



The Word...

The apostles gathered together with Jesus
and reported all they had done and taught.
He said, "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while."
People were coming and going in great numbers,
and they had no opportunity even to eat.
So, they went off in the boat by themselves to a deserted place.
People saw them leaving and many came to know about it.
They hastened there on foot from all the towns
and arrived at the place before them.
When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd,
his heart was moved with pity for them,
for they were like sheep without a shepherd;
he began to teach them many things
(Mk 6: 30-34).

Pondering the Word ...

Well, so much for the deserted place idea!

The disciples have returned from their healing mission and Jesus knows they need time to process their experiences. But someone tips off the crowds and when Jesus and the disciples arrive at the deserted place, they are greeted, yet again, by the masses.

I imagine Jesus turning to the disciples, smiling, and shrugging his shoulders as if to say, "Get used to it, folks. This is what it means to follow me. But not to worry. I'll handle the crowds today."

When we minister to others, it's important to find time to be alone with Jesus and with other ministers to process what we've experienced. But if you find you are called upon yet again, allow Jesus to take the lead and give you the support you need until you get the time to come away and rest a while.

Living the Word ...

The word minister is rooted in the Latin *ministrāre*, "to act as a servant," to serve others (as opposed to serving ourselves). This is the role Jesus calls us to fulfill, and we do so in many ways that we might not think of as ministry: parenting, caring for loved ones, managing employees, teaching, etc. It's important to understand that ministry is always to, not from (i.e., it is not "my" ministry) and that in some cases, parenting in particular, the role is to consider our children's true needs and not necessarily their wants.

It's easy to burn out as a minister, especially if we forget it is God's work we do and not our own. We are not messiahs and will not save anyone. Pay attention to those times when Jesus invites you to step back and rest. Have faith that he will "take it from here."

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Jul 22: *“Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come”* (2 Cor 5:14-17). Our theme this year is *“Another way. Something new!”* Today’s verse is present tense. If we are in Christ, we are a new creation. Christ IS, not was. His life impels us to look for new ways to make God’s presence real today. **Provision: Make all things new!** Are you stuck in old ways of thinking that have grown stale? Our call as a Christian is to make Christ present here and now, responding in new ways to the needs in front of us. Remember the story of the Canaanite woman: she calls Jesus out of his focus on the *“lost children of Israel”* to minister to the whole world. How are you called to make God’s presence new and real today?

Tue, Jul 23: *“Shepherd your people with your staff”* (Mi 7:14-15, 18-20). There’s a focus on shepherds in the readings this week, and a reminder: the one true shepherd is the Lord. **Provision: Keep your eyes on God.** It can be hard to judge whether a shepherd is truly one appointed by God (see Saturday’s reflection). Follow your informed conscience. Be discerning in who or what you choose to follow. With the upheaval in religious and governmental institutions, this is critically important. Look above the fray for God’s guiding staff.

Wed, Jul 24: *“A sower went out to sow. . . . Some [seed] fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots”* (Mt 13:1-9). At the risk of sounding like I’m stuck in the old ways we talked about on Monday, it’s worrisome how fleeting and shallow much of life has become. I shudder at the thought of humanities programs being shuttered, but perhaps all the rapid-fire changes in our world call us to find new ways to nurture and deepen lives, particularly for young people. **Provision: Be an elder.** This isn’t about chronological age. I know young people who are wiser than many in their golden years. Being an elder means tapping into the wisdom of the earth, the wisdom of our experience and remaining realistically optimistic, avoiding bitterness, and holding onto faith. Look for opportunities today to demonstrate hope and wisdom, even if it’s just a casual interaction.

Thu, Jul 25: *“We hold this treasure in earthen vessels . . . We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed”* (2 Cor 4:7-15). This passage calls to my mind the refrain from Leonard Cohen’s classic song, *“Anthem:”* *“There is a crack, a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.”* But I think Paul is saying the cracks in our earthen vessels can also be how the Spirit’s light within us can emerge to illuminate the way for others. I have always found when I am vulnerable and honest, perplexed about my shortcomings and foibles, people are drawn to share their own stories. That’s how trust in community is built. **Provision: Let your light shine through.** Paul also tells us it is through our weaknesses that God’s strength is evident. Don’t hide your God-light today!

Fri, Jul 26: *“The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word, but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word, and it bears no fruit”* (Mt 13:18-23). I conveniently ignore the phrase *“worldly anxiety”* in this verse. I don’t think I lose myself in *“the lure of riches,”* and like to believe if it were all taken away, I would not lose my faith. But anxiety about the world and the future? Can’t say I am as sanguine about that. **Provision: Resist negativity.** Am I allowing the word to be slowly choked by my negative reactions to things of this world? Does this happen to you? We may think the word is planted securely in our hearts, but if anger, worry, or bitterness is there too, it can impact and even stop us from bearing good fruit. Listen to yourself today: does world weariness and jadedness keep you from demonstrating God’s presence and love?

Sat, Jul 27: *When the crop sprouted and bore fruit the darnel-weeds also appeared. “Lord, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where have the darnel-weeds it contains come from?”* (Mt 13:24-30, literal Greek). If you want to learn about darnel-weeds, check out <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/wheats-evil-twin-has-been-intoxicating-humans-for-centuries>: *“Darnel is a ‘mimic weed,’ that looks and behaves so much like wheat that it can’t live without human assistance. In a big enough dose, [it] can kill a person.”* The weeds Jesus refers to are hard to tell apart from the wheat and therefore wind up being cultivated right alongside the good grain. **Provision: Pay attention.** This parable can apply both to habits we cultivate in our own lives, and to those with whom we associate. It can be hard to discern the good from the bad which is why Jesus also tells us *“By their fruits, you will know them.”* This takes time and patience. Look at your life today. Any darnel-weeds sprouting up in your field?