



The Word...

"Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land!
... The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
Never will I forget a thing they have done!"
(from Am 8:4-7)

"I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity.... It is my wish that in every place the people should pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger or argument."
(from 1 Tm 2:1-8)

"The person who is trustworthy in very small matters
is also trustworthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest
in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones."
(from Lk 16:1-13)

Pondering the Word ...

For the past several weeks, the Spirit has been hitting me upside the head with themes and messages I am to hear and to share. This week, these words resound: "It Matters!"

It might seem funny then as we progress this week and read from Ecclesiastes that all life is vanity, "a mere breath." I wish we would hear more from this Wisdom Book because it speaks, not of the futility of life, but of the importance of living fully and seeing God's hand everywhere. It speaks of what really matters.

We hear some of what matters from Amos today: If we take advantage of the needy and destroy the poor of the land, God will not forget our sin. We hear from St. Paul that we are to pray for leaders who will allow us quiet and tranquil lives. What a concept! We are to pray, united as one, without anger or argument. And Jesus reminds us about being trustworthy even in small things—things we might think don't matter at all.

Living the Word...

I say to myself, "I don't trample on the needy! I don't destroy the poor!" Think again. While I don't extort or bribe, I am careless in how I treat the earth. I use too much of her resources, I abuse her water and land and in doing so, take food from the mouths of the hungry. My sins of omission and carelessness matter. I try to avoid anger and argument when it comes to things of the Spirit, but my heart is hardened, closed to those who look at life differently. I try to be trustworthy and reliable, but again, it is sometimes out of obligation rather than love and respect from my heart. And with all the lies and greed we see happening with impunity, I do wonder: "Does it really matter what I say or do?"

How is it for you? Is apathy or indifference creeping into your life? Do you hear yourself asking that same question: "Does it matter?" I am making "It Matters!" my mantra as I face decisions, big and small. I will try to remember "It Matters!" before I use things that add to the destruction of Mother Earth, no matter how small. I will remind myself, "It Matters!" when I engage another in conversation. I will say, "It Matters!" as I discern how God is calling me to act in any given situation. So...what matters to you?

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Sep 19: *"(he) who does no evil to his fellow man, nor bears reproach for his kin"* (Ps 15, Hebrew translation). *"The enumerated virtues all pertain to a person's moral obligation to others... 'bears no reproach for his kin' (means) that when his kin behave badly, he does not pass over the misdeed in silence because of the kinship"* (Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, Vol 3, p. 50). **Reflection/Provision:** This is a new interpretation for me. I thought it was saying we should not reproach our neighbors or kin. Instead, it's about not overlooking a wrongdoing done by a close relation; don't bear or abet the sin just because the sinner is your kin or friend. It's thought-provoking. We spoke a few weeks ago about the danger of hiding misdeeds within an insular community to protect the community. In Mt 18:15-17, Jesus gives advice about how to confront someone who has sinned against "me," but what about an act that hurts others? How do we deal with that? How do we teach our kids to deal with it? Does it matter?

Tue, Sep 20: *"The way of trust I have chosen."* (Ps 119, Hebrew translation). The translation I use for these reflections—the NABRE— uses the word "truth" instead of "trust." Other translations use the Hebrew word *amuna* which is closer to "faithfulness." You might say, "So what? does it matter?" **Reflection/Provision:** I think it does matter. The word "truth" is being thrown around recklessly these days, and being used by some as a weapon of hate. Yes, there are fundamental truths, "first principles," as C.S. Lewis calls them; I am by no means dismissing that. But trust and faithfulness have a gentler ring that speaks of the importance of relying on God. We don't know how God is working in our world. It's easy to grow skeptical or apathetic when we see truth being mocked, so it's essential we trust in God's plan and have faith in God's mercy. If you find yourself asking Pilate's question: "What is truth?" pray instead for God to grant you the graces of faith and trust.

Wed, Sep 21: *"I...urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love"* (Eph 4:1-7, 11-13). **Reflection/Provision:** What does it mean to live a life worthy of our call? Paul says we are to be humble, gentle, patient, loving. Among some communities in my country I don't see that call being lived at all. I see the revenge and violence we read in the Old Testament when tribal norms dictated. I have quoted this book many times, and I still think chapter 19 of Albert Nolan's *Jesus Before Christianity* is the best description of what it means to be Christian. I read it often to challenge myself. *"To believe that Jesus is divine is to choose to make him and what he stands for your God. ... We cannot deduce anything about Jesus from what we think we know about God; we must now deduce everything about God from what we do know about Jesus"* (p.166). In keeping with our theme, how we choose to live our Christian call matters. A lot.

Thu, Sep 22: *"Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth, vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!"* (Eccl 1:2-11). Or in more modern parlance: "Whatever." **Reflection/Provision:** As I mentioned Sunday, Ecclesiastes is worth a good, reflective read. At first, it may seem contrary to our "It Matters!" theme, but it is really about all the anxieties we experience trying to control things beyond our control. This book is about acceptance—remember, resignation is giving up, acceptance is opening up—and allowing ourselves to live all the times and seasons of our lives, knowing God is always present. It is about putting aside our own will and allowing God to be God. Use the practice of Lectio Divina, reading and reflecting on a paragraph each day. What is God saying to you?

Fri, Sep 23: *"There is an appointed time for everything... A time to be born, and a time to die...A time to weep, and a time to laugh...a time to mourn, and a time to dance"* (Eccl 3: 1-11). I am blessed to accompany people on retreat. One thing I suggest at the outset is to read this passage and reflect on "where they are" as they begin their retreat. Some know right away: it's time for seeking or healing or being silent. Some have no idea but now have a good starting point for prayer! And some, I find, are trying to avoid where they are—in sadness or loss. We often limit the time we spend on things like weeping and mourning. We want to reap, but avoid the effort it takes to sow. We often don't give the hard stuff its due. **Reflection/Provision:** When we avoid difficult times and seasons, the harvest we reap may not nourish our souls. The next time you are faced with sorrow or difficulty, respect it. Allow time to process the grief, disappointment, or even anger. Allow God the time to work in you.

Sat, Sep 24: *"But they did not understand"* (Lk 9:43-45). **Reflection/ Provision:** The older I get, the less I understand. But the flip side? The less I understand the more I rely on God and the more I am able to open my hands and accept whatever God brings into my life. I am better able to see that, yes, it all matters, and yes, it all belongs... words to the song of my life I am writing to God's music. I pray God grants you this too!