



The Word...

“Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites,
rebels who have rebelled against me; ... Hard of face and obstinate of heart
are they to whom I am sending you”
(from Ez 2:2-5).

“We are more than sated with contempt; our souls are more than sated
with the mockery of the arrogant [and] the proud”
(from Ps 123).

“A thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan,
to beat me, to keep me from being too elated”
(from 2 Cor 12:7-10).

They took offense at him. Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor
except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house.”
So, he was not able to perform any mighty deed there
(from Mk 6:1-6).

Pondering the Word ...

“Let us speak honestly, you and I, of the hard work faith can be. If it feels like a greeting card, we may not be doing our job. Faith takes us where we do not want to go, to be with those we do not want to meet, to do what we think we cannot do. It is not comfort achieved, but comfort given away” (From Hope as Old as Fire: A Spiritual Diary, by Steven Charleston, 2012, p.47).

Many of the readings this week speak of the difficult path one takes when one is given the role of a spokesperson for God. The prophets, the early disciples, and of course, Jesus himself, know the role they have accepted will not lead to an easy, comfortable life. The arrogant and the haughty, be they in government, industry, or religious institutions, will continue to be obstinate of heart, taking offense at, or even being violent towards, anyone who comes forward challenging the sins of the status quo.

Living the Word ...

Do you feel as I do these days? Sated, sick to the core by the contempt and the mockery of arrogant and proud leaders and those who preach hatred and discrimination in Jesus’ name? It is hard work to go up against the powers that be, and often, I find myself curling up in my “greeting card” faith, and like Jonah, running away from God’s call, using my weaknesses as an excuse rather than a sign of God’s strength. But I am called...you are called... like the prophets of old, like the disciples, like Jesus himself, to speak the truth aloud and peacefully, right where we are, in our “native places” of family, community, and country.

Let us focus on the words: *“Faith takes us where we do not want to go, to be with those we do not want to meet, to do what we think we cannot do.”* When was the last time I have been able to say, “Yes, I go, and I do what I think I am too weak or scared to do.” Look around. Where is God calling me today to use my voice, my vote, my very self, with its thorns and faults, to speak the truth?

Personal Reflections and Ideas ... _____

Mon, Jul 8: *"I [will] beguile her and lead her to the wilderness and speak to her very heart. I will give her from there her vineyards and the Valley of Achor an opening to hope, and she will sing out there as in the days of her youth"* (from Hos 2, Hebrew translation). I've used the Hebrew because of the beautiful nuance that in the wilderness, from the valley of trouble, God will give us "an opening to hope." **Provision: Look for your opening to hope.** When we seemingly have lost our way, God will often lead us deeper into the wilderness, stripped of comfort, to purify and cleanse us and set us on the right path. If you are in that desert right now, try not to fight it. Stay still. Be present and know God is with you. Ask the Spirit to show you the opening to hope God has planned for you.

Tue, Jul 9: *At the sight of the crowds, [Jesus'] heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd* (Mt 9:32-38). What did Jesus see when he looked at the crowds? If you have trouble imagining what the scene was like, look at pictures from Sudan: <https://static.independent.co.uk/s3fs-public/thumbnails/image/2016/02/14/15/South-Sudan-poverty.jpg>; from the US southern border: (<https://wallstreetviral.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Migrants-Held-In-Facilities-at-the-Southern-Border.jpg>); from Gaza: <https://media.gettyimages.com/id/1233048004/photo/topshot-palestinians-gather-at-the-beach-in-gaza-city-on-may-22-following-a-ceasefire-that.jpg?s=612x612&w=gi&k=20&c=BZKODDWZn39G5NjLa1ZsL4Xyh59Gzstdva1bqxIBETQ=>. Jesus didn't see a political party; he didn't see skin color or sexual orientation. He saw the poor and was moved deeply with compassion. So, what did he do? He sent out laborers. **Provision: Go forth to heal in Jesus' name.** The scope of poverty in the world can be another reason we curl up in our "greeting card" faith, but that is not at all what Jesus commands. What will you do today as a laborer in Jesus's chosen vineyard of the poor and oppressed?

Wed, Jul 10: *"Sow for yourselves justice, reap the fruit of piety; break up for yourselves a new field, for it is time to seek the LORD"* (Hos 10:1-3, 7-8, 12). I am not much of a gardener, but I know it takes lots of work to create a new flower bed. Imagine what it's like for a farmer to break up a new field! **Provision: Seek the Lord in a new way.** Are your old fields still bearing good fruit, not just for you but for others? Might it be time to try something new? God is always present, but it can be hard work to break ground on a new field. It might seem easier to go back to your old, worn-out fields. Don't give up. Begin to sow seeds of justice *"for it is time to seek the Lord."*

Thu, Jul 11: *"As you go, make this proclamation: 'The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons"* (Mt 10:7-15). I wonder what Jesus is doing while the disciples are out and about in Galilee. From the text, we gather their assignment is not an overnight trip. I like to think Jesus goes to visit Mom, maybe Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. He retreats to rest and pray. **Provision: Rest.** Those involved in ministry (and I hope we all look at our lives as such) often forget to take breaks. We might be hesitant to leave "our" ministries, forgetting ministry is never "ours." Jesus gives us an example of self-care, to step back and let others take the lead. Of course, the need for help and healing doesn't go away, so maybe we can't go off for a few weeks. But can we...will we ...allow ourselves time each day to rest with Jesus? Remember, that's exactly what he invites the disciples to do after they return! Jesus invites us to do the same. Rest.

Fri, Jul 12: *"Beware of men...When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak...For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit speaking through you"* (Mt 10:16-23). Yesterday, Jesus lists the material provisions the disciples are to leave behind as they begin their mission. As if that's not hard enough, today he tells them they are not to plan how to defend themselves in the face of accusations and persecutions! **Provision: Listen and trust in the Spirit.** Do you ever find yourself half-listening to someone while planning what wonderful thing you are going to say in response? I struggle with that all the time. See if you can pay attention and really listen today to whomever you encounter. Trust the Spirit will give you the right words to say in response.

Sat, Jul 13: *I heard the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send?" (Is 6:1-8). Provision: "Here I am," I said; "send me!" "I am there as Jesus sends out the [disciples] on mission to preach the Kingdom, to heal and cast out demons. What do I feel when I hear him call my name?... I say to him, "Don't send me. I am not worthy." I hear him say, "Do not be afraid. You are exactly the person I need"* (adapted from *Wellsprings*, by Anthony de Mello, 1986, p. 71).