



Come and See!

Week of July 20, 2025, 16 OT

The Word...

"He who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

One who walks blamelessly and does justice;
who thinks the truth in his heart and slanders not with his tongue.
Who harms not his fellow man, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor;
by whom the reprobate is despised, while he honors those who fear the LORD.
Who lends not his money at usury and accepts no bribe against the innocent.
One who does these things shall never be disturbed"

(Ps 15).

Pondering the Word...

The OT and the gospel readings today focus on hospitality: Abraham welcoming the three travelers and Martha welcoming Jesus into her home. And in between is this psalm about justice and truth. Let's explore the link between these two topics, hospitality and justice, that at first glance might not seem all that related.

First order of business: How do *you* define justice? The word is used a lot in Scripture and can be viewed in a few ways. There is retributive justice—accountability and punishment for wrong-doing. It may have to do with one person's sin (e.g., Jezebel) or the community's sinfulness (the Israelites, numerous times!). This definition, a commonly held one, can be misapplied and abused depending on who is judging right from wrong (e.g., Jesus' crucifixion). Egregious violations of this kind of justice are happening now.

There is restorative justice which looks to return in some way what has been lost by individual or communal victims. It ranges from the merciful request for an apology from the perpetrators to the victims (e.g., from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa) to the vengeful demand for the death penalty.

Then, there is what is called distributive justice which is more of a mindset of a community, nation, or world to ensure resources and opportunities are fairly and equitably distributed to all. It focuses on welcome, fairness, righteousness, mercy, and generosity. It applies to all, but particularly the poor and vulnerable (Is 10:1-4), and frankly, I think, would go a long way to stem the need for the other two kinds of justice.

Another phrase for this third kind of justice? "The Kingdom of God."

Living the Word...

Biblical hospitality is not about throwing great parties or providing the best amenities. It, like the word justice, has lost a lot of its real meaning. The hospitable person is a righteous and just person, a person who knows the truth, who will not slander or harm another, who gives generously and cares for innocents. The hospitable person does not tolerate wrong-doing but strives to welcome and provide for all. Let's make sure our hospitality does not become a chore ("*Martha, Martha, you are worried about many things*"), but that as we sit at the feet of our teacher, we learn that to be hospitable, we must welcome all joyfully. And...we must be just.

Personal Reflections and Ideas ... _____

Mon, Jul 21: *"The LORD will fight for you; you have only to keep still"* (Ex 14:5-18). Moses' words remind me of what Jesus says to the disciples: *"When they deliver you up do not worry over what you might speak; for whatever you might say will be given to you"* (Mt 10:19). When push comes to shove, most of us find it almost impossible to quell our fears, to keep still and our mouths shut. **Provision: Pray for faith and courage.** I have such respect for people who continue their **nonviolent, prayerful** protests in the face of blatant injustice and increasing threats. Let's pray as the disciples did: *"Lord, increase our faith. Give us courage to entrust our lives to you."*

Tue, Jul 22: *"On my bed at night I sought him whom my heart loves—I sought him, but I did not find him"* (Sg 3:1-4). Have you ever read the Song of Songs? Some folks get the "willies" from the erotic language; the intimacy implied is just too personal. But consider our verse today: Do you feel a great longing for God? Do you look for God, but can't seem to find him? **Provision: Invite God into your "bed:"** OK, everybody settle down! Think about it this way: when we are asleep, we are vulnerable, we are open...defenseless, really. This is where we need to be to fully experience God. Why do we need to be open and vulnerable? Because God did just that for us on the cross. As we will read Saturday, God desires our love. God is already closer than the air we breathe. God wants us to feel that closeness at every moment. Open up and invite God in.

Wed, Jul 23: *On seeing [the manna], they asked, "What is this?"* (Ex 16:1-5, 9-15). **Provision: Don't ignore what God gives you.** We likely have a set idea of what God's grace is supposed to look like, or what we WANT grace to look like! But, like manna, grace may look like nothing you've ever seen before. Like manna, it may take time and work to process. Be open. God will nourish and feed you if you ask...even if you grumble! 😊

Thurs, Jul 24: *"To anyone who has, more will be given, and he will grow rich; from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away"* (Mt 13:10-17). The Spirit sometimes provides odd images as I reflect on a reading. In this instance, it is a sponge. A dry sponge takes time to absorb moisture while a damp sponge is ready to take on more. Scholars say the purpose here is for Jesus to remind the disciples to be humble given their privileged status (as damp sponges...stay with me here!) and to perhaps forewarn them that "dry sponges" may not be open to his message. But still, I struggle with what Jesus says: Is it the dry sponge's fault it hasn't been used? Do we just give up on it? What if it needs to go slowly to be able to absorb more? **Provision: Remember: the Spirit provides life-giving water.** I don't think Jesus means we give up on people who don't accept his message of love. But it's wise to remember it's not up to us. The Spirit is the wellspring, and drop-by-drop, she can soften the hearts of those to whom we minister so that more can be given, even to overflow!

Fri, Jul 25: *"[We are] always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body"* (2 Cor 4:7-15). This section from Paul's letter addresses what was (and still is) a commonly held assumption about God's action in our lives: God's favor is found in good things ("we are blessed"), and God's disfavor in suffering ("we are cursed"). Some question that Paul is a minister of God since he is being flogged and stoned and rejected at every turn. He tells us: if we are to be ministers in the name of Jesus, we accept both his life and his death. **Provision: Can you find blessing in suffering?** Go back to our reflection Wednesday. God's grace may come wrapped in a package that looks nothing like what we expect. Like Jesus, suffering can bless us with greater compassion and mercy. What we see as a curse might just be a blessing.

Sat, Jul 26: *The people answered, "All that the LORD has said, we will heed and do"* (Ex 24:3-8). *"If you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until harvest"* (Mt 13:24-30). The Israelites have committed to their side of the covenant, which they will violate repeatedly in short order, and which we defy in horrendous ways this very day. Jesus' story of the weeds and the wheat touches a nerve and begs the question, "Why, if God is omnipotent, does evil exist? Why is "the enemy" even allowed to be? Why does God "let" us be evil? **Provision: Obey God's word because of love, not slavery.** The best answer I've ever read to these questions is too long for this forum, but comes from *Jayber Crow*, a novel by the great poet Wendell Berry. He explains God does not want us to be slaves or to obey out of fear. God wants us to obey because we love God and know his word is love: *"We are too tightly tangled together to be able to separate ourselves from one another either by good or by evil. We are all involved in all and any good, and in all and any evil. For any sin, we all suffer. That is why our suffering is endless. It is why God grieves and Christ's wounds are still bleeding"* (pp 294-295).