



The Word...

“My brothers and sisters, show no partiality
as you adhere to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.
For if a man with gold rings and fine clothes comes into your assembly,
and a poor person in shabby clothes also comes in,
and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes
and say, “Sit here, please, ”
while you say to the poor one, “Stand there, ” or “Sit at my feet, ”
have you not made distinctions among yourselves
and become judges with evil designs?

Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters.

Did not God choose those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith
and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him?”

(Js 2:1-5).

Pondering the Word ...

Several years ago, I accompanied a young African American woman I knew to the Social Services office downtown in the city near where I live. She had a new baby and was looking to procure temporary cash assistance while she tried to find childcare and get herself on her feet. As I sat in the waiting room and played with the baby, I noticed I was the only white person there, staff or clientele. I could hear the case workers in the back talking with the clients.

After some time, the young woman came back into the waiting room in tears, unable to negotiate the system. So, I gathered up the baby and went back to meet the case worker. Within 5 minutes, she received approval, and we were on our way. And I was keenly aware and dumbfounded how differently I was talked to and treated. This is way before the term “white privilege” had made it into the common vernacular, but it pained me to no end to see such preferential treatment, seemingly due to nothing but my race.

I recalled this episode when I read the passage today from James’ letter. I think all of us make unconscious (or at times, very conscious) judgments from time to time, choosing who will sit next to on the bus or airplane, addressing those who appear to be “better” because of how they are dressed or how they talk, staying close to familiar faces rather than engaging someone new.

The next time you encounter a situation like this, pray that Jesus will grant you the grace he bestows on the deaf man today: “*Ephphatha!*” – “*Be opened!*”

Living the Word ...

Who do you judge? We hear this week: “Judge not that ye be not judged.” I’ve heard this quote used to justify awful and dangerous behavior. There is a difference between making good judgments for ourselves and passing judgment on another. It is particularly important that we teach our kids this nuance. Pray this week to be open, aware of times when you cast judgment on someone. See if you can be willing to come out of your comfort zone to offer at least a smile and a hello to someone you might otherwise avoid.

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Sep 9: *"I ask you, is it lawful to do good on the sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?"* (Lk 6:6-11). Consider what Jesus is saying here. For him, refraining from healing this man on the Sabbath because of the law would be "evil." What's your opinion? Do you see the sin of omission that would be committed here if Jesus strictly adhered to the law rather than to the command to love? **Provision: What "laws" keep you from loving?** I am going to spend time in prayer with this one. I like to imagine I wouldn't ignore fulfilling a need in love because of a law but my conscience is pinging me to look deeper. I know there are times I have done just that. How about you?

Tue, Sep 10: *"Do not be deceived; neither fornicators nor idolaters... nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor robbers will inherit the Kingdom"* (1 Cor 6:1-11). *"Um...so, Paul: 'Jesus says, "Amen, I tell you that the tax-collectors and prostitutes are going before you into the Kingdom of God"'* (Mt 21:31). I know you wrote this 30 or so years before Matthew's Gospel was written, and you were a Pharisee, true to the Jewish law. I realize this mess you are addressing is a tangle of religious and secular law. But I'm afraid there are folks who read these words out of context as "gospel truth," forgetting Jesus' message of mercy." **Provision: Do you see any one as unredeemable?** I imagine most of us have a list with at least a few names! And this is a complex theological subject way beyond my paygrade. But I believe in a merciful God and my call is to show mercy as well. So, I try to pray for those on my list...those, that as a sinner, I have no right to judge. That is up to God.

Wed, Sep 11: *"So this is what I think best because of the present distress: that it is a good thing for a person to remain as they are"* (1 Cor 7:25-31). What's this "distress?" Lots of commentary on this: some think he is addressing the difficulties within the Corinthian community in regard to "carnal vs. spiritual" activity. Others suggest it is about the imminent coming of Christ; still others think it is a prophecy about persecution coming to Corinth as is has in Thessaly. Could be all of them, but let's not miss an important message he gives us: when you are in distress, you should avoid big decisions or changes. **Provision: Use Ignatian discernment.** In his spiritual exercises, St. Ignatius of Loyola advises we not make any decisions or go back on past decisions during a time of "desolation." This can be tough. When things aren't going well, we can be tempted to make big changes. Sometimes, it's unavoidable, so then we rely on the Spirit and trusted advisors to help us see clearly. If you are in distress, pray, *"Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble"* (Ps 91). Wait for the Spirit to guide you.

Thu, Sep 12: *"I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made; wonderful are your works. Probe me, God, and know my heart; try me...See if my way is crooked and lead me"* (Ps 139). Oh, the readings today are rich with lessons, but whenever Psalm 139 appears in the lectionary, I am compelled to refer to it. The second phrase I've quoted almost sounds like a challenge to God: "Try me. I can take it, God! Go ahead, investigate my heart and my mind, I'm not afraid!" But we hear in the next phrase more of a plea for help that God will show the psalmist where they are falling short. They are not afraid of what God will see, not because they are so sure of themselves, but because of God's great mercy. **Provision: Ask God to help you see.** The willingness to ask for God's help delights God! Don't ever think your heart needs to be in perfect condition to invite God in. Your willingness to be vulnerable and your openness to mercy is the only invitation God needs!

Fri, Sep 13: *"How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord, mighty God!"* (Lk 5: 33-39). Where is God's dwelling place? *"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?"* (1 Cor 6:19). So, if we believe as true: "A" (God's dwelling place is lovely) and "B" (our bodies are dwelling places for the Spirit of God), then, "C:" we are lovely! **Provision: Look at yourself with God's eyes.** i.e., look upon yourself with the eyes of love. Know you are lovely in God's sight. Work to improve upon those things that keep you from recognizing the God within. God looks upon you, as you are, with love!

Sat, Sep 14: *"But they flattered him with their mouths and lied to him with their tongues, though their hearts were not steadfast toward him, nor were they faithful to his covenant"* (Ps 78). None of us are saints. We preach but do not always practice what we preach. Yet, there are those in our midst—false prophets—who make their living this way. **Provision: Pay attention.** Anyone who invokes Christ's name but preaches and acts with malice and hate is a false prophet. Pay attention to those who preach Christ but whose hearts are not faithful to love.