

Provisions as We Become A New Creation

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings

Second Week of Easter 2021



Sunday, April 11: *The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common... There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale... and they were distributed to each according to need. (Acts 4:32-35)*

Let's focus on a few words from this passage: "possessions," "own," and "need." This reading is timely as my husband and I are knee-deep in the process of getting rid of stuff, the possessions we "own" that in reality, own us. Unfortunately, most of it is just that — stuff — not really of great value that we could sell for proceeds to give to those in need. Some can be donated and useful for others, but a lot is simply clutter that sucks up time, space, and energy.

The message of this reading goes far deeper and, if taken seriously, is much more uncomfortable than the idea of those "blessed" with lots of stuff merely getting rid of our excess. This reading calls into question the idea of ownership and how we allow what we possess to define us. Clearly, there is not "one heart and mind" among Christians in my country! Would I, would you be willing to sell what you have to share based on the need of others in the community?

Today's Provision: Look around your life and your heart. What do you own, and conversely, what owns you? What do you define as basic needs and human rights that all people deserve? Does your life align with that definition? It's easy for me to get overwhelmed by the enormity of need, and yet I must practice what I preach. Most of us individually only have enough power to take small steps, but those steps count. And added together, those of us with one mind and heart can make a difference. Perhaps it right there -- with our minds and hearts -- that we need to start.

Monday, April 12: *Why do the nations rage and the peoples utter folly? The kings of the earth rise up, and the princes conspire together against the LORD and against his anointed: "Let us break their fetters and cast their bonds from us!" He who is throned in heaven laughs; the LORD derides them. (Ps 2)*

I don't know. I don't think God laughs at our rage and folly or derides us or wants us "shattered like an earthen dish." God loves us. I think God cries.

Today's provision: Comfort God. When I was a kid, I was taught (NOT by my parents, thank goodness) that every time I sinned, I was like the soldiers who pounded the crown of thorns deeper into Jesus' head. I don't recall it ever being mentioned that when I did good things, I was like Simon of Cyrene, helping Jesus with his burden. Some theologians might cringe at this provision: God is omnipotent and doesn't need our comfort. Or, as we read in Matthew 25, perhaps God does. Comfort God today by being loving and gentle with God's creatures and creation, especially those in most need of comfort.

Tuesday, April 13: *Jesus said to Nicodemus: "You must be born from above. 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." Nicodemus said to him, "How can this happen?" (Jn 3:11-18)*

If I ever get around to writing a book, I might focus on Scripture characters like Nicodemus and other actors who get panned because they are considered weak or cowardly or even villainous. Nicodemus first comes to Jesus under the cover of night. It took great courage for him to do that. He speaks up for Jesus' right under the law to be heard, but gets skewered by his fellow Pharisees and accused of being ignorant (Jn 7:50-52). That, along with his participation in caring for Jesus' body after his death (Jn 19:39-40) likely led, if not to his dismissal, then to a greatly diminished status in the community to which he had dedicated his life. Nicodemus was open, willing to learn something new even at the risk of losing his status and livelihood. I see several courageous representatives of my faith community doing the same thing today. I ask myself, "What risks am I willing to take to be true to the wind of the Spirit blowing through my life?"

Today's Provision: Pay attention to where the Spirit is leading you. Sometimes, it seems much easier to go through life not questioning, not really paying attention to the signs God offers us. An unexamined life may not be worth living, but as life gets more complex, it is tempting to shrug our shoulders and avoid as much risk as we can. The past year has offered us time to reflect, time to procrastinate, or both. It's time now to start paying attention. Where is the Spirit leading you?

Wednesday, April 14: *"The captain and the court officers went and brought (the Apostles), but without force, because they were afraid of being stoned by the people. (Acts 5:17-26)*

The only way the officers could bring the Apostles in "without force" is for the disciples to go willingly. They remember Jesus' warning: *"Those who take the sword will perish by the sword."* (Mt 26:52) The disciples model themselves after Christ, even in the face of their own imprisonments and eventual deaths.

Today's Provision: Be peaceful. I write about this a lot because frankly, I struggle with it. I often feel anger or defensiveness rise in an alarming manner when I'm confronted by someone who holds a different moral or political stance. But as a Christian, I am called to compassionate response and peaceful resistance, to model myself after Christ and the early disciples. This is an essential and timely message. "Help me, Lord, to model your peace."

Thursday, April 15: *"We must obey God rather than men."* (Acts 5:27-33)

"God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God and God in them." Anything that comes from God comes from love. Anything that is not of love is not of God. If we believe that each soul is made in God's image and if we believe that faith is a gift from God, how can we ever judge any one person based on how God created them?

Today's Provision: Obey God. We are not talking about behavior here. Civil laws are needed, ones based on a just and fair balance between the dignity of every human being, their individual rights, and the common good. Any laws or customs structured to oppress people because of their God-given race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or belief system — any law not based in love is not of God. We will not be judged on how well we followed the rules of men. We will be judged on how well we have loved.

Friday, April 16: *"Have nothing to do with these men, for if this endeavor is of human origin, it will destroy itself. But if it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them; you may even find yourselves fighting against God."* (Acts 5:34-42)

The Pharisee, Gamaliel, advises his fellow members of the Sanhedrin to be patient and see what becomes of the Apostles. We know their patience with his advice didn't last too long! When we're trying to make decisions or discern God's will, it takes patience, a virtue in very short supply these days! We want immediate answers, so some may choose to follow the easiest path without any consideration, or conversely, ignore an established path completely.

Today's Provision: Be patient. Remember Jesus' great advice: *"By their fruits you will know them."* (Mt 7:16) Fruit does not appear overnight. It takes time, patience, and attention, and the more important the decision, the more patience is required. If a decision or a person or a group is of God, their fruits will be good from beginning to end, and will endure. And also, as if we need reminding: fighting against God is always a losing proposition! 😊

Saturday, April 17: *The Twelve called together the community of the disciples and said, "It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to serve at table."* (Acts 6: 1-7)

I have a bit of a beef with the Apostles here. "Do you remember what Jesus said after he washed your feet during the Passover meal a few months ago? You are supposed to do that for others, right?" "What about 'The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.' Remember that?"

The first stirrings of clericalism? It didn't take long. I understand they have a huge job to do, but the higher they stand above the crowds, the further away they get from doing as the Lord commanded. The word of God is paramount, so important it should be preached not so much in words but in deeds.

Today's Provision: Keep it real. This tendency for priests and ministers to put themselves above the people of God is not just a problem for the ordained. The same issue arises among anyone whose role involves serving others, either in a career or as a volunteer. The power dynamic in the "have/have not" scenario — and it doesn't matter what the "currency" is: youth, health, knowledge, money, etc. — can get in the way of our treating one another with respect. And interestingly, it can go both ways. Being aware of our assumptions and expectations can help keep us honest and real as we enter into any relationship, especially when we are serving God's people.

Take a look today at the different relationships in your life. Are you able to detect how the power dynamic plays out? Are you a servant-leader or one who wishes to be served? Are your relationships well-balanced or could they use some correction? Be honest with yourself and with others. See if you can find of place of equity where each person is treated with the dignity and respect due all of God's children.