



The Word...

Elisha left him, and taking the yoke of oxen, slaughtered them;
he used the plowing equipment for fuel to boil their flesh,
and gave it to his people to eat.
Then Elisha left and followed Elijah as his attendant.
(1 Kgs 19:16b, 19-21)

When the days for Jesus' being taken up were fulfilled,
he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem...
"No one who sets a hand to the plow
and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God."
(Lk 9:51-62)

Pondering the Word ...

Moving ahead.

This theme is sprinkled throughout the readings this week. It is an apt one for us. Life has changed so much and while many may long to go back to "the way things were," it is time to move ahead with creativity and determination to a new and better future.

Elisha's life sounds pretty cushy for his time: a big team of well-trained oxen that are plowing what is likely a large plot of land. He destroys both the oxen and his plow which seems to be impractical at best. What are his beloved parents supposed to do now? And Jesus' comments about letting the dead bury their dead? You can almost hear the gasps at those shocking words!

In essence, these readings are about our priorities. Will we remain longing for the past? Or are we accepting the reality of the present in order to move ahead?

Living the Word...

I don't know about you, but as a person who likes control, I have found it hard to set my sights on a future that seems so uncertain. Mutating viruses, rampant and random gun violence, extreme weather, political upheaval. Sometimes I just want to stay huddled up in my house, relying on Zoom for contact with the outside world!

Jesus sets his sights on Jerusalem and moves ahead towards a future he knows looks very dim. We pray that ours is a "future filled with hope" (Jer 29:11), and as we work with and trust in God, that we can help bring about that hope-filled future.

As we read Scripture this week, I'll point out instances where we are called to move ahead. Take time to reflect on your own life and priorities. Acceptance and peace don't come from the "what ifs." They blossom and bear fruit in moving ahead from the "what is."

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Jun 27: *"When you see a thief, you keep pace with him, and with adulterers you throw in your lot."* (Ps 50) When I read this I thought, "That's what Jesus does!" He calls Levi and Zacchaeus -- tax collectors, considered thieves -- to follow him. He allows a woman of questionable reputation to bathe his feet, and refuses to condemn the woman caught in adultery. Of course he scandalizes the elders! **Reflection/Provision:** Jesus keeps company with sinners. He knows the importance of prayer to keep him strong in the face of sin so he can heal those caught in its web. While we may not be tempted by the sin we experience around us, we can fall prey to the sin of despair. Moving ahead in Jesus' name takes lots of prayer. Allow him to heal you as well.

Tue, Jun 28: *"You alone have I favored, more than all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your crimes."* (Am 3:1-8; 4:11-12) The Book of Amos does NOT rank as one of my faves. And this quote really bugs me. It brings back that little voice of pride within that says: "You should have known better!" Oh really? Yes, I'm blessed with a knowledge of God and I've experienced God's mercy, but it's prideful to think that knowledge makes me more "favored" or better than anyone else. **Reflection/Provision:** What does it mean to be a "chosen" people? It is not about God "liking" us any better. It's not self-righteousness. It's all about the responsibility that being chosen entails. And part of this responsibility is accepting our human frailty. We sin, we make mistakes. The best witness we can give as followers of Christ is not by accepting and enduring punishment as our lot, or beating ourselves up; it is prideful to think we control God that way. It's by standing up, dusting ourselves off, and giving praise to our merciful God who helps us as we move ahead.

Wed, Jun 29: *"In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, rise and walk."* Then Peter took him by the right hand and raised him up. (Acts 3:1-10) I love images in Scripture of those who have been healed being helped up by their healer. Elijah and the widow's son. Jesus with Jarius' daughter. Peter on several occasions with those he heals. It is an important aspect of our work with those who suffer—helping them get back up and move ahead to new life. **Reflection/ Provision:** I've mentioned the Ignatian Volunteer Corps of which I am a member. A lot of the work we do in the Baltimore area has to do with "accompaniment." It goes beyond acts of mercy to give a helping hand so individuals can get up or back on their feet, through outreaches such as job training and teaching English, facilitating social services and finding housing. The next time you're involved in doing God's work with the oppressed, take an extra step with them. Engage the person to whom you serve the food or give the bag of groceries. Consider an on-going service role that helps raise up those trying to move ahead.

Thu, Jun 30: *"Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home."* (Mt 9:1-8) What's the helping hand Jesus offers the paralytic? Empowerment. Jesus is, in effect, saying: "You can do this. I see in you that which you don't see in yourself." **Reflection/ Provision:** I never miss an occasion to talk about Jesus' ministry of empowerment, building self-esteem, believing in those to whom we minister to be agents of growth and change in their own lives. This is a particularly important part of the ministry of parenting. How will you empower others today?

Fri, Jul 1: *"I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."* (Mt 9:9-13) *"There are two kinds of people: the righteous who believe themselves sinners; and, the rest, who believe themselves righteous."* (Pascal) I think what Jesus really wants to say here is: "I did not come to call the UPTIGHT!" **Reflection/Provision:** Righteous people know themselves as sinners and hence, their need for God. It's the uptight who believe themselves to be better than others; hence, they miss out on the deep relationship with Christ found only in the realm of mercy. Pray with this today.

Sat, Jul 2: *"No one patches an old cloak with a piece of unshrunk cloth for its fullness pulls away from the cloak and the tear gets worse. Do not put new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined."* (Mt 9:14-14) A perfect bookend to our week about moving ahead. But I want to point out one other thing from this passage: Some may say, "Well, all we have to do is 'shrink' all this new stuff, these new ways of thinking so we can patch up the old." That leaves us wrapped in an old, battered cloak that will not keep us sheltered from the headwinds of change. It will not protect us. Only God can do that. **Reflection/Provision:** "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God." Traditions are important and good. They help bridge the generations and ground us in rich history. Narrowness of thinking and hardness of heart will not prepare us to move ahead, and indeed has been the source of great sinfulness in the past. Pray the Spirit will guide us to preserve what is good and discard the things that hold us back.