



Come and See!

Week of January 12, 2025

The Word ...

A voice cries out: "In the desert prepare the way of the LORD!
Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!
Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low;
the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley."
(Is 40: 1-5,9-11).

““In truth, I see that God shows no partiality”
(Acts 10:34-38).

Pondering the Word ...

The phrase that comes to mind as I read these two passages: “a level playing field.” (No, not because of the NFL playoffs!)

Too often, our communities, be they faith communities or neighborhoods—particularly in suburban areas—tend to be homogenous “echo chambers” with little diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, income, educational status, etc. We “keep to our own” and can fail to see the real challenges for those whose daily lives involve navigating valleys and mountains, rough and rugged terrain, be it because of poverty or prejudice.

Scripture reminds us again and again that God shows no partiality, that God sees the hearts of each of us, and does not judge as we judge (1 Sm 16:7). When we hear of “God’s preferential option for the poor,” this doesn’t mean God prefers the poor, but that God’s compassion and mercy is stirred deeply by those who suffer due to poverty or powerlessness, whatever the reason. God expects those of us blessed with abundance (and not just material abundance) to have that same preferential option, reaching out with compassion within and beyond our comfort zones to expand our definition of community, to work to level the playing field for all!

Living the Word ...

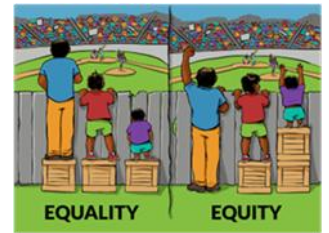
An essay I read several years ago documented the author’s move from a suburban parish to the city. She wrote that sharing the cup takes on a whole new meaning when the person in front of you is homeless, just in off the streets. (And this was prior to COVID.) It takes courage to explore other communities and places of worship, to experience life and faith from another’s perspective just for the purpose of learning. Not to fix, not to comment, and surely, not to judge.

The Dalai Lama, when asked some years ago how he would define himself, answered, “I’m one of 7 billion” (I guess he’d say 8.2 billion now!). Imagine what the world could be like if we all ventured outside our tribal confines, not just to reach out now and then with works of charity, but with the goal of building a wider community of tolerance, love, and equality! We learn about faith and hope, not from eloquent analysis of Scripture, but from the scripture of our lives, the real lived experience, the stories we share with each other. What will you do in this new year to “level the playing field” in your own community and in the world?

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Jan 13: *“Justice and judgment are the foundation of his throne”* (Ps 97). **Provision:**

What does justice mean to you? I imagine the first thing that comes to mind for some is retribution, punishment of a person or group of people for some real or perceived wrong. (That definition is trending in certain factions of the US now.) But justice from God’s perspective has more to do with righteousness and equity: *“He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity”* (Ps 98:9). I’ve shared this cartoon in the past. It clearly illustrates that before we can claim equality of opportunity, we need to acknowledge inequity. As we talked about yesterday, before we can truly grow our communities, those of us who travel on straight highways must work to level the playing field for all. How do you define justice? What steps will you take to bring about equity in your world?



Tue, Jan 14: *“He who consecrates and those who are being consecrated all have one origin. Therefore, he is not ashamed to call them ‘brothers’”* (Heb 2:5-12). Do you consider Jesus part of your community? Do you accept Jesus as “one of us?” (“us “being human, not just someone who looks or thinks like you.) If we accept Jesus in his full humanity, we also have to accept that the life he led is within our reach. Hmmh. It’s easy to keep Jesus at arm’s length when we focus solely on belief in his divinity. Our greatest comfort *and* our greatest challenge come when we are willing to call him “brother.” **Provision: What virtues of your brother, Jesus, do you hope to model in this new year?** Make a list of all the attributes and virtues you see in Jesus, e.g., compassion, courage, inclusiveness, prayerfulness, etc. Then, pray with the list. Where are you most like Jesus in your life? Where are you challenged to imitate him? Give thanks for the grace to continue to grow more Christ-like.

Wed, Jan 15: *“Because he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested”* (Heb 2:14-18). Today is the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., someone who tried to model the peace and nonviolent resistance Jesus preached. He, of course, suffered as Jesus suffered, and I am sorry to say his message, like Jesus,’ is often squelched by violence, bigotry, and greed. But like Jesus’ message, his goal of the “beloved community” cannot be held down forever. This is the basis of faith. *“Our goal is to create a beloved community, and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives”* (MLK). **Provision: What qualitative and quantitative change will you make?** Don’t just think of this as a nice platitude. Make it real.

Thu, Jan 16: *“But rather encourage one another every day ... so that none of you might be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness –For we have become partakers of the Anointed if indeed we cling to the origin of our assurance, firm to the end”* (Heb 3:7-14, literal Greek translation, per David Bentley Hart). “Encourage one another every day:” Encourage: from Old French, *“encoragier”* to make strong, to hearten. One another: not just yourself, but the whole community. Every day: yes, every day. Not just on the Sabbath, at bible study, at your stint at the food pantry. Every day. **Provision: Guard each other’s hearts.** I know so many people, me included, who fall prey to the deceitfulness of sin we see played out in the media every day. So, instead of being prey, let’s pray and work together in community to build our courage, to hold onto the promise of Emmanuel, God with us.

Fri, Jan 17: *Unable to get near Jesus ...they opened up the roof above him. After they had broken through, they let down the mat on which the paralytic was lying. ... Jesus saw their faith* (Mk 2:1-12). I love this passage. My favorite phrase? “Their faith.” We don’t know the identities of the four guys who carry the paralytic to Jesus. We do know they took risks to get him there. And we know once they’ve done what they set out to do, they fade into the background. The healing is up to the paralytic and Jesus. But Jesus recognizes “their” faith. **Provision: Faith in community takes courage.** Active faith requires the community to take risks to bring others to a place of healing. It also means we are willing to step aside and let God take over. Rest assured. Jesus sees our faith.

Sat, Jan 18: *“The word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow”* (Heb 4:12-16). When was the last time Scripture cut you to the heart? Has that ever happened? If not, you’re probably reading Scripture like a history book or as catechesis. **Provision: Read it twice.** Pick a passage you don’t quite “get.” Read it first for context and content. What do the words say? Then, read it a second time, this time for meaning. How do these words “feel?” What do these words mean in my life?