



Come and See!

January 7, 2018

The Word...

Brothers and sisters:

You have heard of the stewardship of God's grace
that was given to me for your benefit,
namely, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation.

It was not made known to people in other generations
as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:
that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body,
and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

(Eph 3:2-3a, 5-6)

Pondering the Word ...

When you hear the word "stewardship," what comes to mind? When you hear the sermon this weekend at church is about stewardship, do you conveniently decide to go to another church or just sleep in? Many associate the word with fundraising and monetary support. But in the Bible, stewardship is used to describe a special relationship. The steward is an honored servant entrusted by the master to manage day-to-day affairs, finances, merchants, and other servants. So when Paul says he is a steward for God, we may be tempted to think of it as a business role. And given Paul's determined approach to evangelizing, we may not be too far off. Paul is a man with a mission!

But what Paul holds as gift is nothing short of God's grace, a grace available to all who are ready and willing to accept it; a grace Paul knows he is called to share with as many people as he can. No longer is God's grace only intended for one nation, one class of people. Great and powerful is Paul's knowledge of the mystery of God's all-welcoming grace and embrace, yet at the same time, precious and exquisite.

We are all entrusted as stewards...of our planet, our bodies, each other, and yes, our churches. But we are also honored to be stewards of the graced knowledge of Emmanuel, the mystery of God with and for all of us.

Living the Word...

In my church, the focus of our stewardship weekend is typically about sharing our talents. Indeed, we are the keepers of the gifts and talents God has given us, and we are to nurture and offer them to others as evidence of the great gift of God's grace.

What are the gifts you bring to the Christ Child today? Take time to reflect on and pray about what God sees as your gifts. Do you share them with others, either through church or some other charitable channel? Many of us discount our giftedness, thinking we don't have much to offer. Perhaps your gift is a ready smile, a willingness to help, your singing voice, a talent with finances, your patience and compassion. See how many times you can share your gifts this week. Just as with God's grace, the more you share your gifts, the more you will have!

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

Jan 8: *"Come to me heedfully. Listen, that you may have life."* (Is 55:1-11)

Today's lectionary for the Baptism of the Lord lists five options for the first reading, but this little line from Isaiah resonates with me, particularly as we enter into ordinary time. The seasons of Advent, Christmastide, Lent, and Easter focus our attention and invite us into deeper reflection, heeding the word of the Lord. But as we pack up the crèche and ornaments for another year, our focus tends to return to the ordinary yet still busy rhythms of life. That's why it's especially important for us to consciously enter the Lord's presence and listen to his word. Take a brief moment out of your day to listen to God. Let God grant you life in him.

Jan 9: *"What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him." His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee.* (Mk 1:21-28)

"His fame spread everywhere." Can you imagine what it would be like today? There'd be viral videos all over YouTube, Instagrams shared worldwide. You talk about fame! Surely we would all be willing to follow this man Jesus wherever he leads! Or would we? Would we be any different from the people of his time, excited and awestruck just as long as he is doing cool things like driving out demons and curing illnesses, but quick to turn on our heels the minute things get complicated? Do we find ourselves touched by media stories of people involved in social justice work but afraid or skeptical about venturing into that realm ourselves? Are we just enamored of Jesus or really willing to live life as he did?

Jan 10: *Samuel grew up, and the LORD was with him, not permitting any word of his to be without effect. Thus all Israel came to know that Samuel was an accredited prophet of the LORD.* (1 Sm 3: 1-10, 19-20)

We are inundated with words from voices that prattle on about inane subjects. My guess is the prophets of the Lord were people of few words, and that the words they did utter came from complete openness to God. We hear in this verse that none of Samuel's words were to be without effect. So how come, then, the people ignored his warnings and advice? Oh, the same reason we ignore the warnings of experts on exercise, screen time, eating right, etc. The same reason we hear Jesus' words about giving up our idols and following him, caring for the poor and hungry, welcoming the stranger, and then go out and do exactly what we want anyway. The words of the prophets and of Jesus are powerful words, words that can affect change in us and in our world, but only if we accept them with open ears and hearts. Think about Jesus' words that are hard for you to accept. Pray with those words and ask to be enlightened as to how you can practice them today.

Jan 11: *"Why has the LORD permitted us to be defeated today by the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the LORD from Shiloh that it may go into battle among us and save us from the grasp of our enemies."* (1 Sm 4:1-11)

The Israelites are getting creamed by the Philistines and wonder why God is not with them. "Oh silly us," they say. "We forgot to bring the Ark. Surely, God exists there (even though we've been totally ignoring him in our lives)!" Yes, God is all-powerful. Jesus can work miracles any time he wants. But the key to how that power, those miracles impact my life has to do with my faith that they can. The real sanctuary is in my heart.

Jan 12: *Samuel delivered the message of the LORD to those who were asking for a king: "He will take your sons and assign them to his chariots and horses...He will take the best of your fields, vineyards, and olive groves, and give them to his officials; He will tithe your crops and give the revenue to his eunuchs and his slaves. When this takes place, you will complain against the king whom you have chosen, but on that day the LORD will not answer you."* (1 Sm 8:4-7, 10-22a)

The moral: "Be careful what you ask for--you just might get it." Israel wants a human king to do for them all the things human kings do for their neighbors: defend their property, prepare them for war, lead them into battle...all that nice stuff. The analogy to the nationalist movements we see happening around the world is striking. We cannot ignore this message. Be careful what you ask for, what you vote for, what it is you think you really want. It may come with moral and monetary costs you may find too difficult to bear.

Jan 13: *"The LORD anoints you commander over his heritage. You are to govern the LORD's people Israel."* (1 Sm 9: 1-4, 17-19) *As he passed by, he saw Levi sitting at the customs post. Jesus said to him, "Follow me."* (Mk 2:13-17)

Saul is out searching for his father's missing livestock. Matthew is sitting at the customs post lining his pockets. God's call may come when we least expect it. Are you ready to follow?