

Provisions for the Journey to Pentecost

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Second Week of Easter, 2024



Sunday, April 7: *The community of believers was of one heart and mind...There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need (Acts 4:32-35).*

The early Christian communities tried their best to focus on equality, at least materially, fulfilling the missive from Deuteronomy 15:4: "There will be no person in your midst in need." I assume this "need" they refer to was defined by the basics: enough to eat and shelter for the night. Throughout communities and across the world, in countries rich and poor, this need still exists in our midst. We are still instructed by God to ensure all have adequate food and shelter. But what about other needs, the ones that are not always so obvious? The epidemic of loneliness and isolation, mental illness, fear, despair?

Today's Provision: "Feed and shelter" those in need. It can be a lot easier just to donate money or time to shelters and soup kitchens, but maybe not as easy to visit prisoners, to be present to those who live alone; to reach out to a neighbor or community member you know is suffering from depression or loss. Food and shelter are basic needs, and yet so are compassion and emotional support. Not all of us are trained to give the kind of support some folks require, but just your presence and your offer to assist them to find the care they need can work wonders. Of course, let us continue to feed and house those who lack these basic necessities, but let's not forget to reach out to help satisfy another's need for respect and love.

Monday, April 8: *Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:26-38).*

"To be innocent is to retain that space in your heart that once heard a still, small voice saying not your name so much as your nature; and the wherewithal to say again and forever your wordless but lucid, your untriumphant but absolute—yes. You must protect this space so it can protect you. You must carry it with you through whatever milieu in which you find yourself growing too comfortable: the seductive assurance of secularism, the hive-like certainties of churches, the mental mazes of theology...Something in you must remain in you, voiceless as you voice your deepest faith, doubt, fear, dreams..." (adapted from *My Bright Abyss* by Christian Wiman, 2013, p. 64).

Today's Provision: Be who God made you to be. If it were that easy! It is the blessed among us whose God-nature has been able to withstand the realities of life. We (and others) often judge us by our numbers—how many goals we score in the junior soccer league, the "chair" we sit in in the middle-school orchestra, our GPAs, SATs, MCATs, our salaries, our investments. And we get caught up comparing ourselves to others. Mary took a great risk to be the person God called her to be. She trusted God. Trust God to lead *you* to be the person God calls *you* to be.

Tuesday, April 9: *"The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (Jn 3:7-15).*

I am blessed to be writing this where a breeze is blowing in from a nearby body of water. It is a gentle breeze, at times, imperceptible, save for the motion of the leaves and fronds of the trees. It is easy to take such beauty and refreshment for granted. I think, too, about times when I take the movement of the Spirit for granted and fail to notice her gentle touch moving in the people around me.

Today's Provision: Be aware of the Spirit. Try to pay extra attention today to notice the Spirit's movement in yourself and in those around you. Perform and look for random acts of kindness. Unlike the wind, we know from whence the Spirit comes. Give thanks for these experiences and lead others to see and feel the Spirit as well.

Wednesday, April 10: *The angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison, and said, "Go and take your place in the temple area and tell the people everything about this life." ...then the captain and the court officers went and brought them, but without force, because they were afraid of being stoned by the people (Acts 5:17-26).*

The angel instructs them, "Speak all the words of this life" (literal translation). What are "all the words" the disciples use? Love God, love all God's creation. Have hope and faith. Share your blessings. Be a person of peace. Gracious words,

humble words, words the people long to hear. But then “the heat” shows up. The officers don’t want to cause a scene for fear the people will riot, but they have no reason to worry. The disciples go willingly and peacefully with the authorities. I’d say their nonviolent resistance speaks volumes about what “this life” really means.

Today’s Provision: Be a person of peace. There’s a story of a Vietnam soldier rebuking the Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, about his unswerving dedication to nonviolence. “You’re a fool,” said the man. “What if someone wiped out all the Buddhists and you were the last one left. Would you not try to kill the person who was trying to kill you, and in doing so save Buddhism?!” Thich Nhat Hanh answered patiently, “It would be better to let him kill me. If there is any truth to Buddhism and the Dharma it will not disappear from the face of the earth but will reappear when seekers of truth are ready to rediscover it. In killing, I would be betraying and abandoning the very teachings I would be seeking to preserve.” Is this not what Christ teaches as well? Anyone promoting violence in Christ’s name has it all wrong. Even when you and I react in a hateful manner, even to those who promote Christian violence, we have it wrong too. Let us pray to be people of peace.

Thursday, April 11: *“The LORD is close to the broken-hearted; and those who are crushed in spirit he saves”* (Ps 34).

“Part of the greatness of the Psalms, part of the source of its enduring appeal through the ages, is that it profoundly recognizes the bleakness, the dark terrors, the long nights of despair that shadow most lives, and against all this, evokes the notion of God’s caring presence that can and does reach out to the broken-hearted.” (Adapted from The Hebrew Bible, A Translation with Commentary, by Robert Alter)

Today’s Provision: Allow God’s mercy to comfort you. Even in these celebratory days of Easter, there are many among us—in our families and communities—whose spirits are crushed. Maybe you are one whose heart is broken. The joy of Easter can in fact make us feel worse: “Where is resurrection for me?” we ask. Empty platitudes of salvation do no good. Instead, let God’s caring presence be felt. If you are suffering, sit in silence and pray, “Come, Spirit of love and mercy!” If you are comforting another, be close. Your prayerful silence is a great channel for God’s merciful touch.

Friday, April 12: *One of his disciples, Andrew, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?”* (Jn 6:1-15)

Imagine this scene. I see a young boy, maybe 11 or 12—like Jesus when he stayed behind in Jerusalem! He has made his way to the front of the crowd, wanting to hear the teacher’s every word. He hears Jesus’ question to Philip about buying food for all the people, and he shyly brings up his meager offering. So innocent like a child, so trusting, so willing to share what he has.

Today’s Provision: Share what you have. Are you ever put off by the number of people in your life and community needing to be “fed?” People close to you as well as the millions upon millions around the world who live in hunger and fear. “What can I do?” you ask. “I have so little to offer.” The next time you question what difference you can possibly make, remember this young boy. Sit close to Jesus. Listen to him. Have faith. He will take your meager offering and make it into a gift that feeds more than you could ever imagine!

Saturday, April 13: *As the number of disciples continued to grow, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution* (Acts 6:1-7).

Remember our reflections from Sunday and Wednesday? The Apostles were to distribute provisions based on the individual’s need and were to teach everyone about living this new way of life. It doesn’t take long for old biases and ways of being to emerge. It seems, to borrow an image from *Animal Farm*, that all the widows are equal, but the Hebrew widows are more equal than the Hellenist widows (diaspora Jews who spoke Greek instead of Hebrew/Aramaic). If you read into the text, it is the Apostles themselves who are guilty of this behavior, so they choose seven Hellenist men to take over the daily distribution. Let’s hope they did a better job of including everyone!

Today’s Provision: Examine your biases. We all have them, and it’s best to admit it so we can be more aware when these biases sneak into the way we judge or treat others. Consider the Campaign for Human Development’s principle of “Subsidiarity” which takes solidarity to a deeper level. Not only are we to stand with those we serve, but those people need to be an integral voice at the table when decisions are being made that impact them. So, in our story, it would be the Hebrew and Hellenist widows, as equal participants with the men, who would decide how the distribution would be handled. Women as full partners, participating in decision-making. Gee, what a concept! And you know what? This would have made Jesus very happy indeed!!