



The Word ...

David and Abishai found Saul lying asleep ...Abishai whispered:
“God has delivered your enemy into your grasp. Let me nail him to the ground;”
But David said, “Do not harm him, ... “I will not harm the LORD’s anointed”
(1 Sm 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23).

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you...
Do to others as you would have them do to you”
(Lk 6:27-38).

Pondering the Word ...

Well, these readings are quite timely as we prepare for Lent. In the OT reading, David encounters Saul as he did a few chapters earlier, and again refrains from taking his life. (Why? Is he afraid of punishment for slaying God’s anointed, or is it real mercy? Either way, Saul gets to live another day.)

David knows that if the situation was reversed, he’d be a dead duck twice over. He treats Saul as he would have Saul treat him, but he has no illusions that’s going to change Saul, so David is still on the run for his life. But he trusts God: *“The Lord will reward each for their justice and faithfulness.”*

Luke’s Gospel today is chock-full of things to reflect on, but let’s focus on this idea of *“doing to others as you would have them do to you.”* Anyone in a long-term relationship knows that, if taken too literally, this can be a recipe for conflict. The way one person wants to be treated in any given situation may be different from what the other would want: one might want to be embraced during a time of trouble; the other, left alone. In communities, this can also be a source of tension, and even more so when we interact with people whose lives are different from ours, (e.g., the poor, those who face bigotry, etc.) And it doesn’t even touch on those we might consider our “enemies,” whose values and goals are not aligned with ours.

But it comes down to this: How do YOU want to be treated? With dignity and respect for my uniqueness as a child of God, with acceptance that what I desire might be different from what you desire. When Jesus encountered others, he often asked, “What would you have me do for you?” He listened, he did not assume to know. He did not condone evil, but he was good to all: friend, stranger, and enemy alike.

Living the Word ...

I don’t like the word “enemy,” but I feel so much animosity right now towards US government leaders (and unelected influencers) and the wrecking ball they’ve taken to humanitarian organizations and to medical and research funding, not to mention the elimination of thousands of government jobs, and the heartless treatment of immigrants. Their values and goals have nothing in common with mine. I know righteous anger is part of my Christian witness, but hate is not. So, this Lent, I will try to avoid hate, to *“seek to understand rather than to be understood”* as St. Francis instructs us, knowing it will not change those who foster hate. Use this week to consider how you will witness to the truth this Lent while resisting hate, both in how it manifests in society and how it can manifest in our hearts.

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Feb 24: *"Before all things else, wisdom was created; and prudent understanding, from eternity. The word of God on high is the fountain of wisdom and her ways are everlasting"* (Sir 1:1-10). (The Book of Sirach is not found in the Masoretic text and is typically in the Apocrypha of Protestant bibles.) My first reaction to this verse was, "Uh, Lady Wisdom, where have you gone and can you come back soon?!" Several of the OT readings and the Psalms this week talk about praying for wisdom and understanding. **Provision: Let's pray together!** Many in the US are feeling confused and unmoored right now, so let's commit to praying today to the Spirit—Lady Wisdom—that she will lead us to a greater understanding of God's plan and to discern God's call to each of us as we navigate these stormy waters. *"I do believe. Help my unbelief!"* (Mk 9:24).

Tue, Feb 25: *"If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all"* (Mk 9:30-37). In 1970, an engineer and mathematician, the late Robert K. Greenleaf, published an essay called, "The Servant as Leader." Based on over 30 years of experience with AT&T, he developed a philosophy of management on the premise that the best and most effective leaders are servants first: *"A servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong. While traditional leadership generally involves the accumulation and exercise of power by one at the 'top of the pyramid,'...the servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first, and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible"* (<https://www.greenleaf.org/what-is-servant-leadership/>). **Provision: Check out this website.** Then, compare what you see happening in your country to what you learn. Compare Jesus' leadership to what you read. (I'm thinking we flood the US Congress with emails including this link. Maybe they'll get the hint!)

Wed, Feb 26: *"There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us"* (Mk 9:38-40). Oh, I really need to talk to Jesus about this one, particularly the last line. This may have applied in his day, but I don't think it is the way things are today. There are plenty of people out there who are not "against" Jesus but are not willing to speak out against evil. So many of us defer to the status quo. And unfortunately, there are some today who claim to speak for Jesus, but whose words and actions—so called "mighty deeds"—are antithetical to all Jesus taught. **Provision: Stand up against the status quo. Speak out against those who hijack Jesus' name for their own purposes.** Come together in community to find the courage to take a stand for what you know is right.

Thu, Feb 27: *"Everyone will be salted with fire.... Keep salt in yourselves and you will have peace with one another"* (Mk 9:41-50). The first thing that came to mind was a package of ghost-pepper salt I have in the pantry—now, that's being salted with fire! 😊 In ancient times, consuming salt together signified an alliance, the binding nature of a covenant. This covenantal use is discussed in Lev 2:13 and in Nm 18:19, so Jesus is likely referencing the importance and value of the new covenant he is making with his followers. Fire represents the trial of purification, perhaps a warning to his followers that maintaining this covenant will at times be painful. It surely will be for Jesus. **Provision: Keep the value and promise of the covenant within you.** We all have our own covenant with God, but our faith can be tested by trials we endure. Through those fires, our faith is purified and refined; our covenant is made stronger. Keep "the salt"—the confidence in our covenant—in mind today as you encounter things that can lead to sin and discord with one another.

Fri, Feb 28: *"Keep away from your enemies; be on your guard with your friends...A faithful friend is a life-saving remedy... For he who fears God behaves accordingly, and his friend will be like himself"* (Sir 6:5-17). It's that darn word "enemy" again! Sirach's advice on choosing friends wisely is exponentially more important now because of the thousands of online "friends" available to us! But this verse leads me to reflect: do I really want all my friends to "be like myself?" I think this is a big part of the problem. We exist in echo chambers; we keep away from people with different opinions. We don't want to get into heated arguments, so we keep to "our own kind." **Provision: Examine the word "enemy."** Well, this is a strange prayer exercise. Sirach's message here has to do with avoiding people who will lead you away from God. One way to eliminate "enemies" is not to have any. I think that's what Jesus did. But there are also those pesky "enemies" within: my need to be right, impatience, close-mindedness, etc. Reflect on the enemies in your life. How can you make peace with them?

Sat, Mar 1: *"Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these."* (Mk 10:13-16). A Native American story: Young braves come riding in from a hunt to find the great Warrior Chief sitting on the ground playing with little children. Aghast, they ask him why he is doing such a thing. He answers, "They have just come from the Great Mystery to which I will soon return. We have a lot in common." From young children, we can relearn joy in simple things, honesty without pretense, wonder and amazement, acceptance of differences, forgiveness. **Provision: Become like little children.** When you wake tomorrow, imagine you are seeing and hearing everything around you through the eyes and ears of a child. Taste and smell and touch things for the first time. Give glory to God for the amazing gifts of your life and our world.

(Next week, we begin Lenten "Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem.")