



The Word ...

“Thus says the LORD: Share your bread with the hungry,
shelter the oppressed and the homeless; clothe the naked when you see them,
and do not turn your back on your own.

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your wound shall quickly be healed; your vindication shall go before you,
and the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer, you shall cry for help,
and he will say: Here I am!

If you remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech;
if you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted;
then light shall rise for you in the darkness,
and the gloom shall become for you like midday.”

(Is 58:7-10)

“You are the light of the world.”

(from Mt 5:13-16)

Pondering the Word ...

There are a few passages from Scripture I call defining readings. This selection from Isaiah is one of them. It states very clearly most of what social justice entails. (The only thing I believe it lacks is making sure those in need have a voice in their redemption, the kind of empowerment Jesus offers to those he heals.)

I have a triangle diagram I share with folks called, “The Four A’s of Social Justice.” **ACTS** of mercy, like feeding the hungry, clothing the naked make up one of the sides: “help for today.” The second side I label **ACCOMPANY**, which provides “help over time,” supporting those in need through ongoing education, immigrant support, finding housing, etc. This calls for a greater, ongoing commitment to make an appreciative difference in the lives of a few people. The base of the triangle is **ADVOCACY**, “help and hope for the future,” working for change to address the problems of poverty, racism, violence, and other oppression in our midst.

“Wait a minute,” you say, “You call this *the FOUR A’s*. A triangle has three sides. What’s the fourth A?”

That A—**ATTITUDE**—resides at the center of the triangle, and asks” “What’s in *your* heart?”

Living the Word ... “*You are the light of the world.*” “Who? Me? Jesus isn’t talking to me!”

Think again. Jesus calls to all of us to be a light, a person of justice who can light up the darkness, as we hear in today’s psalm. And if you hadn’t noticed, there’s a lot of darkness around. It’s important, though, to make sure your heart is in the right place. If you act begrudgingly, out of obligation and guilt rather than out of love, see what’s causing the wound in your heart. For many of us, it’s not malice but a feeling of futility. “What difference can I make?” We might feel more comfortable giving financial support, and while money, given to the right organizations, can make an incredible difference for those in need, make sure it makes a difference for you too. A change of heart often comes when confronted, not only by the need, but by the gratitude and grace we receive from those with whom we share. Think about using the upcoming season of Lent to light up your world!

Personal Reflections and Ideas... _____

Mon, Feb 6: *As [Jesus and the disciples] were leaving the boat, people... laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged him that they might touch only the tassel on his cloak* (Mk 6:53-56). **Reflection/Provision:** Imagine what this is like for Jesus. At times, I forget the reality of his humanity. This reaction could swell the head of a lesser person. Dare I say a few of the disciples are likely reveling in all this attention! But Jesus is aware from whence his power comes, and with that power, awesome responsibility. Mind-boggling responsibility. Any of us responsible for and to others are wise to remember the power we hold, and like Jesus, put our total faith and trust in God to help shoulder the burden and bless the result. Pray today for God to guide you as you tend to others' needs.

Tue, Feb 7: *"How well you have set aside the commandment of God in order to uphold your tradition! You nullify the word of God in favor of your tradition that you have handed on"* (Mk 7:1-13) The Pharisees ask Jesus why his disciples don't wash their hands before eating. This law, among others, was created to stem the spread of disease. (We know all about that!) Jesus is not questioning the law. He's pointing out the elders care so much about "human precepts," they ignore God's law. What was simple and pure at the beginning has become distorted by layers of man-made rules. **Reflection/Provision:** Are there traditions or laws that in practice stand in the way of doing God's will? Things don't have to be sinful to distract us. "We've always done it this way" can be a justification to continue something that no longer bears fruit, or to exclude new people or ideas.. See if there are habits and traditions in need of refinement so your focus can remain on God's word.

Wed, Feb 8: *The LORD God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it"* (Gn 2:4-9, 15-17) **Reflection/Provision:** "Well," some may say, "what about that 'dominion' thing, the 'subduing the earth' directive!" You know, I can't think of anyone who, having dominion over something, would want to destroy it... anyone who is in their right mind, at least! Take about 1 ½ hours to watch "The Letter" (<https://www.theletterfilm.org/watch/>). Watch it as a family if you can and then discuss it. I think many of us are "becoming used to 'it,'" or giving up, thinking there is nothing we can do. Think again. Let the children lead.

Thu, Feb 9: *"Let the children be fed first. For it is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs"* (Mk 7:24-30). **Reflection/Provision:** When Scripture readings we like come up in the lectionary, we are happy to hear them again. Then, there are other readings—today's gospel may be one of them—that we'd just as soon not have to deal with. I wince when I hear Jesus' hurtful dismissal of this woman, but I am always buoyed by her refusing to take no for an answer. She is a woman on a mission and is not going to let him bully her. And I am even more delighted with Jesus' response. No, he doesn't apologize (I think Mary would scold him!), but he recognizes her faith and rewards her by healing her daughter. Take note too: she takes Jesus on his word. He doesn't have to show up at her house. If there are Scripture passages like this that get under your skin, take time to imagine the setting and the message the evangelist is trying to convey. By continuing to engage him, the gentile woman calls Jesus out to a wider ministry, a ministry of love and healing offered to all!

Fri, Feb 10: *"I confess my faults to the LORD," and you took away the guilt of my sin. ...with glad cries of freedom you will ring me round.* (Ps 32). **Reflection/Provision:** Spoiler Alert: Lent starts in 12 days. I like to suggest Ps 32 as a prayer to hold in your heart this Lent. Read the whole thing—it's pretty short. I particularly like the message in v. 4 (not included in today's reading) that explains the heaviness of the sins we have not brought to God for mercy. And I love the image of the "glad cries of freedom" that surround us when we fully accept forgiveness. Remember, if I believe God has forgiven me, then who am I to not forgive myself? Lent is a time to reflect not only on our sins, but on God's great love, and to change and open our hearts to accept that love.

Sat, Feb 11: *God said: "The man has become like one of us... Therefore, he must not be allowed to put out his hand to take fruit from the tree of life also, and thus eat of it and live forever."* (Gn 3:9-24). **Reflection/Provision:** "Wait a minute: 'Living forever.' Isn't that what God wants for us? Isn't that why Jesus became incarnate?" Let's consider this: Is it that the first humans were just not ready for the gift of immortality? Is it by knowing the hardships of human existence that we come to know and fully appreciate the great gifts of God? I was once told that God brings each of us home when we are most ready—so comforting--but we can practice immortality today by giving thanks and praise to the God who has given us all that is good...very good.