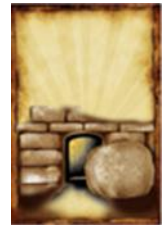


Provisions for the Journey to Jerusalem

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Lent Week Five, 2025



Sunday, April 6: "Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him, "Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days." ... Jesus said to them, "Untie him and let him go" (Jn 11:1-45).

Several of the readings this week have to do with taking risks. In today's gospel, Jesus takes a big risk going back to Bethany, less than two miles away from Jerusalem where the elders are seeking his life. But I'm fascinated by the people to whom Jesus is talking in this quote today. Who is it that rolls back the stone? Who will untie Lazarus and let him go free? He has been dead for four days and, as Martha says, there will be a stench. I imagine those in war-torn and violent areas know that smell. It is one people say you never forget. Jewish law is extremely strict about touching a dead body--*tum'at met*—one of the highest forms of ritual uncleanness. Perhaps the Jews sent their servants to do the "dirty work," and, like the servants at the wedding feast at Cana, they play an integral part in bringing this miraculous event to life.

Provision: PRAY for courage to take a risk. *I'm offering a Day of Prayer next week, entitled, "Unbind Him. Set Him Free: The role of community in Jesus' healing ministry." Many great souls among us are willing to get their hands dirty, to even risk their lives, working with Jesus as he heals throughout the world. It is an abomination that so many who have dedicated their lives to unbinding those trapped in poverty are losing support. ("The Vatican's global charity arm, *Caritas*, ...warned that millions of people will die as a result of the 'ruthless' U.S. decision to 'recklessly' stop USAID funding, and hundreds of millions more will be condemned to 'dehumanizing poverty.'" <https://apnews.com/article/usaaid-christian-nonprofits-funding-freeze-bbb000ea0e232765db1280c093301a8a>).

Jesus calls all of us to roll back the stones and roadblocks that prevent people from moving ahead, to unbind those who are not free. True servants of Jesus aren't afraid to get their hands dirty or call out injustice. For their labors, they are blessed to be a part of real miracles. What risk will you take today? Do what you can to set someone free.

Monday, April 7: *God stirred up the holy spirit of a young boy named Daniel, and he cried aloud: "I will have no part in the death of this woman." ... "Are you such fools, O children of Israel! To condemn a woman of Israel without examination and without clear evidence?"* (Dn 13:41-62).

"Way to go, Daniell!" You may think it takes great courage for him to speak up, but indeed he has the Spirit within him! The Holy Spirit rarely allows one to mince words! The undercurrent to this story is about the community blindly following the elders, which Daniel is quick to point out. It reminds me of the old folktale, The Emperor's New Clothes (https://andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheEmperorsNewClothes_e.html). Too often, we just go along with what those in authority say is true or right. We fail to use our own consciences. We just don't want to take a risk.

Provision: FAST from just going along. ACT. I know so many people—myself included—who are tired, overwhelmed, by the rapid-fire disruption to the world order. It might seem easier to throw up our hands in disgust and despair, but this is precisely the time to act. Ordinary citizens throughout the world are coming together, crossing party and ideological lines, to oppose the "chainsaw," "strongman" approach to governing. Do you feel the Holy Spirit moving in you, encouraging you to take a risk and speak out against injustice, to fast from blind allegiance? "Do not quench the Spirit." (1 Thes 5:19).

Tuesday, April 8: "Make a saraph and mount it on a pole, whoever looks at it after being bitten will live" (Nm 21:4-9).

I listened to a webinar the other day that featured Greg Boyle, SJ, author, and the founder of Home Boys Industries (<https://homeboyindustries.org/>). He's an absolutely amazing man. He said something that made me think of this story from Numbers. To paraphrase Greg: If we do not welcome our own woundedness, we will tend to despise the woundedness we see in others. So, what's that got to do with these nasty biting saraph serpents? God is telling the people, through Moses, "you must look at what has bitten you so as to live." If we are unwilling to look at our sinfulness—and as Greg says—to welcome it as part of our human condition, healing will be hard to come by. And when we are not healed, it is difficult to reach out to heal another. "You cannot give what you do not have" (Carroll A. Wise, *The Meaning of Pastoral Care*).

Provision: GIVE of yourself. Be a wounded healer. Do you have what it takes to be a "wounded healer?" Can you be a bearer of God's mercy without dwelling on your own experience? Are you healed enough from your own sin, loss, or pain to be an empathetic listening ear for those who suffer? Can you "teach" those who have fallen away or who have given up hope, not by proselytizing but by your compassion and joy? Wounded healers can be powerful companions. Is this a gift you can share? (*The Wounded Healer* by Henri Nouwen is still one of the best books on this subject.)

Wednesday, April 9: *"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free"* (Jn 8:31-42).

Sometimes, I feel like Pilate: "What is truth?" (Jn 18:38). There is so much misinformation, "gaslighting," and even bold-faced lying, it makes my head spin. I have been holding on to Scripture for dear life: Proverbs 6:16-19; Zechariah 8:16-17; Isaiah 58 & 59; Matthew 7:15-20; the parables in Luke; John 14:6 *"I am the way and the truth and the life."* The way to truth, the way to freedom is to live life the way Jesus lived.

Provision: PRAY to live as Jesus lived. Several people have been credited with this saying, but it appears theologian Karl Barth was the first to say, *'people should hold the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.'* Not many of us read newspapers anymore, preferring soundbites from our favorite echo chamber, but the advice remains sound. When you read or hear about a situation, talk to Jesus about it. What would he have to say? Are there parallels in Scripture? What advice might he give you? (Another good quote, this one from Reinhold Niebuhr: *"It's always wise to seek the truth in our opponents' error, and the error in our own truth."* Niebuhr's writings on religion and politics, though dated, are worth reading. He is neither "conservative" nor "liberal." He is a Christian. I wonder what he'd say to us today.)

Thursday, April 10: *When Abram prostrated himself, God spoke to him: "My covenant with you is this: you are to become the father of a host of nations"* (Gn 17:3-9). *Jesus said to the Jews: "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever keeps my word will never see death"* (Jn 8:51-59).

Why does God pick Abram? Genesis 11 and 12 don't give us much information. We learn a bit more about him as the story continues, but why is he chosen "to become the father of a host of nations?" In Romans 4, Paul tells us it is his righteousness that comes from faith. But faith is a gift as well. Why does God grant Abram faith? I think God picked Abram because of his openness to the Mystery and his willingness to take a risk. One might say believing in these words of Jesus is taking a risk, too.

Provision: Have HOPE and faith in the Mystery: Abram was one of three sons of Terah, and the only one who did not have children. Since children were a sign of blessing, Abram and Sarai could have been bitter. Some may say they had nothing to lose, but I think they were open to the possibilities that believing God's promise offered. How open are you to God's promise? What risks are you willing to take for God, remembering the words in Mt 7:21-23: *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father?"* See if you can leave your comfort zone today and encounter the Mystery. Holding on to hope is to have faith in the mystery.

Friday, April 11: *"I hear the whisperings of many: 'Terror on every side! Denounce! Let us denounce him!' All those who were my friends are on the watch for any misstep of mine"* (Jer 20:10-13).

"Those who were my friends..." I imagine these words ring in Jesus' ears as he faces his torture and death. I wonder: What was the turning point for Jeremiah's "friends?" Maybe it's the Temple Sermon (Jer 7:1-7). Most people resent having their wrongdoing called out, particularly in public at the temple gate. For all but one of Jesus' male friends—those who had something to lose—it was fear that drove them from his side. I don't equate Jeremiah's so-called friends with the disciples who ran away Good Friday. I believe they truly loved Jesus. But often, when the going gets tough or we face threats for speaking God's truth in community, fear of losing what we have can cause us to turn away from the good.

Provision: ACT without fear. What do *you* have to lose?

Saturday, April 12: *"I will turn their mourning into joy, I will console and gladden them after their sorrows"* (Jer 31:10-13).

True to the role of a prophet, Jeremiah reminds those whom God has duly and pointedly scolded, that God will be true to God's covenant. "Yahweh keeps promises," no matter how many times we break ours. (I've never taken the time to analyze Isaiah and Jeremiah to see how many of their prophecies are condemnation versus God's faithfulness...maybe someday!) Today, God promises to turn our mourning into joy: those living in war zones, the innocent being held in prisons and cages, those who have lost their livelihoods and their freedom, those who are mourning a fragile, but peaceful world order, those frightened by challenges to democracy. *"I will console and gladden them after their sorrows."*

Provision: HOPE. Give thanks for the Lord's faithfulness. *"But this I will call to mind; therefore, I will hope: The LORD's acts of mercy are not exhausted, his compassion is not spent; they are renewed each morning— great is your faithfulness! The LORD is my portion, I tell myself, therefore I will hope in him. The LORD is good to those who trust in him, to the one that seeks him. ...Let us search and examine our ways and return to the LORD. Let us lift up our hearts as well as our hands toward God in heaven!"* (Lamentations 3:21-25, 40-41).

*Day of Prayer, Monday, April 14, 9 am-3 pm; Loyola on the Potomac in southern Maryland.

<https://loyolaonthepotomac.com/days-of-prayer>.