



Come and See!

Week of January 29, 2023

The Word ...

“Seek the LORD, all you humble of the earth, who have observed his law;
seek justice, seek humility; perhaps you may be sheltered
on the day of the LORD's anger.”

(from Zep 2:3;3:12-13)

Pondering the Word ...

Two themes interplay in the readings this week: shelter and humility. And the Spirit, ever playful, keeps the song, “Gimmie Shelter” by the Rolling Stones, running in my head! I’d never read the lyrics before—one takes a risk, as humility is not an attribute the Stones embody—but the words speak of the world with storms threatening and violence raging, and that love—just a kiss away—is the shelter, the answer. Interesting tie-in to today’s readings, but don’t expect the music ministry to be using it in today’s services!

Just how do these two themes come together? I imagine we’ve all dreamed of an escape from the busyness or boredom of life, or worse, from the very real threat of storms and violence. We long for sanctuary, a hiding place where we can get away from the people and forces that would overwhelm us. But the best we can do as humans is to find temporary refuge, and man-made shelters of money, power, fame, or addiction can be washed away in an instant. They will never save us. To find true shelter, we must turn to God.

Real shelter—God’s shelter—requires us to cede control, to humble ourselves, and to confront our own unworthiness. Real shelter requires trust and a willingness to be vulnerable, to allow God’s unconditional love to protect us, not from “the Lord’s anger” that Zephaniah mentions today, but from the sheer emptiness and futility of a life lived only for ourselves. Seek justice for those on the margins. Seek humility. Yours will be the true shelter: the kingdom of heaven.

Living the Word ...

*“When it comes to putting broken lives back together... the human best tends to be at odds with the holy best. To do for yourself—to grit your teeth and clench your fists—is, by that very act, to be unable to let something be done for you and in you. The trouble with steeling yourself against the harshness of reality is that that same steel also...secures your life against being opened up and transformed by holy power. You can survive on your own. You can grow strong on your own. You can even prevail on your own. But you cannot become human on your own. Surely that is why, in Jesus’ sad joke, the rich man has as hard a time getting into Paradise as that camel through the needle’s eye because, with his credit card in his pocket, he is so effective at getting for himself everything he needs that he does not see that what he needs more than anything else can be had only as a gift. He does not see that the one thing a clenched fist cannot do is accept, even from ‘le bon Dieu’ himself, a helping hand.” (Adapted from *The Sacred Journey*, by Frederick Buechner)*

Personal Reflections and Ideas... _____

Mon, Jan 30: *"You hide them in the shelter of your presence from the plottings of men; you screen them within your abode from the strife of tongues"*(Ps 31). **Reflection/Provision:** The only way God can hide us in his presence is if we are able to find God's presence in every situation we encounter. And that presence is found in the small, still voice—the silence—within. It is a grace, but one we can cultivate by creating "bursts" of quiet in the midst of our day. I laughed when I read the words, "You screen them within your abode." It is precisely from the "screens" in our lives that we need to find refuge! Be intentional this week by finding these bursts of silence. If you are in the car, turn off the drone of the "strife of tongues." Put on some quiet music, or better yet, no sound at all. The asphalt can be sacred ground—even the stoplights and potholes—if we are present to the moment. Be creative. Find places for brief escapes around campus, at work...heck, in the bathroom if you need to! (BT,DT!)

Tue, Jan 31: *"My daughter is at the point of death. Please, come lay your hands on her that she may get well and live."... There was a woman afflicted with hemorrhages for twelve years. "If I but touch his clothes, I shall be cured"* (Mk 5:21-43). **Reflection/Provision:** While these readings are not about a literal shelter, they are about finding refuge in God through humility and faith. Jarius, a synagogue official, is taking a risk. The elders are uncomfortable with Jesus, but this man, desperate to save his daughter, humbles himself before Jesus and puts aside his own reputation and livelihood to express his faith. The bleeding woman, likely a pariah due to her condition, humbles herself even further by pushing through the crowd to touch her healer. Many people suffer in silence, their infirmities hidden, maybe even from themselves. They are too ashamed (the contrite face of pride) to seek help and healing. How can you provide a path to someone else—or to yourself—to find refuge and shelter in Christ?

Wed, Feb 1: *They said, "Where did this man get all this? What kind of wisdom has been given him? What mighty deeds are wrought by his hands!"...And they took offense at him* (Mk 6:1-6). The Greek says they were "scandalized" by him. Why? Skepticism? Did they scoff at him, not believing he was the real deal? Jealousy? Could be, but maybe they, like many others at the time, were just not willing to accept the ramifications of what he had to say. **Reflection/Provision:** Look at your life: Have you missed out on the shelter of God's love due to haughtiness or an unwillingness to look beyond your expectations or ingrained views to find something new?

Thu, Feb 2: *"He...has [freed] those who through fear of death had been subject to slavery all their life"* (Heb 2:14-18). **Reflection/Provision:** Freedom from fear of death requires a lot of humility and faith. It's not something we like to think about, but we can start practicing for it now. Do you hold things in a "death-grip" for no reason other than a need for control? Start small and begin to loosen your grip. You'll be amazed at the freedom you feel!

Fri, Feb 3: *"Do not neglect hospitality"* (Heb 12:1-8). **Reflection/Provision:** Ok, fess up: how many of you, when you hear the word hospitality used in the context of religion, think of casseroles? 😊 Do you ever think of sanctuary, shelter, providing not just bodily nourishment for one day, but practical, spiritual, and emotional nourishment over time? Maybe it's teaching English to immigrants. Perhaps your church can actually sponsor a family of angels disguised as refugees. Isolated acts of mercy are always important and always needed, but accompanying someone on their journey—and not expecting them to follow our journey—is the best kind of hospitality we can give. Research opportunities in your area to accompany those in need of welcome.

Sat, Feb 4: *"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose. Beside restful waters he leads me...I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come"* (Ps 23). This psalm is among the most recognizable of all the psalms. Christians usually hear it read at funerals, and while its beautiful imagery is very comforting for those who mourn, for the Jewish people, these words are not about some idyllic afterlife. They are about the here and now. Actually, in many Christian Bibles, the title is "The Lord, Shepherd and Host." **Reflection/Provision:** Here's the topic of hospitality again. The green pastures and restful waters sound like a pretty nice refuge to me. And in what might seem a paradox, allowing God to serve us—to set a table for us, to anoint us, even to wash our feet—requires humility on our part. How can that be? When we allow others to be our servants, we put ourselves in their hands. We are vulnerable. We rely on and trust them that they will take care of us and nurture us without expectation of return. The unconditional love of God is the most humbling thing we will ever experience. God wants to dwell with us right here, right now. Let God love you.