

Provisions for the Journey

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Fourth Week of Easter 2022



Sunday, May 8: *When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and with violent abuse contradicted what Paul said....So (the disciples) shook the dust off their feet...(and) were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13:14, 43-52)*

Can you imagine? A group of faithful children of God being filled with jealousy and hurling violent and hateful abuse towards others who speak of God's love, mercy, and salvation? Why, I am SO glad we have, as a species, moved beyond such narrow-mindedness! I am so glad I don't do that sort of thing!

Not.

I am always amazed and ashamed when my ire and my voice are raised when faced with a contradiction to what I believe to be Christ's teaching. If I claim to have "the truth," if I really believe all will be well because we all abide in God's hands, why am I so angered and threatened by those who proclaim things contrary to what I believe? Righteous anger is one thing, but like the disciples today, I should be able to "shake the dust of my feet" rather than hurl into the faces of those who oppose me. I should be able to go forward in joy rather than allow my anger to cause me to betray the tenets of non-violence Jesus taught me by his sacrifice.

Today's Provision: What are you angry about? This is an interesting question to add to your nightly examen (you are doing those, right? 😊), especially if you seem to be getting angry more often these days. What's making you angry and more importantly, what are you doing with your anger? It's not the feeling of anger but how we act upon it that can lead to sin. Ask Jesus to help you process any difficult emotions you are feeling.

Monday, May 9: *"Who was I that I might hinder God?" (Acts 11:1-18)*

Peter's words today always hit me hard on both a personal and institutional level. This line comes from the passage when Peter is defending himself to "the circumcised believers" for going into the home of "uncircumcised people" and eating with them. How do the institutions with which I align myself – governmental and religious – hinder God by not welcoming those who don't meet certain criteria? If we truly believe everyone is made in God's image, then how can we reject the idea that the Holy Spirit resides in each person, AND that by our welcome, they come to know they have a place at the table? How do I hinder God each day by failing to be loving, patient, and merciful, even (especially) to those with whom I disagree?

Today's Provision: Welcome others. Look, I know this isn't easy or cut and dry. We live in a world where the "kingdom of (name that nation)" takes precedence over the Kingdom of God, where borders are more important than bridges. I'd hope our religious institutions might lead the way to this change, but so far and into the present day, who is welcome and who is not is still an issue. All I can do on my own is to welcome the stranger, the person who is different from me, who holds different opinions. All I can do is by my open-mindedness and open heart acknowledge our common humanity and equality in God's eyes. What will you do today to welcome someone who is different from you?

Tuesday, May 10: *The hand of the Lord was with them and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. (Acts 11:19-26)*

There's a nuance in this verse. We hear "a great number" of those who believed turned to the Lord. What about the others who believed but did not turn to the Lord? I think this illustrates again the difference between belief and faith. It is possible to believe in God, but still resist turning to God and making God the center of our lives. It is possible to ask for healing and mercy, but still harbor doubts about our worthiness or God's willingness to heal us. Belief acknowledges the presence of God — "I believe *in* God." Faith affirms the unconditional fidelity and love of that God -- "I trust God." It is knowledge of the heart, not of the head.

Today's Provision: Turn to the Lord. Make what you believe your faith. Reflect on this difference today and how it plays out in your life. This, like most things in the realm of faith, is not a one-and-done. We have to reaffirm our faith every day. In fact, it is often in the difficult times that we become more aware of God's fidelity even if the intention we pray for is not granted. If we truly have faith then we will be rewarded with peace regardless of the outcome. Reflecting on this in prayer is not a one-and-done either. This is fodder for daily prayer: do I have faith in what I say I believe?

Wednesday, May 11: *"May God have pity on us and bless us; may he let his face shine upon us."* (Ps 67)

I tend to write things that challenge me (and as a result, you if you are reading this) to get off our duffs or to be more aware of our sinfulness and hypocrisy. But it's just as important to pray a prayer like today's psalm verse: "Lord, have pity on us, for life is difficult and we are only human. Bless us with your love, mercy, and compassion. Smile upon us, let us see the light of your face so that your way may be known upon the earth through our smiles, our witness, and our light!"

Today's Provision: Pray for God's loving embrace. I don't do this enough. How about you? I (still) get overwhelmed by the "shoulds" and that I am not doing enough or should have done better (see Friday's reflection). I hear this from lots of people. The next time you find yourself lamenting about some "should" or "shouldn't," stop and ask God to embrace you in all your humanness. I think God really looks forward to just this kind of prayer!

Thursday, May 12: *"With uplifted arm he led them out, and for about forty years he put up with them in the desert."* (Acts 13:13-25)

The image of God "putting up" with the Israelites makes me smile. It reflects a lot of what we hear in Exodus about the people and their impatience, but hey—40 years is a long time! The Greek word Luke uses in my version of Acts is *etropoforhsen* which means "he endured their ways," "he bore their manners." But other translations use *etrofoforhsen*, which means "he took care of them," "he taught them," "he fed them." And really, it's both and the same, isn't it? Any parent can attest to that! Speaking for myself, I know what God endures with me... and that's for way more than 40 years! And I also know how I have been cared for, enlightened, and fed – all by that same God.

Today's Provision: Thank God! Each evening, look at the day that has passed. First recognize the times God has graced you by allowing you to be a channel for love and the Spirit. Thank God for caring for you. Next look at those times when God "endured your ways" with patience and by teaching you. Again, thank God for caring for you!

Friday, May 13: *"In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?"* (Jn 14:1-6)

There's a parable about a religiously observant man. He was rich and successful but stingy and mean. He dies and is greeted by St. Peter at the gates of heaven and is told they will walk to a place prepared just for him. The first house they see is a beautiful mansion, and the man assumes this will be his eternal resting place. Instead, he sees relaxing on the spacious porch a man he knew, much less observant than himself who hung out with the poor and unsavory characters and who worked various menial day jobs in his town. The rich man smiles, "Well, if this is what that poor loser gets, I can only imagine where I will be."

He and St. Peter continue their walk. The man notices that each house they pass is a bit less beautiful than the previous one. He assumes they will soon turn a corner to find his palace but they continue down the same road. The houses get smaller, simpler, and plain. He hesitantly asks St. Peter, "I-I-I am wondering about all these houses—how do you decide who lives where?" St. Peter laughed and answered, "Oh, we don't decide that. We just build your house with the stockpile of materials you have provided for us during your lifetime."

They stop in front of a little hut, comfortable and warm (and in heaven, mind you!), but far from the man's expectations. St. Peter consoles him and says, "You see, you were good about following all the rules — going to church, listening to the Word — that is why you're here and not elsewhere! But we build these houses out of love, compassion, mercy, and generosity. We could only build you a house with what you gave us."

Today's Provision: How's your stockpile coming along these days?

Saturday, May 14: *"I have called you friends...and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain."* (Jn 15:9-17)

What an incredible testament of love and trust! I would have been a blubbing idiot had I been among the disciples that night, because of the poignancy yes, but also because I would have doubted whether I could live up to the gift of Jesus' friendship and the charge of bearing fruit in his name. I guess that's why this verse brings tears to my eyes today. I am deeply moved by his friendship but often feel unworthy of such trust. Sometimes, I am not a very good friend to him.

I had an interesting conversation recently about how Jesus empowers us with our own healing, and to go and bear fruit by empowering others. (This is a favorite topic of mine.) The other person mentioned she used to resist this idea because she thought that, in the realm of charity to others, it put her in a dominant role; it implied she had the power to give to someone else. It made me reflect on what I mean by Jesus empowering us. I came to understand that to me, this means Jesus sees in us what we fail to see in ourselves. He calls us friends and appoints us to go and bear fruit because he believes in us.

Today's Provision: He believes in and trusts you. Spend a couple hours in prayer with that! It overwhelms me to consider this and take it into my heart, but I believe it is true. Jesus sees in us what we fail to see in ourselves. How can we be anything but empowered by the trust and love of such a friend!