



The Word...

*“As you go, make this proclamation: ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’
Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons.
Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give”
(Mt 9:36-10:8).*

Pondering the Word ...

The literal Greek puts that last line so simply: *“You have received a free gift; give a free gift.”*

Fritz Kreisler, the late Austrian concert violinist is quoted as saying: *“I was born with music in my system. It was a gift from God. I didn’t acquire it. So, I do not even deserve thanks for the music... I never look upon the money I earn as my own. It is public money, entrusted to me for proper disbursement. My beloved wife feels exactly as I do... In all these years of my so-called success in music we have not built a house for ourselves. Between it and us stand all the homeless in the world”* (as cited in *Challenge*, by Mark Link SJ, 1993).

Wow! That’s an amazing way to look at one’s life! I am far from anything close to that level of humility. Of course, we are entitled to earn a reasonable living using the gifts God has given us; God speaks about the blessing of being able to “eat the fruits of our labor” (Ps 128:2; Is 3:10). Self-efficacy, the knowledge that one is capable of doing for oneself, is an important part of a healthy psyche. But we are also told to share the gifts and the fruits of our labor with those less fortunate (Mt 25:31-46; Lk 6:38; Rom 12:13; Hb 13:16, among many others); and, to share, not out of obligation, but out of love and kindness (Dt 15:7-11; 2 Cor 9:6-10).

Living the Word...

We talked last Sunday about the importance of gratitude, particularly in the face of the mystery of the Divine’s presence in the world. I find it difficult at times to maintain that sense of gratitude for all that I have been given when I consider the suffering in the world. It’s overwhelming that I should be so blest while children die by the tens of thousands each day from war, poverty, and disease, mostly at the hands of humanity’s greed. I cannot contain my tears.

And yet I know the more grateful I am for the free gifts I receive, the more joy I can contain, and the more I will be impelled to share these gifts and this joy. Let’s try a little prayer exercise: Grab a pen and paper and write down all the things you have received as gift from God last week. Not just the obvious big things like your body, your brain, your faith, etc. List the little things. Include also the trials that have provided growth. This is not to discount the work you’ve done to bring your gifts to fruition; it’s an exercise to open yourself to see God at work in you, and that, in reality, *all* is gift. Now, flip the page over and list the gifts you’ve given others without cost. We’re not talking here just about donations. When have you given of your time, your true self, without expectation of return? I bet there are more than you think. Do you see that these are gifts too?

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Jun 15: *“Lord, listen to my groaning. Harken to my word... Heed my call for help! I bring my plea expectantly before you. For you, O God, delight not in wickedness... the arrogant may not stand in your sight. You hate all evildoers. You destroy all who speak falsehood; The bloodthirsty and the deceitful the LORD abhors”* (Ps 5).

When I am feeling hopeless about the state of the world, I remember this psalm, and also the words from Peter’s second letter: *“But do not let this one thing be concealed from you, beloved ones: that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a single day. The Lord is not delaying what is promised but is magnanimous toward you, intending for no one to perish, but rather for all to advance to a change of heart”* (2Pt 3: 8-9). **Provision: Bring about the Kingdom.** God “hates” and “abhors” the deceitful and evildoers? I’ve wrestled with this before. I like what Peter says: God awaits “all to advance to a change of heart.” That sounds like the merciful God I know. So, as we struggle through these times of arrogance and wanton deception from all sides, let’s work hard to bring about a change of heart for those trapped in a web of deceit. We do this, of course, not by condemning but through love.

Tue, Jun 16: *“Against you only have I sinned; and done what is evil in your sight”* (Ps 51).

This is supposedly the psalm of David to atone for his sins of adultery and murder. *Only* against God have you sinned, David? What about Bathsheba, her child, and Uriah? *“For transgressions against God, the Day of Atonement atones; but for transgressions of one human being against another, the Day of Atonement does not atone until they have made peace with one another”* (from the Mishnah, from *Gates of Repentance*, p. 239). I can’t think of any sin that is against God alone. Even if there is no other person or part of creation involved, when we sin against God, we sin against ourselves. And “me” is usually the last to whom we grant mercy. **Provision: Practice forgiveness.** Ask God to strengthen you so that you can forgive—others and yourself.

Wed, Jun 17: *“The LORD keeps those who are constant”* (Ps 31).

Provision: Keep on keepin’ on. God does not ask us to have everything figured out, to understand every detail of the “law.” God asks us to be faithful, to keep in our hearts the message of God’s mercy and love, and to share that message. Be constant. You can do this.

Thu, Jun 18: *“But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions”* (Mt 6:7-14). *“Those who cannot forgive others break the bridge over which they themselves must pass”* (Confucius).

Fri, Jun 19: *“For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be”* (Mt 6:19-23).

We’ve heard this verse many times, but there’s another aspect we can fail to recognize: our time. Our hearts may be with our treasure, but do our calendars reflect that? As parents, we may say our kids are our treasures, but are we overly concerned with providing material things for them? Do we spend focused time with them, one-on-one? The same applies to all our loved ones. **Provision: “Where your treasure is, there also will be your time.”** There’s an invitation in the NYT this month for self-care, and one thing the author suggests is tracking the time you spend on your smart phone. There’s a way to do that in your settings app. It’s sobering to see it in black and white. Each morning, answer this question: Where or what is my treasure? Then, when you do your examen at night, look back on how much time you spent nurturing that treasure in your heart.

Sat, Jun 20: *“Don’t worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil”* (Mt 6:24-34). And I want to say to Jesus, sufficient for a day is its own grace and blessings as well! Perhaps a special event or person has come and gone. We are retiring from a fulfilling career or anticipating an empty nest after years of active and rewarding parenthood. We know not what God has in store for us and we might find ourselves worrying about what happens next. **Provision: Trust in God’s plan.** God wants for “our welfare, not for woe” (Jer 29:11). In the wise words of Dr. Seuss, *“Don’t cry because it’s over; smile because it happened.”* Be grateful for what has been given and hopeful for what is to come!

In a few weeks, I will be taking a hiatus from writing—the first time since I began in 2009—due to some major surgery. I don’t know how long my recovery will take, but if I am up to it, I will try to resurrect some things from years’ past. I humbly ask for your prayers.