

Provisions for the Journey to Pentecost

Brief reflections on the week's Scripture readings
Sixth Week of Easter, 2026



Sunday, May 10: *"Beloved: Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pt 3:15-18).*

You are walking down the street today and someone you've never met comes up to you. They are doing a podcast. They ask, "Are you hopeful?" then stick a microphone under your nose. If you say yes, there are follow-up questions: "Are you hopeful just for yourself or for the world?" "Why are you hopeful?" "What is the reason for your hope?"

"Are you hopeful?" What is your answer?

Provision: PAY ATTENTION. These days, I'm not sure I'd make it through that first question. If I said no, I don't think it would be too hard to articulate all the reasons for my lack of hope. While I doubt the interviewer is looking for this exchange to be a crux issue of faith for me, would I even be aware enough to realize that is exactly what this question is? The key, I believe, is the first phrase: *"Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts."* *The Message* translation reads, *"Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention."* The only way we can always be ready is if we keep our sights focused on the gentle message of love and mercy we hear from Jesus Christ, through good times and bad. Before you head out onto the streets of the "real" world today, ask Jesus to grace you with his presence so you can answer skepticism with hope.

Monday, May 11: *We spoke with the women...One of them, a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, and a worshiper of God, listened, and the Lord opened her heart to pay attention (Acts 16:11-15).*

In Acts of the Apostles, we hear stories, like the one today, of Gentiles welcoming the disciples into their homes. We also hear stories, like the one tomorrow, of Gentiles beating them within an inch of their lives. There is one operative word in today's reading...wait for it...**LISTEN!** In this case, though, it's not about the disciples listening—they seem, for now, to be pretty good at that—but about how they must trust the Lord to open the hearts of those to whom they minister.

Provision: "We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs." It is often frustrating when we work in social justice ministries to see people we serve drawn back into the traps of addiction or life on the streets. Sometimes we can feel like Isaiah, *"In vain I have labored; I have spent my strength in futility and in emptiness"* (49:4). So, it's good for us to listen to these words: It is the work of the Spirit to open hearts and make others ready to listen to the good news. If you find you get frustrated with people who seem not to listen (um...that could be our kids as well!), say a quick prayer to the Spirit that she will allow the words you speak and the love you share to be heard by open hearts.

Tuesday, May 12: *The crowd joined in the attack on Paul and Silas, and the magistrates had them stripped and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After inflicting many blows on them, they threw them into prison (Acts 16:22-34).*

What precipitates **this** attack on Paul and Silas? Philippi is predominantly Gentile, so it isn't the local Jews complaining about violations of the law. In this case, it is a slave owner, angry that Paul has driven out of a young slave girl a bad spirit that allowed her to tell fortunes. The owner has been making a pretty penny on this girl and now his little profit-center is out of business. So, he riles up the crowd and the local officials (who, BTW, shake in their shoes later, when they learn Paul is a Roman citizen!) and beat Paul and Silas silly. People don't like it when you do anything to disrupt their money-making schemes. Sound familiar?

Provision: Consider nonviolent resistance and boycotts. It doesn't necessarily have to be a money-making scheme. It could be a power grab. We saw in Minneapolis earlier this year, two young people killed for challenging government mercenaries abusing political power. (Please let us not forget the names and lives of Renee Good and Alex Pretti.) We also see the impact consumer boycotts can have on businesses whose leaders cave to political pressure (in these cases, the almighty dollar often wins out). Just be aware: anytime the people rise up against the powers that be—those who take advantage of others, those who strive to impose their will, those whose god is greed—there will be blowback. Be safe, but don't hide. Make sure to exercise the freedoms you have. Vote! Pray for courage and strength. Don't be imprisoned by fear.

Wednesday, May 13: *"I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But the Spirit of truth will guide you to all truth"* (Jn 16:12-15).

Some of you may remember the 90's film, *A Few Good Men*, and the famous line shouted by Jack Nicholson's military character to a civilian interrogator: "Truth? You can't handle the truth!" Even if you've not seen the movie, these impactful words have made it into common vernacular. Jesus' words are not at all angry, but they gently state the same thing. The disciples cannot handle, are not ready yet for the truth. This becomes evident a few days hence when the brutal truth of the crucifixion becomes a reality. As we talked about Monday, it is the Spirit that knows when each of us is ready to accept the truth.

Provision: Give the Spirit time. I am confronting a situation that is asking me to give the Spirit time, to be patient as the right way of proceeding emerges. It reminds me, yet again, that I am not in control (which is not an acknowledgment I like to make!) But the Lord granted me great peace today like I have not had in some time. I am always grateful when I cede control and allow the Spirit of truth to work. Perhaps you are experiencing something similar, that God is asking you to wait, to be patient. There's a wonderful quote from the *Tao Te Ching*: *"Do you have the patience to wait till your mud settles and the water is clear? Can you remain unmoving till the right action arises by itself?"* Life can get muddy. If this is the case for you right now, let things settle. Trust the Spirit. The right, true, and clear action will arise.

Thursday, May 14: *"This is my commandment: love one another as I love you"* (Jn 15:9-17).

Provision: How does Jesus love you? We've reflected on this verse and on this question in the past, but it bears repeating: How does Jesus love you? There are times when I feel Jesus' love, but I'm not sure that's the answer Jesus is looking for. It's not just about how *we* feel. You and I know the answer, and it's a hard one to face: Jesus loves me, loves you, loves everyone...unconditionally. And that's how he asks us to strive to love one another. Everyone. I don't know about you, but most days, I fail miserably. It's important to note, though: Jesus doesn't say we need to LIKE everyone! Any parent, spouse, or partner can attest to times when their ever-loving dear one is hard to like! (I remember the instructors from a marriage class 40 years ago advising us to make a conscious decision each morning to love each other—even if it was through clenched teeth!) We will encounter people whose actions and behaviors rub us the wrong way or seem wrong or even evil. Jesus' doesn't call on us to condone wrongdoing, but he tells us plainly: we are not to judge, and we are to love everyone as a child of God. How will you love everyone today?

Friday, May 15: *One night while Paul was in Corinth, the Lord said, "Do not be afraid. Go on speaking, and do not be silent, for I am with you. No one will attack and harm you." ... They seized Sosthenes, the synagogue official, and beat him in full view of the tribunal...Paul remained for quite some time* (Acts 18:9-18).

The Lord said Paul wouldn't be harmed, but we can't say the same for good old Sosthenes! The Jews in Corinth, led by Sosthenes, bring Paul to the Roman tribunal because he *"is inducing people to worship God contrary to the law."* When the Roman proconsul, Gallio, says he can't be bothered and throws them all out, the crowd is embarrassed and hopping mad. They take it out on Sosthenes. But he apparently doesn't hold a grudge because we hear of him again in Chapter 1 of First Corinthians. He has become Paul's "brother" in faith!

Provision: Practice forgiveness. Paul could have hightailed it out of Corinth. At the very least, he might have avoided Sosthenes at all costs. Sosthenes could have been so angry with Paul that he'd seek revenge. But those things didn't happen. I like to imagine Paul comforting Sosthenes after his beating, taking care of him, and nursing his wounds; speaking to him with gentleness and kindness. Sosthenes experiences Paul's mercy and love and is led to conversion to become part of the new community. All because of forgiveness. We too can live this kind of unconditional love. Forgive.

Saturday, May 16: *Paul traveled... bringing strength to all the disciples* (Acts 18:23-28).

The new disciples face ridicule, persecution, or worse. Some have been disowned by their families. What can Paul do to bring them strength? The disciples know Paul is one of them. They know he has suffered and persevered. They see the scars. He walks the walk, likely with a limp. We may defer ministry to those wearing a collar or a large cross around their necks, or to those with advanced degrees. Paul brings strength to the disciples not because he can quote Scripture. The strength he imparts is from his living, prophetic witness.

Provision: Bring strength wherever and to whomever you can! Good bookend to the week. We started out talking about hope and the importance of being purveyors of hope in the face of a darkened, skeptical world. But remember: Paul derives his strength and hope just as Jesus did—by "praying always" and being open to the voice and wisdom and grace of the Spirit. That's the best, and frankly, the only way we can minister well and bring strength to others.

Many years ago, there was a slogan for American Express: "Don't leave home without it!" Good advice for all of us—clergy and laity alike—don't leave home without calling upon God for hope and strength to give to all those you meet.

