

Provisions for the Journey

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Second Week of Easter 2022



Sunday, April 24: *Many signs and wonders were done among the people at the hands of the apostles...None of the others dared to join them, but the people esteemed them. Yet more than ever, believers in the Lord, great numbers of men and women, were added to them. (Acts 5:12-16)*

"No one dared to join them..." Why? Fear perhaps? Feelings of unworthiness? We learn many believers were added to the ranks of the "The Way." Would joining the apostles constitute too much of a risk? Did the apostles welcome others to join them in Solomon's portico, or was it already an exclusive club? And really...is it ok just to be "a believer in the Lord?"

Today's Provision: Live what you believe. This is at the heart of many theological debates: Are we justified by faith or by works or by some combination thereof? Lived out in real life, I'm not sure many of us think about this on daily basis but it's worth some consideration. Having faith, truly believing in the Lord doesn't give us carte blanche to live the way we want or in opposition to Jesus' teachings. You can't say you believe in something if you are not willing to live according to those beliefs. Spend some time today considering how your life reflects belief in Jesus Christ.

Monday, April 25: *For you have said, "My kindness is established forever;" in heaven you have confirmed your faithfulness. (Ps 89) "...this is the true grace of God. Remain firm in it." (1 Pt 5:5-14)*

Throughout the Easter season, many readings focus on the faithfulness and trustworthiness of God and God's promise, and for good reason. If we put ourselves in the disciples' sandals, the threats loom large. Jesus is no longer with them. They are on their own. We might think, "Well, it should be easy for them to remain firm in faith. After all, they have seen the risen Lord!" Then we look at our own experience. We claim to believe the Lord is risen. I hope we all have experienced Christ active in our lives. It's easy to "see" Jesus present in good times, even in the challenging, heady times when we are true to our witness. But what about the times when we can't seem to find him anywhere. What about the times when our lives are threatened, when hope is hard to see?

Today's Provision: Look for the promise in scripture. As you read scripture this week (and every day for that matter), look for references to God's promise, God's faithfulness to the covenant, God's trustworthiness. We've discussed this in the past: we claim "I believe IN God...I believe IN Jesus Christ." But do you believe God? Do you trust Jesus? Do you believe God's promise? Just like the disciples of old, we need to be reminded of and strengthened every day by that promise, particularly in times of trial. If you are going through difficult times, pray the Psalms with feeling and emotion. If your struggles these days are lighter, thank God and pray God will strengthen the millions in our world who are so low on hope today.

Tuesday, April 26: *"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)*

Nicodemus comes to Jesus under the cover of darkness. What does Jesus teach him? Like the wind of nature which we tend to overlook unless it slaps us in the face, the Spirit is always with us, even when she is still. We need awareness to hear her message and feel her on our skin and in our souls. The Spirit, like the wind, is available to everyone to feel and hear. We don't need to understand something to recognize its existence and impact on our lives... like love. The Spirit is love. Let us awaken to her presence and be willing to acknowledge her in the light.

Today's Provision: Be aware of the Spirit. One common thread found in every spiritual tradition is the importance of awareness, of being present to the moment at hand. But if your "awareness" comes from the media then you have a big problem; I think it is the cause of the mental health crisis in the world today. "The Sacrament of the Present Moment" has nothing to do with what we absorb online. We will not find true and lasting peace hidden in the apps on our phone — even the spiritual ones. The Light of God's promise is always present even though it might be hidden from our eyes. Come to know that truth in the moment you are living right here and right now and you will find the true peace you seek.

"Nay, rather, it is as the light which people see not while it is obscured among the clouds, till the wind comes by and sweeps the clouds away." (Job 37:21)

Wednesday, April 27: *"For everyone who does evil things hates the light and does not approach the light, for fear his deeds will be exposed; But whoever acts in truth approaches the light, so that his deeds might be made manifest—that they have been worked in God."* (Jn 3:16-21, literal Greek translation)

I like this translation. It is more hopeful than the one from the lectionary I use: *"For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light... But whoever lives the truth comes to the light..."* Not many of us live the truth every day. We sin, sometimes grievously. But that doesn't mean we are not able to come towards the light. God is always inviting us to return for forgiveness. Don't live in fear. Act in truth. Approach the Light.

Today's Provision: Seek forgiveness. Like in the story of Adam and Eve, we may try to hide from God in our naked sinfulness. (Maybe that story is exactly what keeps us from admitting our sins!) We are afraid God will banish us from the garden, so we despair and turn away. But through Jesus, we learn of the mercy of God and the prodigal, extravagant nature of God's love. Whatever your faith practice, go to God and admit your sins. Allow the light of love and mercy to wash over you. Let God work in you.

Thursday, April 28: *Peter and the Apostles said in reply, "We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:27-33) "The one who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of earthly things. But the one who comes from heaven is above all....For the one whom God sent speaks the words of God. He does not ration his gift of the Spirit."* (Jn 3:31-36)

In the verse from Acts, Peter is speaking before the Sanhedrin. The second verse appears to be spoken by John the Baptist. The messages are similar. John, it seems, is talking about himself as "the one who is of the earth." He preaches on earthly things like sin and repentance, just like the elders preach on the 613 commandments in the Torah (*mitzvot*). But "the one whom God sent speaks the words of God"...words of salvation and mercy, not dismissing the Law but teaching us what it means to live the Law in love.

Today's Provision: Obey God: Love. It may seem easier to just follow "the rules," but there's a subtle problem with that. It may give some a false sense of security or even control. It can keep us from relying on our own consciences to make decisions that might appear to contradict the customs and rule of the law. God's law is to love. If you are struggling with a decision that causes you conflict, ask yourself: What action is the most loving to all involved?

Friday, April 29: *"If I but trust to see the Lord's goodness in the land of the living—Hope for the Lord! Let your heart be firm and bold, and hope for the Lord."* (Ps 27, Hebrew translation)

Commentary from Robert Alter: *"This last exhortation...begins by affirming trust in God and reiterates that hopeful confidence, but the trust has to be asserted against the terrors of being overwhelmed by implacable enemies."* (The Hebrew Bible, Volume 3, p.79, emphasis added; WW Norton & Company)

What are the "implacable enemies" that threaten to overwhelm you? Globally, we see lots of them: the pandemic, oppressors waging war, tribal violence, gang violence, those whose greed is destroying the earth and the impacts thereof. Perhaps your enemies are more personal: addiction, depression, anxiety, serious illness, grief. But there's an interesting nuance in this verse. Enemies can terrorize, but do we allow our hope and trust in God to be overwhelmed by them as well?

Today's Provision: Remember the words of Psalm 22. *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* Of course, these are also Jesus' words from the cross. Some might consider these words to indicate a "dark night of the soul," but take note: Jesus still invokes God. He believes God hears him. Even though it seems God has left them alone, the psalmist and Jesus know that is not the case. Their hope and trust in God remain against the terror they face. Pray with this psalm anytime you feel overwhelmed by great sorrow. *"...when he cried out to God, God heard."*

Saturday, April 30: *The sea was stirred up because a strong wind was blowing....they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they began to be afraid. He said to them, "It is I. Do not be afraid."* (Jn 6:16-21)

This gospel scene has been depicted, I'd guess, by hundreds of artists. The images I have seen show Jesus walking ever so lightly upon the rough waters. I like to imagine this is how Jesus walked upon the earth as well so as not to disturb it. He respected his Father's great creation and took pains to treat it gently.

Today's Provision: Tread lightly. *"Through life, I want to walk gently. I want to treat all of life – the earth and its people – with reverence. I want to remove my shoes in the presence of holy ground. As much as possible, I want to walk in peace. • I want to walk lightly, even joyfully, through whatever days I am given. I want to laugh easily. I want to step carefully in and out of people's lives and relationships. I don't want to tread any heavier than necessary. • And throughout life, I think I would like to walk with more humility and less anger, more love and less fear. I want to walk confidently, but without arrogance. I want to walk in deep appreciation. I want to be genuinely thankful for life's extravagant, yet simple, gifts – a star-splattered night sky or a hot drink on an ice-cold day. • If life is a journey, then how I make that journey is important. How I walk through life."* — Steve Goodier, author.

Walk today--wherever you are. In nature, on a busy city street. Tread lightly. Be grateful. Respect God's creation.