



The Word ...

Naaman said: "Please let me, your servant, have two mule-loads of earth, for I will no longer offer holocaust or sacrifice to any other god except to the LORD."
(from 2 Kgs 5:14-17)

As [the lepers] were going they were cleansed. And one of them, realizing he had been healed, returned, glorifying God in a loud voice; and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him....

Jesus said in reply... "Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?" Then he said to him, "Stand up and go; your faith has saved you."
(from Lk 17:11-19)

Pondering the Word ...

So, what happens next? In Second Kings, we just have to read the next two verses; in the passage from Luke, we have to use our imaginations.

"When my master enters the temple of Rimmon ... I too must bow down in the temple of Rimmon.... may the LORD please forgive your servant this." Elisha said to him, "Go in peace" (v.18-19). Naaman already foresees a problem: "I know there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel...What am I to do when I go back to my homeland?" He asks for preemptive forgiveness and Elisha grants him mercy in God's name. He is assured that this pagan foreigner's conversion is such that his heart will remain with the one, true God, despite outward appearances.

In Luke, the ten lepers—nine Jews and one Samaritan—are healed. Jews and Samaritans don't acknowledge each other, which is why I think Jesus is keen on pointing out the compassion and gratitude of the "foreigner" in his parables and interactions. The nine Jews are joyous but oblivious, eager to get back to their families. The lone Samaritan focuses on gratitude, and when he returns home, I imagine that like the Samaritan woman at the well, he shares the wonderful gift this Jewish holy man has given him. He continues his Samaritan traditions, his heart changed, softened, filled with gratitude for the God who recognizes the good hearts of all people. His faith has saved him.

Living the Word...

Have you ever experienced a situation when the "rules" got in the way of your showing compassion? In the early days of WWII, the Lutheran theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, agrees to participate in an assassination attempt on Hitler. He speaks of "throwing himself at the mercy of God," for he knows what he is doing is a sin. I think too of some courageous nuns I've met who travel the streets of Chicago at night with bags of condoms to protect the trafficked sex workers they are trying to rescue and bring in from the cold. The God I worship knows the commitment and compassion, the goodness in these holy women's hearts. If you are offended or shocked by the thought of their work, you might want to spend some time looking at your faith. Has rigidity and judgment hardened your heart? Open it up. Allow true faith to heal and save you.

Personal Reflections and Ideas ... _____

Mon, Oct 10: *“For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery”* (Gal 4:22-24, 26-27, 31-5:1). Interesting follow-up to yesterday’s reflection. Does your faith in Christ set you free to love? What is “the yoke of slavery” Paul refers to in this passage? If we read it in the context of what precedes and follows, Paul is talking, not about the yoke of sin, but of the yoke of the law, specifically circumcision (read tomorrow’s passage from Galatians). **Reflection/Provision:** Christ set us free so that we can **be** free, but only if we choose to be free. Free from undue anxiety about dotting all the I’s and crossing all the T’s; free to love one another even if it takes us to unpleasant places; free to understand the Spirit of the law, not just the letter. Jesus does not abolish the law, he fulfills it. He shows us how it is to be lived. Focus today on how you are called to live God’s word.

Tue, Oct 11: *“For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love”* (Gal 5:1-6).

Or the literal translation: *“faithfulness made actual through love.”* **Reflection/Provision:** I detect a theme running through the readings this week, don’t you? There’s a lot of vitriol being spewed these days by so-called “holy” people: who is a “real” Christian, a “real” Catholic? Ugh! As I’ve asked a few times recently, I wonder what Paul would say about the state of Christianity today? Or more importantly, what Jesus would say? Our faith is made actual—made real—through love. Not through hatred, not through exclusion. If we want to talk about heresy, anything that is not of love is not of God. Period. Keep this in your heart the next time you are confronted by those who spew words of prejudice and hate.

Wed, Oct 12: *“Woe to you Pharisees! You are like unseen graves over which people unknowingly walk”* (Lk 11: 42-46).

Luke’s Jesus is rough on the Pharisees. It’s no wonder they begin to plot against him! The image Jesus uses in this passage is unsettling. In Judaism, contact with the dead or the bones of the dead renders one ritually impure. Jesus uses a tenet of the very laws the elders insist upon to illustrate their hypocrisy. **Reflection/Provision:** If I am honest with myself, others, and God, there are church laws that sting my conscience as being hypocritical, especially those that exclude people. But as the late Billy Graham once mused, go in search of a perfect church, then join it. It won’t be perfect anymore! We are so very far from what God desires for humanity. Real faith is based, not on perfection, but on hope. How will you work today to further God’s vision?

Thu, Oct 13: *“In all wisdom and insight, [God] has made known to us the mystery of his will...a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ”* (Eph 1:1-10). **Reflection/Provision:** *“To sum up all things in Christ.”* I love this phrase. It speaks to what we’ve been reflecting on this week. If it speaks to you too, spend prayer time using *Lectio Divina* to reflect further. First, allow the phrase to resonate. Repeat aloud a few times, putting the emphasis on a different word each time. Next, allow it to echo in your mind, turning it around like a gem held up to the light. Then talk to God about your thoughts. Ask God what this verse means in your life. Finally—the most important part of prayer we rarely take time for—sit in silence and allow God to answer you. (Be aware though that the answer could come later in the day or next week or month. Remember, God’s time is not our time!) After your prayer, jot down a few notes about your prayer experience.

Fri, Oct 14: *“Even the hairs of your head have all been counted. Do not be afraid”* (Lk 12:1-7).

Reflection/ Provision: I like to pair this verse with Genesis 3:19: *“For you are dust and unto dust you shall return.”* The two may seem contradictory, but instead, they assure us of the unfathomable love of God. We are dust, but even in our insignificance, God knows and cares every part of every being on earth. *“Do not be afraid.”* Just as God made us from nothingness, God will bring us to the ultimate fullness united in the Spirit. *“You are love and unto love you shall return.”*

Sat, Oct 15: *“[God] put all things beneath [Jesus’] feet and gave him as head over...the Church, which is his Body”*

(Eph 1:15-23). **Reflection/Provision:** Never lose sight of this: we, the people, are the Body of Christ. Not the hierarchy, not the institution, whatever denomination. And Christ’s Body has many, many parts. It is not one color, gender, creed, or nationality. It is creation in its astounding fullness and diversity. Let us pray today that the entire Body of Christ will work as one—no exclusions—to bring us closer to God’s desire for us.