

GOD'S WORD IS ALIVE

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acta
PUBLICATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

God's Word is alive; it strikes to the heart. It pierces more surely than a two-edged sword. (from Hebrews 4:12)

I came to Scripture in a roundabout way, through an early love of books. From the time that I can first remember, I couldn't put a book down. I read on my lap at the dinner table; I carted novels to school and read them during class. I read on the beach and in the bathroom, and any time I was forbidden to read, I disobeyed. My disobedience was pure. My primary allegiance has always been to the story.

I came to the Bible as an adult, though I knew many of its stories since childhood. A lifelong Catholic and graduate of parochial schools, I didn't think there would be much in the Bible that I hadn't already heard. I began reading the Bible systematically, with a plan to read a few chapters a day. Two years later, I emerged from the Book of Revelation, blinking in the light of a new world. This story of salvation history changed me more than anything I'd ever read, and I had to know more. And so I became a student of the great Story.

Stories wield a certain power over our lives. We have a fascination with people who are not us but who are like us. Stories teach and entertain, but they also comfort with the uncanny recognition of who we are and what we want. Our dreams and fears, our best and worst selves are demonstrated in stories, both biographical and fictional. We encounter ourselves in stories in a way that is almost confessional: this is who I am; this is who I could be.

Anyone who encounters the Word of God as a person of faith is open to this same experience. In almost a quarter century of serving the Church and many years of facilitating inquiry groups for the RCIA, I have listened to many people relate how contact with the stories of Scripture, however randomly met, transformed their hearts. In Bible studies, faith-sharing groups, seminaries, and parishes where the Liturgy of the Word is powerfully proclaimed and preached, more and more people are awakening to the deep call of God's story and feel summoned to radical response. God's Word reveals to us the beauty of the image in which we were made and meant to be. Having looked into that mirror, it is hard to accept the worldly image of what it means to be human any longer.

The Bible is a love story, sometimes funny, sometimes tragic, but always full of longing and presence and constancy. When we come to know ourselves as simply the most recent participants in this ongoing

story, Scripture becomes alive for us as we pick up the trail of “those who have gone before us, marked with the sign of faith.” Scripture is not the story of religious people who once knew God long ago. It is the ongoing testimony of sinners and saints (and some who are both) who tell us what they have learned and what we might learn if we take up the trail after them. Reading the Bible, then, is not for the sake of getting the history straight but for the purpose of finding our place in the story.

This collection of meditations on the Sunday lectionary, with additions made for special feast days, is arranged in four sections: one for each of the three lectionary cycles, and a fourth for feasts and solemnities, some of which are celebrated irregularly. Therefore, there is a “Liturgical Readings Calendar” at the beginning that gives the proper readings for all the years from the First Sunday of Advent in 2014 to the Feast of Christ the King in 2023.

More than anything else, this book is a conversation for ordinary Catholics and other followers of the three-year lectionary cycle of readings about the relationship between Scripture and personal experience. It includes brief reflections on each of the readings, as well as questions to help you make the connection between God’s Word and everyday life. A suggested action concludes each Sunday’s commentary, for those who want to know what, precisely, one might do in response to the Gospel.

I have been having the conversation that is this book with friends, catechumens and parishioners for some time. Others may find it helpful for both private and group use. Lectors may consult these reflections for insights into the meaning of the passage they are preparing to proclaim. Homilists can use them as a starting point for their own preparations. Scripture study groups and those in the catechumenate process may like the faith-sharing questions for their open-endedness (yes-or-no answers are seldom possible). I have tried hard not to ask a question I can’t answer myself or don’t find relevant to my own life of faith. Of course, the supplied questions may spawn more meaningful questions or concerns from a group, which should always take precedence over those found in the book.

For in the end, a relationship with God’s Word is a personal encounter. Though homilists and commentary writers and catechists do their best to mediate this Word for others, each of us has to make room for the Word to be planted down deep in us. Once it sleeps in the soil, a seed can produce astonishing new life. I hope this astonishment and life comes to you.

CYCLE A



FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Light and Darkness

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 2:1-5

Let us walk in the light of the Lord!

If God were to have the divine way with the world, what would it look like? We know how to respond if it is our way we are imagining: someplace beyond natural disasters, with no anxiety and lots of what we most need and want. Isaiah imagines a day when God's people finally know the life that God intended for them. Nations actually seek wisdom and instruction, intending to walk in the way of truth. Justice is rendered, peace replaces violence.

It all begins, of course, with a recognition that God is in charge. Swords do not get beaten into plowshares until the mighty realize that a Mightier One has arrived. Peace has its roots in every act of humility.

SECOND READING: ROMANS 13:11-14

It is now the hour for you to wake.

Our waking habits are very individual. Some people spring up at dawn, grateful to be alive, breathing in the air with exuberance. Some of us open one eye miserably, snap it shut, and try to pretend it is still night for a few minutes more. Paul says time is short, do not play games, morning has broken!

If we honor God's ways, we honor one another and do not live half-hidden, with a private agenda submerged in our words, relationships, and choices. Do we dare to move out of the shadows, beyond cynicism and resentment, and live in the light without pretension? (The night is far spent: Slow risers might want to begin right away!)

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 24:37-44

You must be prepared.

If Isaiah painted a picture of the day of the Lord as being glorious, a revelation of justice and truth, then Jesus counters that image: This day will also be mysterious, unexpected, and rather dangerous. Frankly, Isaiah's image is a bit more comforting. I am all for peace and justice arriving tomorrow. But a thief breaking into my house? This is not what I usually intend when I pray "thy kingdom come"!

Isaiah's understanding of that day necessarily includes the warning Jesus offers. When God is fully revealed, and justice is served, what will that justice look like? We pretend it is going to come down hard on the Bad Guys—we get the peace, they get the justice. But the fact is, we've all got a stake in the material world: the power, the glory, the sheer amount of stuff that weights us to this world like an albatross. When Jesus comes, all that is rooted in this world will disappear.

Questions for Reflection

- Isaiah envisions a world without conflict. What areas of your life would change in such a world? (Think of personal grievances, racial or ethnic tensions, institutions that you do battle with.)
- Paul's checklist for dishonorable living lists the vivid extremes like carousing, and the more hidden sins like jealousy. What would a list of honorable attributes for living contain?
- When Jesus breaks into your house like a thief in the night, what are you likely to lose?

Action Response

Review the areas of your life that would change if Isaiah's prophecy materializes. How many of those things do you have the power to change now? How much of the conflict in your life originates with you? Begin to move toward the kingdom now.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

The Voice of the Herald

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 11:1-10

No harm or ruin on my holy mountain.

Good news! Incredible reversals are about to take effect. Society will no longer be run like a beauty contest, where the ones who look good and dress smart get all the praise and all the prizes. Justice will be for the poor and the plain ones too. The vulnerable will be safe in the company of predators. Poison will not threaten the well-being of our children, not in its literal or more subtle forms. From now on, nobody hurts the innocent, and the wicked will be struck down with a word.

This is good news! Unless, of course, you stand to benefit from the world as it is. Are we sure we're on the side of the one upon whom God's spirit rests?

SECOND READING: ROMANS 15:4-9

Accept one another as Christ accepted you.

Acceptance is not much to ask for: not to be rejected outright because of the way we look or talk, who our parents were, what we may have done in the past, or what we have or lack. But we all know it is not that simple. One group excludes another, historically, politically, and how can we as individuals withstand the pressure to conform to that? The norms of our culture teach us who's in and who's out, and if we attempt to change the rules, there's hell to pay.

Paul says: Jesus comes to change the rules. This world's hell is heaven in the world to come, so whatever the cost of doing justice, consider it a downpayment on a dream home. Acceptance of one another is the first step on the path of justice.

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 3:1-12

Reform your lives!

Bad news! Some baptizer is calling for reform. He dresses weirdly and eats bugs. Everybody's falling at his feet, getting dunked in the river. There's hysteria in the air, and the authorities are out of their minds about him.

He says awful things about our religious leaders, tells them their claims to God's favor mean nothing. God would just as soon have rocks

for children! He says God's going to clear out all the deadwood in the forest. (I wonder if that includes me!) And he says if you think he is a reformer, wait till you see who is coming up. A dunk in the river will be nothing compared to a shower of Spirit and fire.

Real bad news—unless this is the herald you've been praying for.

Questions for Reflection

- Who are the people who compose your immediate community (family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, parish)? How will Isaiah's reversals affect the people you know?
- What people or groups are outside of acceptance in your town? What or who keeps them out?
- Would John the Baptist be a threat to you? Your family? Your church? Your neighborhood and town? Why?

Action Response

Identify one concrete step you can take to further the acceptance of outsiders in your community. Welcome a stranger, forgive a fellow sinner; don't let fear or prejudice divide your heart.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Kingdom Coming

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 35:1–6, 10

Be strong, fear not.

What if the weak were suddenly made strong? We see it all the time in cartoons: Popeye eats his spinach and beats Bluto black-and-blue (and Bluto could use a beating, we think). We see it in the news as well. Countries long victimized by a powerful class undergo revolutions in which the former victims oppress their oppressors. Human justice wears a brutal face, as those who suffer unjustly take on the character of injustice themselves.

Divine recompense is different. Judgment is reserved to God, and the poor are restored to wholeness without becoming part of the cycle of evil. There is no need to turn and wreak vengeance on the strong ones. Those who are truly restored have room only for singing and joy in their hearts.

SECOND READING: JAMES 5:7–10

You too, must be patient.

“Patience is a virtue,” my mother would intone, whenever algebra problems would wear down my eraser and good humor. This did nothing to increase the virtue in me. You cannot speak of patience to the impatient!

The patient know the fruits of waiting. They see the kingdom coming in the seeds they sow, words of kindness, deeds of compassion. They speak prophecy, knowing that what they say is already coming to pass. They know that God is in the seen and the unseen; and behind the scenes, God has already prepared a place for us. They believe that tenderness today means more love for tomorrow. And they are willing to make sacrifices now, trusting in God’s promises. Patience is the premier virtue for Advent.

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 11:2–11

“What did you go out to see?”

Our expectations dramatically affect what we experience. Depressed people tend to gather evidence that life is not working. Angry people collect grievances. The self-righteous hunt for the sins of others. We’re all looking for something, and we generally find it.

John in prison is reevaluating his claims about Jesus. He has prophetic expectations that he is unsure have been met. Jesus quotes him some Scripture as reassurance. But then Jesus directs the same concern to the crowds. What were you looking for in John? The message or the messenger? Because if you think it all ends with John, you will never guess that it begins with Me.

John announced the end of an age, the axe laid at the roots of some very old ways of being and thinking. Jesus announces the coming of a new age in which the humblest member would be greater than John. We have to believe that John in prison would be grinning to hear that. He was quite prepared to decrease for such an increase.

Questions for Reflection

- As the weak gain power and a voice in our culture, the strong tremble. Who are the weak in your circles? When they gain power, will they perpetuate injustice?
- How are you practicing patience during the holiday crush to get it all done?
- What do you expect to happen this Advent, and how does this expectation affect your experience of this season?

Action Response

The kingdom is coming! Everybody has a share in the harvest, but also a share in the sowing. What are you doing to make the kingdom a reality for others? Choose one seed to plant—gentleness, forgiveness, gladness—and tend it patiently in prayer and practice.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

What Child Is This?

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 7:10-14

Ask for a sign from the Lord.

Ahaz has a point, not wanting to tempt God by asking for a show of magic. But it was God who first offered to help Israel with a sign of confirmation in this time of distress.

Evidently it is all right with God that we of partial understanding and faulty vision ask for the assistance we need for discernment. But we have to be open to the outrageous: virgin births, guiding stars, visiting kings, angels talking to shepherds. God's signs are not the paranormal raps on a Ouija board, containable if irrational. If we ask for a sign, we might have to live with the astonishing results.

SECOND READING: ROMANS 1:1-7

You have been called to belong to Jesus.

Paul has a clear sense of vocation that should be a model for every Christian. He knows himself as an apostle, one sent by God, called and set apart to proclaim the Gospel. He is not the least ambiguous about it: God has him on a mission and he aims to fulfill it.

Most of us are pretty vague about the call, the mission, and the goal. Does God have a plan for my life? Is there something I should be doing? Where is my life headed, if anywhere? Has God even noticed me yet?

For those who are unsure of the details, Paul spells it all out in the letter to the Romans. "Spread the Gospel" is the bottom line of the Christian mission, but the how of it has to do with the way of "holiness, grace, and peace" that we are called into. We cannot learn it in a day; but we must learn it in a lifetime.

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 1:18-24

This is how the birth of Jesus came about.

It's a story about an old-world engagement—a deal cut, father and intended husband shaking hands on an exchange of resources. And then the upset—a pregnant girl, a spoiled contract. But a good man does not hand over a child to a mob for stoning, so he opts for a discreet annulment of the deal. Joseph had no idea that he had made a contract with

Heaven over the redemption of history itself.

An angel explains the details: the Holy Spirit, the son on the way, the end of sin as we know it. Joseph is not losing a wife, he's gaining a Savior. Grace happens. And Christmas happens too, in part because a good man chose not to stand in its way.

You and I have a part to play in the story of redemption. Our Eucharist is a contract with heaven, and all we have to do is get our agenda out of the way and let grace happen. Glory be to God for this gift.

Questions for Reflection

- What matters of discernment might you need to bring to God at this time? What prevents you?
- How would you describe your vocation as a Christian to someone who does not share your faith?
- Grace is happening in your life right now. Are you participating in it, or are you an obstacle in its path?

Action Response

Christmas is the best time of year to work on enlarging your heart. In exchanging gifts, do not forget those who cannot reciprocate your generosity. Remember the poor and the lonely in this season for families.

How Beautiful

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 52:7-10

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news!

Have you ever lost your home? Some of us have literally lost our homes in natural disasters, or have had to flee a native country and go into exile. Some have lost homes in economic disasters, or marital ones. It is actually easier to “lose home” than we might think. Sometimes our sense of home slips away as we fall into depression, loneliness or overwork. Sometimes we divide ourselves from home and family through deliberate acts of sin.

How relieved we are in such isolating times as these, when we greet the messenger of good news. The exile is welcomed back! We can go home. We walk in wonder, in disbelief at such news. How beautiful the thought of home is to those who are isolated and in exile.

God went into exile once, far from divinity, far from home. God came into place and into time, abandoned unity for singularity, left omnipresence and took on limitation. God entered the strangeness of flesh and its isolation. God went into exile once, so that all of us could find our way home. We celebrate the feast of home today. Wherever you are, God is welcoming you and offering you the shelter of your truest home.

SECOND READING: HEBREWS 1:1-6

This Son is the reflection of the Father's glory.

History, seen through the eyes of faith, is like building a jigsaw puzzle. We pick up a straight edge here and know we have the border. We see a bit of blue and know it is the sky, or perhaps the water. As we continue to piece the fragments together, the image grows clearer, and we know as the end nears what we are looking at.

Salvation history teaches us through the fragments, stories of Abraham and Moses, Hannah and Ruth. We get the picture of who God is, what this relationship with God is all about. Sometimes we find an ambiguous piece—this story of Abraham and Isaac, is this sky or water?—and we pause to consider our options. But in the end, when Jesus appears, all the pieces fall into place. From his birth to his death, and yes, through his resurrection and his Spirit, Jesus continues to show us what

the puzzle of existence is about and how to put the pieces of our daily choices together.

GOSPEL: JOHN 1:1-18

The light shines on in darkness, a darkness that did not overcome it.

The Gospel of John is a love story. It does not contain a story about Jesus born as a baby, the Christmas story we expect to hear. But it does give us poetry, the language of love and longing. It tells us about love taking on flesh and coming to live with us. It says we will all have a share in this love, for “love follows upon love.”

We know about love stories. Some of them endure throughout our lives and become the strength which sustains us to do all the good we do. Some of us had the steadfast love of parents, siblings, teachers, mentors, and special friends. Some of us, too, have suffered the disappointments of love: the parent who deserted, the companion who could not or would not stay. The wounds of love go deep, just as the gifts of love transform and heal us.

The love that John announces in his love story is the love that is here for eternity. This love does not disappoint. This love is to be trusted and is for real. This love will heal us, sustain us, and lift us up. And this love will transform us so that we become heroic and generous lovers ourselves. As in any love story, if you want to be where love is, you have to follow the Beloved.

Questions for Reflection

- Reflect on times when you lost your sense of home and how you were brought back.
- What are some of the ambiguous pieces of life’s puzzle for you? How does Jesus shed light on them?
- What are the richest sources of love in your life? For whom are you a source of love?

Action Response

In this season of gift giving, remember to give love. Give love in warm presence, kind attention, sympathetic listening. Give love in patience and forgiveness. Give love so that you can become love.

The Holiness of Family

FIRST READING: SIRACH 3:2-6, 12-14

Kindness to a parent will not be forgotten.

In this day and age, when so much has been said about bad parenting and offspring who refer to themselves as survivors of their childhood, it is peculiar to talk about the honor due to parents from their children. Putting aside the nightmare scenarios we've all heard about, it is enough to say that every generation is indebted to the last one in ultimate ways, and youth should not ignore the needs of elders.

The human family is a real and vital relationship, a community of people who need one another and who must depend on one another for the survival of all of us. If I assist the older woman trying to make change on the bus, or share my lunch with the old man who's been sitting on the curb every day, I have honored my parents. Every person in need is an invitation from God to see myself as sister or daughter or mother in Christ.

SECOND READING: COLOSSIANS 3:12-21

Over all these virtues put on love.

Paul presents a smorgasbord of counsel in this passage. Dress yourself with virtues. Give each other a break. Exercise forgiveness. Do peace. Be grateful. Make a home in your heart for Scripture. Any one of these would make a fine New Year's resolution.

But then comes the awkward passage about wives and husbands. Rather than ignore or apologize for Paul's culturally dated advice, I think preachers should take the opportunity to challenge the dynamics of human domination and submission. Paul says elsewhere and eloquently that the holiness of the body of Christ mandates that every part exists in communion with the others in mutual service of one life. There is only one head to this Body, and that is Christ. The rest of the members are to submit to Christ, and to one another in the way that love always submits to the beloved.

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 2:13–15, 19–23

Take the child and his mother and flee.

This is a strange story to use to celebrate the feast of the Holy Family, because this is a frightening story about a family in crisis. Fleeing your homeland for fear of death squads murdering children does not sound like a placid family portrait to me. (Sounds like Jesus has more in common with people who “survived” their childhood!) Out of chaos, and not stability, rose the life of Jesus.

But what makes this family holy is their attentiveness to God’s Word—in a visitation by an angel, in a dream, always willing to move in the direction that God prompts. They were not a model family living a perfect existence. They were a real family who faced real emergencies and tests to their lives. And from the start, they were ready to follow the will of their Lord.

Questions for Reflection

- How are you invited to be parent or child or sibling to the people in your life?
- Which phrase of Paul’s counsel in this passage speaks loudest to you? How does it encourage you to grow?
- What makes a family holy? Whether you live in a nuclear family or not, what is your responsibility to contribute to the holiness of your family of the heart?

Action Response

It is new year’s resolution time: Have you made the usual list? Be sure to add a spiritual agenda to your hopes for the coming year. Review Paul’s advice in Colossians 3. And let the Word of God, rich as it is, dwell in you in the coming year.

EPIPHANY

Walking Together

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 60:1-6

Nations shall walk by your light.

Although independence is an icon for Americans, and isolationism the shadow side of that quality, to go it alone tears at the fabric of our creatureliness. Every dream of the prophets for peace included the hope of acceptance by other peoples, and even their admiration. When the glory of God is finally revealed, all nations would flock to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice and praise to the God of Israel.

The manifestation of God's glory that Israel hoped for is the literal definition of epiphany. The divine revelation is always accompanied by a rush toward unity: one God, one people, one peace. All that divides humanity would fall away in the wonder of that hour.

In the meantime, we who believe without seeking an epiphany must continue to harbor that hoped-for peace in our hearts.

SECOND READING: EPHESIANS 3:2-3, 5-6

Members of the same body and sharers of the promise.

The letter to Ephesus is Paul's great letter about the church, its universal mission, and its embrace of all peoples as sharers in the divine plan. Paul takes on a very touchy subject by tackling it head-on: The spiritual inheritance of the Jews is to be shared equally with the Gentiles.

To imagine the original impact of this claim, I think of what it would have sounded like to my parents before the Second Vatican Council to hear that God loved the Protestants just as much as the Catholics. And it may be as much of a surprise to some people today that God also loves Buddhists, Muslims and Mormons with the same passion that we used to think was reserved only for Catholics.

It is no wonder that Paul got into trouble with the Jerusalem crowd, who saw the revelation of Jesus Christ to be a private, Jewish matter. The reconciliation of humanity to God through Christ has always been tough to swallow for anyone who lives with a divided heart.

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 2:1-12

“We observed his star at its rising.”

The astronomers from the East made some brilliant calculations regarding the star, but they greatly miscalculated when they showed up at Herod’s palace. If the wise men believed Herod when he said he wanted to worship the new king too, they must have been fatally innocent. Any child who hears this story knows that Herod is lying.

Still, these three do manage to find the child and recognize his greatness, despite the simplicity of his surroundings. And out of their coffers they surrender their wealth to the King of the poor.

The church has always seen these three as representatives of the universal nature of the good news of Christ. All nations will bow down in worship, as Isaiah foretold. God is the Lord of these three strangers from the Orient, who recognize the Savior even before his own people acknowledge him. And those who followed a star out of their lands are led back safely by a dream.

Questions for Reflection

- How is God’s glory revealed in our world at this time? How does this revelation help you to hold peace in your heart?
- Cultural pressures dictate our prejudices and fears about those who are “other” than us. How do you mend the divisions that you may have been taught to uphold?
- Have you ever taken a journey in faith, as the wise men did? What mistakes did you make? How did God supply what you lacked?

Action Response

Pope Paul VI said, “If you want peace, work for justice.” We manifest the glory of God in our world to the extent that we make justice and peace a reality. Brainstorm with your family or primary community one way that you can make a concrete commitment to justice this year.

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

“Give in for Now”

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 42:1-4, 6-7

I, the Lord, have called you for the victory of justice.

Folk ballads endure because they recall for us the personalities of heroic figures we want to keep alive in our hearts. The lover who does not forsake his love, though he loses his life preserving her safety. The soldier who wins the battle at the cost of his blood. The leader who is slain while carrying forward the cause. The servant songs of Isaiah are like ballads written about Jesus centuries before he was born. Like all ballads, they describe the noble figure and why he is to be revered. In the later verses, we will hear how he was slain for the sake of the truth, in fidelity to love, to liberate his people.

The fate of the servant of the Lord is unfair. But he brings real justice into an unjust world by his total surrender to God’s purposes. He gave himself over to injustice for a time, so that God’s justice might be known for all time. It is an odd bargain, but all of God’s dealings are full of mystery from where we sit. Forgiveness of sin is hardly just, but who will turn it down?

SECOND READING: ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 10:34-38

“Anyone who fears God and acts uprightly is acceptable to God.”

Peter didn’t always get it, but when he got it, he got it good. His sudden breakthroughs caused him to shout that Jesus was the Messiah or to leap overboard and swim to shore at the sight of Jesus. Peter wasn’t the most perceptive man in Galilee, but he wept at the knowledge of his own sin and admitted when he was wrong. That’ll get you pretty far in the reign of God.

All along, Peter has had a hard time, like the rest of the disciples, seeing Gentiles as salvageable people. Prejudice runs deep, and the Hebrew prejudice against outsiders was bred to the bone—and for good reason. Outsiders never did the Jews a lick of good. Why should they care, or their God care, what happens to the Gentiles?

But in the time it takes for Peter to have one vision (see earlier in chapter 10), Peter sees his way through and repents his blindness. He brings the good news of Jesus to Cornelius and his household because of what he sees, and the light of the world shines further into the darkness.

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 3:13-17

“We must do this if we would fulfill all of God’s demands.”

Sometimes I like the job description of John the Baptist. He gets to stand in the river all day and dunk people, while preaching up a storm about everything he sees that God does not like. He does not have to practice diplomacy or be nice to his enemies; after all, they’re God’s enemies too. Being John the Baptist seems like a good job, if you don’t count the beheading.

But even John has his off days. It is not always easy being the town baptist. When Jesus shows up, for example, he is confounded. Baptize “the one who is to come”? But all this baptizing is for the purpose of preparing for this very man! Jesus takes John aside. “Give in for now,” Jesus urges gently. Do it God’s way, and do not expect to understand everything.

Like John, we are susceptible to thinking we know what God wants and does not want. We think we have the corner on the market of God’s plan for us, not to mention for everyone else. We have to be alert for the curve balls of faith, the events that twist us around and ask us to do what does not fit, what is not reasonable. Faith is not the same as reason. If it were, we would not have to believe; we would know.

Questions for Reflection

- Have you ever suffered an injustice for the sake of a greater justice, or have you observed someone who has?
- To whom do you bring God’s good news, and from whom do you withhold it?
- When has a curve ball from God changed the way you see or understand your faith?

Action Response

Is there something in your life that you are resisting, such as the pursuit of a dream or allowing a wound to heal? Give in for now. Let God take you where the Spirit is prompting.