praying for the right words to console and heal those listening. He looks at them, his eyes conveying his love and compassion; his words, though unexpected, settling softly in their hearts. *The next time you read or listen to Jesus’ words, imagine him raising his eyes and looking into yours with love.*

Thu, Sep 10: *“... I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause my brother to sin.”* (1 Cor 8: 1-7, 11-13)

In today and tomorrow’s passages from First Corinthians, Paul talks about the importance of setting examples for the community and practicing what we preach, even if our theological or doctrinal knowledge suggests we could choose a different action. Here, the Corinthians think it’s ok to eat meat sacrificed to idols since idols are not real things; Paul challenges them, that while this may be true, they need to consider the example they set for others. Tomorrow, Paul talks about meeting people where they are just as Jesus did, but also making sure he is true to his own faith practice. These are good considerations when we are faced with moral decisions. For some, rules are rules. They fail to take into account the pastoral needs of the person in front of them; we’ve all heard horror stories about this. And we also know all too well about faith leaders who fail miserably in practicing what they preach. *Think about this in your own life. Are there rules you follow, so much so that they impede showing Christian compassion and mercy to another? Are there things you condemn in others that you are guilty of as well?*

Fri, Sep 11: *“Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own? You hypocrite! Remove the wooden beam from your eye first.”* (Lk 6:39-42)

Maybe you think the splinter in your brother’s eye is more serious than your beam in yours. A beam is a beam. Jesus calls out our hypocrisy but also tells us to make sure we can see clearly so as to help our brother or sister. Seeing our willingness to address our issues can motivate others to do the same with theirs.

Sat, Sep 12: *“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ but not do what I command?”* (Lk 6:43-49)

“That’s a good question, Lord. Why don’t you ask me one I can answer! The only reason I can give is that I get so busy and lose focus on you and your will for me. I stop being aware and all of a sudden, it is my will I am following. A will that often takes the path of least resistance, a path that seems easier or feels good now, but will leave me empty later. And let’s be honest, Lord: some of what you command – loving enemies, blessing those who curse or mistreat me, turning the other cheek – these are tough assignments that, to be honest, don’t often lead to a change of heart for my ‘enemy.’ The only reason I can give, Lord, is that I am human, I am weak, but I need you in my life. And I have faith that this is reason enough for your continued mercy to me. Thank you.”