



# Come and See!

August 5, 2018

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## The Word...

The whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.  
"Would that we had died at the LORD's hand in the land of Egypt,  
as we sat by our fleshpots and ate our fill of bread!  
But you had to lead us into this desert  
to make the whole community die of famine!"  
Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will now rain down bread from heaven for you.  
Each day the people are to go out and gather their daily portion;  
thus will I test them, to see whether they follow my instructions or not."  
*(From Ex 16:2-4, 12-15)*

## Pondering the Word...

What's exactly *is* a fleshpot? We don't hear that word used much. The modern definition means a place of luxury and unrestrained hedonism. Historians suggest it may have its roots from this biblical reference and that its meaning was both literal and figurative. It was a pot for boiling meat, but scholars say it was unlikely the Israelites had much opportunity to eat meat during their enslavement. In the context of this reading though, that seems to be the logical definition.

Figuratively, it may have referred to the decadence prevalent in ancient Egyptian society at the time, behavior that would have been abhorrent to those Jews faithful to the covenant. As they gripe here to Moses and Aaron about conditions in the desert, they may be looking back and saying, "Well, for as bad as it was in Egypt, at least it was better than this."

That's a common trap we can fall into when we set out to make a change. Whether we are looking at healthier lifestyle choices, or more serious changes like overcoming addiction or leaving an abusive relationship, when the going gets rough, we can find our resolve flagging. We may look back at the past and think, "You know, it wasn't so bad. At least it was easier than this." Sometimes it feels like we are out in the desert, all alone.

That's when our faith in God's care and providence really comes into the picture. It may seem God is testing us, but if we pray for God to give us "our daily bread"--just enough strength to make it through this one day--we will find ourselves moving further away from the past that enslaved us and closer to the freedom that only true reliance on God can offer.

## Living the Word...

Changing metaphors from a desert to a river, one of my all-time favorite proverbs is a Native American saying, "Trust in God, but paddle the canoe." (This proverb has iterations in the folklore of many cultures.) So what does "paddle the canoe" mean? Sometimes, extra effort is needed to get through the rapids, so how about starting each day with a heartfelt word of gratitude for God's presence and an earnest prayer for strength enough for the day? Each morning, do a quick run-through of the day ahead and ask God to be with you, especially during those times when your resolve will be tested. If you find yourself caught up in the rapids, imagine Jesus sitting in the bow of the canoe, steering you forward. Have faith that he will lead you to calm and restful waters, far away from the barren desert.

Personal Reflections and Ideas: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Aug 6:** *“Moreover, we possess the prophetic message that is altogether reliable. You will do well to be attentive to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”* (2 Pt 1:16-19)

The Spirit is talking to me today. I have been in a dark place. The strife in the world and the turmoil in my church has left me jaded, losing hope for peaceful, civil resolutions to the anger, conflict, and the revelations of lies and sin that seem to arise daily. I would do well to be more attentive to the light of Scripture and inspirational prayer rather than to the news feed. Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr once advised that we keep abreast of current events with the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other. Let’s turn to Isaiah 11:1-9 for the prophetic message of salvation and peace.

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**Aug 7:** *Thus says the LORD: “Write all the words I have spoken to you in a book.”* (Jer 30:1-2, 12-15, 18-22)

Well, there you have it! It is God who first instructed us to journal, not Oprah! ☺ I talk about the benefits of journaling, but am I faithful to the practice? Hardly. The idea of journaling can be intimidating, especially if we think we need to write poetically or even just in full sentences. One author refers instead to keeping a “listening book.” At first I thought, ‘why not just call it a journal?’ but the more I think about it, the more I like the idea. Keep a small notepad handy or use the notes app on your phone calendar. Make note of a few key words about what you’ve “heard” from God through the experiences you’ve had that day or the people you’ve met. Then do a quick review as you do your nightly examen. See what God has had to say through the small snippets of your day.

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**Aug 8:** *“You shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; those who plant them shall enjoy the fruits.”* (Jer 31:1-7)

Scattered throughout the Old Testament are words like these, where God acknowledges our need to enjoy the fruits of our own labor. I think Jesus recognizes this as well when, as in today’s gospel reading, he tells people it is their faith that has been instrumental in granting what they desire. Pope Francis speaks often of the basic human right for gainful work, that all should have the opportunity to provide a decent life for their families. As technology takes more and more jobs, we would do well to pay attention to this basic need we all have to plant and to reap. What can we do to ensure all have the chance for fruitful employment?

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**Aug 9:** *“Give me back the joy of your salvation, and a willing spirit sustain in me.”* (Jer 31:31-34)

“A willing spirit sustain in me.” I believe this is all we can really ask for, and that truly, this is all God asks of us. In today’s gospel, Peter makes his bold proclamation that Jesus is the Christ, a true statement of faith that God has granted him. A few verses later, Jesus calls Peter “Satan” for being an obstacle to him. Peter is a great example of one who must have prayed constantly for a willing spirit. He needed that spirit to sustain him when he didn’t understand who Jesus was, and to overcome his many failures and denials. Let’s pray today and every day for God to sustain our spirits in the face of our foibles and missteps. The joy of God’s salvation is found in a willing spirit that returns again and again for God’s mercy and strength.

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**Aug 10:** *“Well for the man who is gracious and lends, who conducts his affairs with justice... Lavishly he gives to the poor, his generosity shall endure forever...”* (Ps 112)

Interesting follow-up to Wednesday’s reflection. There is so much abject poverty in our world. Jesus even reminds us we will always have our poor; and yes, there will always be a need to provide the basic bodily requirements for food, shelter, and clothing for a certain part of the population. But what if “giving lavishly” to the poor means a regular volunteer stint to help with job training so people can get back on their feet? Teaching literacy to adults to aid in their work search and bolster their self-esteem? Taking in foster children? Contrary to what some people think, the poor have the same need to enjoy the fruits of their labors. Most people I know are so generous, opening their wallets, closets, and pantries for the poor. Might we be called to open up some time on our calendars as well?

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**Aug 11:** *“...For the vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint; If it delays, wait for it, it will surely come, it will not be late.”* (Hab 1:12-2:4)

Remember that “light of Scripture and inspirational prayer” we talked about Monday? Well, the Spirit is speaking again. Be patient. Wait for the vision. It will not disappoint.