

Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings

Holy Week 2018



Sunday, March 25: *Those passing by reviled him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself by coming down from the cross." (Mk 15:1-39)*

"For a while again I couldn't pray. I didn't dare to. In the most secret place of my soul I wanted to beg the Lord to reveal himself in power. I wanted to tell him that it was time for his coming...why didn't he come in glory with the angels and lay his hands on the hurt children and awaken the dead soldiers and restore the burned villages and the blasted and poisoned land?...But thinking such thoughts was a dangerous as praying them. I knew who had thought such thoughts before: 'Let Christ the king of Israel descend now from the cross that we may see and believe.'" (from Jaybor Crow, by Wendell Barry, 2001, Counterpoint Publishers)

Today's Provision—Faith in Action: How many times I have had these thoughts: "Why does God 'permit' such pain and suffering? When, Lord, will you make all this stop?" Am I just like those skeptics on Good Friday, demanding Jesus prove himself? Where then does my faith come into play? Where then am I challenged instead to find Christ in my brothers and sisters, particularly those who suffer poverty, oppression, rejection? Wendell Barry ends this provocative passage with the words, *"For any sin, we all suffer. That is why our suffering is endless. It is why God grieves and Christ's wounds still are bleeding."* What will I do today to ease Christ's suffering by easing the suffering of another?

Monday, March 26: *One of you will betray me. "...Master, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I hand the morsel after I have dipped it." So he dipped the morsel and took it and handed it to Judas." (Jn 13:21-33; 36-38)*

Jesus basically tells John who's going to betray him. Why doesn't John jump up and confront Judas, or get Peter to do it? Why doesn't someone follow Judas when he leaves the room? Are they just so confused? Maybe the Passover meal must proceed with such prescribed rules that they don't want to disturb the flow. Or they think it's not their place, or they are afraid. What would I have done? What keeps me from stepping in when I see trouble brewing?

Today's Provision—Have Courage: By the Last Supper, the die is cast. God's will will be done. We don't know why the other disciples don't stop Judas. These days, we hear, in the wake of some violent tragedy, people "saw it coming" from the perpetrator. In some cases, they did speak out ahead of time and their warnings weren't heeded. But just as often, people kept their anxious thoughts to themselves. "It's not my business. I could get sued. I don't want to get involved. Someone else will deal with it." It takes great courage to intervene when our neighbor's life is in danger, but what about when we witness someone, perhaps from another culture, being bullied or harassed? Do we gently accompany that person or do we, like the priest and the Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan, just pass on the other side of the road? Clearly, many situations require professional intervention, but there are basic techniques we can learn to diffuse everyday difficulties before they go any further. Some jurisdictions provide training, and there are several websites that can guide you as well. *"Don't stand by idly when your neighbor's life is threatened."* (Lv 19:16)

Tuesday, March 27: *"So Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." (Jn 13:27)*

Have you ever really thought about this exchange between Judas and Jesus? This passage gives rise to a scholarly suggestion that Judas was the only apostle Jesus could rely on to help him fulfill the Scriptures and his destiny. We don't know, but you do have to wonder what transpired between these two men at that last meal together.

Jesus washed Judas' feet—what was that moment like? What was each man thinking and feeling during that sacred, intimate encounter? What was in Judas' mind and heart as he hurried away (at Jesus' urging) to play the role he was to play? Did he imagine he was forcing Jesus' hand or that he was doing what was best for the nation of Israel?

Today's Provision—Know our Minds and Hearts: There's an expression I've seen on novelty items—usually associated with chocolate—that says, "If you're going to sin, sin boldly," clearly a play on Martin Luther's oft-misinterpreted quote: *"Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly."*

Too often, we are unaware of the sins we commit, or worse, we justify them in the name of some "higher" cause by supplanting God's will with our own. By "sinning boldly," Luther is suggesting we pay attention, that we be aware of those times we don't live up to what Christ expects of us (sins of omission), cognizant of the things for which we need forgiveness. But we don't, like Judas, despair of our sin, but rejoice even more boldly in God's mercy and salvation. Each night, look back on the day and ask: "Where did I listen to and fulfill your will today?" Give thanks for the gift of grace. "Where did I miss the mark today?" Ask for forgiveness and commit to do better. And rejoice!

Wednesday, March 28 *"Lord, in your great love, answer me. Insult has broken my heart, and I am weak...the insults of those who blaspheme you fall upon me."* (Ps 69)

"Oh, do those insults and blasphemy really break my heart? How about when I am the one uttering them, betraying you by taking your name in vain or failing to stand up to those who daily, hourly make a mockery of you and your sacrifice? It's easy for me to look with contempt at those in religious or political power who use your name for their own profit or perversion, but am I as willing to look in the mirror and see my own guilt? In your great love, Lord, answer me. Let me see the truth of my own failings so that I may repent and return to you."

Today's Provision—Face the Truth: The God I know is merciful God who has great love for all his children. This is not the same God I thought I knew when I was younger--that God was a punishing, vengeful God. I thank God every day for revealing to me his true self in the person of Jesus Christ. This gift of mercy has made me more willing to face my failings head on. If you struggle with your sins and unworthiness, turn to God and ask for the gift of knowing in a very real and personal way his great mercy. Face the truth...about yourself and about God.

Holy Thursday, March 29: *"Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'"* (1 Cor 11:23-26)

What does Jesus mean when he tells us, "Do this in remembrance of me?" The late Sulpician biblical scholar Fr. Addison Wright said that in ancient Semitic cultures, the word translated "memory" or "remembrance" was not so much about remembering a past event as it was about making the event real in the present. Another scholar, Rev. Dr. Joe Jensen explains: "For Jews celebrating the Passover, it is not reflecting on what God did back then (in Egypt) but on the experience of that event now." He refers to Deuteronomy 5:3: *"The LORD, our God, made a covenant with us at Horeb; not with our ancestors did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, all of us who are alive here this day."* Rev. Jensen continues: "What gets translated as, 'Do this in memory of me,' in the minds of Jesus' disciples hearing him speak would be, 'Do this to make me present.'"

Today's provision—Make Christ Present: Do we see the celebration of the Eucharist or Holy Communion as a commemoration of an event two millennia ago or it is real for us today? What did it mean to the disciples gathered around the table that night? How did it change their view of the Passover? The meaning of Jesus' words that night probably didn't become real to them until they experienced his suffering and their own fear; his resurrection and their own joy; and finally, the gift of his Spirit on Pentecost and their own call: 'Go out and make disciples. Make me present in the world today.' This is our call as well. If we just leave Jesus behind at our communal table, we've missed the whole point. How will you make Christ present today?

Good Friday, March 30: *Oppressed and condemned, he was taken away, and who would have thought any more of his destiny?* (Is 52:13-53:12)

When reading this verse from Isaiah, the Spirit led me to recall a beautiful Pueblo blessing that is used when someone is departing, either on a long journey or on their final journey. I can imagine Jesus saying these words as well:

*"Hold on to what is good even if it is a handful of earth.
Hold on to what you believe even if it is a tree which stands by itself.
Hold on to what you must do even if it is a long way from here.
Hold on to life even when it is easier letting go.
Hold on to my hand even when I have gone away from you."*

Today's Provision—Hope: Yesterday, we talked about Christ being present today. In many lives, Good Friday is not just a day to be commemorated, but a true lived experience. It is essential that when we face the Good Fridays in our lives, we make Christ present. We see him reaching out his wounded hand to hold our own, giving us the hope of resurrection. Hold onto hope even when life seems hopeless. *"Then at last we see what hope is and where it comes from, hope as the driving power and outermost edge of faith. Hope stands up to its knees in the past and keeps its eyes on the future...To remember is to see that we are here today by grace, that we have survived as a gift...and we have this high and holy hope: that what God has done, he will continue to do, that what he has begun in us and our world, he will in unimaginable ways bring to fullness and fruition. To have faith is to remember and wait, and to wait in hope is to have what we hope for already begin to come true in us through our hoping. Praise him."* (Rev. Frederick Buechner, from his sermon, *A Room Called Remember*)

Holy Saturday, March 31: *"Then God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."* (Gn 1:1-2:2)

I can't imagine the first disciples are thinking much about light today. They hide in darkness, their spirits abide in darkness. Fear is the dominant emotion, with a loss of hope at the dream destroyed not far behind. They cannot see it yet, but the dark shadows mean a light is somewhere nearby. They must be patient, they must be brave, because they will be called, in due time, to shout from the rooftops what they have learned in the dark. (Mt 10:27)

Today's Provision—Look for the Light!: Spend time today reflecting on the dark corners of your own life and heart and invite the Resurrected Christ to fill them with his light. Then share that light. A Blessed Easter to you all!