



Come and See!

Week of January 15, 2023

The Word ...

Sacrifice or offering you wished not, but ears open to obedience you gave me.
Holocausts or sin-offerings you sought not; then said I, "Behold I come."
"In the written scroll it is prescribed for me, to do your will, O my God, is my
delight, and your law is within my heart!"
I announced your justice in the vast assembly;
I did not restrain my lips, as you, O LORD, know.
(from Ps 40)

Pondering the Word ... "

The readings for this week are significant. They focus on the role Jesus plays in recasting some traditional laws, rites, and rituals of his people, not to abolish them but to lead people to a greater understanding of God's wishes. These readings invite us to look at our current laws and rituals with new eyes as well: to understand the kind of sacrifices God desires, the new wine and new wineskins, and appreciating the gift of the Sabbath as made for us, not us for the Sabbath.

When I picture the Old Testament accounts of the slaughter of hundreds of animals, and holocausts with flames rising up to the sky, and blood being sprinkled on the people, I think, "WHAT A MESS! How did they ever pull off these outrageous spectacles? What a hassle!"

But then I think—which is easier: to deal with these chaotic sacramental machinations and then go home, get cleaned up, and get back to my everyday life? Or to offer my whole self, my whole being to do God's will? To be unafraid to call out injustice to "the vast assembly?" To be willing to obey God's commands even if they take me somewhere I don't want to go?

Living the Word ...

Just like our forebearers, some of the faithful prefer to have set rituals to perform, scheduled obligations to meet—a sort of checkbox approach to faith, not because they are lazy or uncaring, but because it gives them a sense of control: "If I do this number of things in this way, I will get to heaven;" or, "if I concern myself with this one issue, I have fulfilled my obligation and can write my ticket." And then we are left to squirm in our seats when the readings for the day shine a harsh light on this kind of "checkbox faith."

Are you up for two challenges this week? Read the readings, not as history, but in real time. What things might Jesus say about our current rules, sacrificial rites, and rituals in relation to God's true desires? And second, spend time studying your chosen denomination's social teachings. While we might be able to recite the tenets, do we understand what they call us to do and how they tie directly to Scripture?

Personal Reflections and Ideas...

Mon, Jan 16: *"Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?"* (Mk 2:18-22). By these words, Jesus proclaims the Good News to the people of his time: the Kingdom of God is here, right now, in your midst. He is "the bridegroom," and it is time, not for mourning, but for celebration! **Reflection/Provision:** Of course, we know he foresees trouble: he predicts "the bridegroom" will be taken from his disciples, but we have the benefit of his presence in our midst, right here and now. This is not to say there are not times for fasting, but these are due to our departure from God, not God from us, because...of course, we know... God ever leaves us! Offer of prayer of praise and rejoicing for the God who is with us always "until the end of the Age!"

Tue, Jan 17: *"We desire each of you to demonstrate the same eagerness for the fulfillment of hope until the end, that you may not become sluggish"* (Heb 6: 10-20). The Greek word translates to "dullards." The author doesn't want the new Christians to become lazy and ignorant or fall into a rut and lose their fervor, joy, and hope—in other words, don't wind up with a "checkbox" approach to faith! 😊 **Reflection/Provision:** How are you doing with Sunday's challenges? Are there laws and rituals in your faith practice that have lost their freshness? Are you able to connect with the social teachings of your church? Are you just going through the motions, or is it too much of a hassle—or a risk—to learn something new? Seek out books, lectures, or discussion groups that present a different—even a challenging—look at your well-worn "wineskins."

Wed, Jan 18: *Looking around at [the Pharisees] with anger and grieved at their hardness of heart, Jesus said to the man, "Stretch out your hand"* (Mk 3:1-6). **Reflection/Provision:** I like gospel stories that show Jesus' human emotions. He's fed up with these hypocrites. I hope he is staring them down! But he doesn't call them bad names or insult their mothers; he doesn't attack them. He refuses to back down. He does what is right. Often, I find myself angry at hypocrisy, but I back down, more out of apathy than anything else. I don't always do the right thing. Does this happen to you too? When this happens, let's ask ourselves: "What is the right thing to do right now?"

Thu, Jan 19: *"If then [Jesus] were on earth, he would not be a priest, since there are those who offer gifts according to the law...he is mediator of a better covenant, enacted on better promises"* (Heb 7:25-8:6). Jesus was of the tribe of Judah; Jewish priests were from the tribe of Levi. So, under the law, Jesus would not be allowed in the sanctuary, much less the Holy of Holies. **Reflection/Provision:** It's easy to understand why many Jews rejected Jesus, seeing him as a blasphemer and heretic. I wonder how Christians would react now to someone who, like Jesus, is open and welcoming, bringing better promises to all, while bringing into question many of the exclusionary laws and practices of Christianity. If you've not read "The Grand Inquisitor" from Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (Part V, Chapter 5), you might want to. I'm sorry to say it is a truer depiction than any of us wants to admit.

Fri, Jan 20: *Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and justice shall look down from heaven fit them* (Ps 85). **Reflection/Provision:** "The truth hurts." "No justice, no peace." As usual, Scripture turns our flawed view upside down. In the Truth and Reconciliation commissions held in countries such as South Africa, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, and Canada, no one ever said the truth-telling would be easy. The unvarnished truth is painful for both the oppressor and the oppressed. Only when humanity is ready to accept the truth that springs from the earth: the broken bodies and civilizations, decimated lands and sacred spaces, and only when justice is called down from the Great Spirit can kindness, healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation begin. Not many of us are called to participate in these commissions, but it doesn't mean we don't have a role. What can do you to learn about a truth you'd just as soon ignore? How can you show kindness to someone who has suffered injustice because of their race, religion, country of origin, gender, or sexuality?

Sat, Jan 21: *"How much more will the Blood of Christ...cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God!"* (Heb 9:2-3, 11-14). **Reflection/ Provision:** A good bookend for our discussion on taking a fresh and challenging look at our faith. "Dead works" is a harsh phrase, but consider: Is your worship dull and boring? Do you know the living God? Are "works" you do done out of obligation or to gain heaven rather than out of love and compassion? Do you ever consider that "works" include, not just charitable actions, but speaking out against injustice and taking risks to oppose policies that oppress others? The Blood of Christ heals and cleanses us in proportion to the desire we have to be healed and cleansed. How much do you desire Christ's healing?