

ctkAlive! Scripture Study
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
2021—B Cycle



*"Summer Sunset" courtesy of
[Saulius Sutkus](#) on Unsplash.com
(see the closing prayer)*

Opening Prayer

(edited for use here)

When evil darkens our world, give me light.
When despair numbs my soul, give me hope.
When I stumble and fall, lift me up.
When doubts assail me, give me faith.
When nothing seems sure, give me trust.
When ideals fade, give me vision.
When I lose my way, be my guide!
That I may find serenity in Your presence
and purpose in doing Your will.

— Rabbi [John D. Rayner](#)

Source: [Woman's Day](#)

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 35: 4-7 "Say to those whose hearts are frightened: 'Be strong, fear not.'"

Psalms 146: 6-10 "The God of Jacob . . . secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry."

Letter of St. James 2: 1-5 "Show no partiality as you adhere to the faith."

Mark 7: 31-37 "People brought to Jesus a deaf man who had a speech impediment."

A Reading from the Book of Isaiah (35: 4-7)

The return of the exiles

"Have courage, do not fear.
See, your God comes, demanding justice.
He is the God who rewards,
the God who comes to save you."

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unsealed.
Then will the lame leap as a hart
and the tongue of the dumb sing and shout.
For water will break out in the wilderness
and streams gush forth from the desert.
The thirsty ground will become a pool,
the arid land springs of water.
In the haunts where once reptiles lay,
grass will grow with reeds and rushes.

Personal Reflection

Isaiah 35 is a powerful, poetic word of comfort for the mourning Hebrew exiles, who lost their temple, their land, and their sovereignty. Their suffering is manifested in a fearful heart, obscured vision, impaired hearing, broken bodies, and silent tongues. The exiles feel God's sorrow in their very bodies. Despair and weariness have utterly overwhelmed them. But hope endures. The God of Jacob does not abandon these people to their despair. Their sorrow will come to an end, and they will find new life in God.

Isaiah imagines their plight in creational terms. The general theme is that Yahweh will transform desolate, dry places into paradise. Overnight, even a small amount of rain can change a dry desert into a vibrant landscape. But Isaiah's poem moves far beyond the natural consequences of water in the desert. Creation itself will rejoice. Creation's praise joins human praise, in recognition of God's marvelous work.

Source: [Michael J. Chan](#) at [Working Preacher](#)

"Have courage, do not fear. See, your God comes. . . ."

— *How good am I at comforting and encouraging family members and friends in their dark times? When was the last time I had occasion to do this?*

"Despair and weariness have utterly overwhelmed them. But hope endures."

— *How might I apply this poetic passage to my experience of the pandemic? How confident am I that my environs and the world will blossom again?*

Responsorial Psalm 146 (6-10)

(edited for use here)

*Praise the Lord, my soul.
Yahweh is forever faithful
giving justice to the oppressed
and food to the hungry.
Praise the Lord, my soul.*

Yahweh sets the prisoners free.
Yahweh gives sight to the blind;

Yahweh straightens the bent.
Yahweh protects the stranger;
sustains the widow and the orphan.
Praise the Lord, my soul.

Yahweh loves the virtuous;
but brings to ruin the way of the wicked.
Yahweh will reign forever, your God, O Zion,
from generation to generation. Alleluia!
Praise the Lord, my soul.

Personal Reflection

This post-exilic psalmist demonstrates his faith in Yahweh as always available and eager to help, although at times their God may seem indifferent and distant. We must rely on God alone and cast all our cares on the Lord. Yahweh shows faithfulness to all who are weak and inclined to seek their welfare from other sources. God also shows faithfulness and love for those in situations of disadvantage or illness.

— *What similarities do I see between the Isaiah 35 reading and Psalm 146?*

— *What verse(s) in Psalm 146 apply to my own current life circumstances?*

A Reading from the Letter of Saint James (2: 1-5)

“My brothers and sisters, if you truly believe in our glorified Lord, Jesus Christ, you will not discriminate between persons. Suppose a person enters the synagogue where you are assembled, dressed magnificently, and wearing a gold ring; at the same time, a poor person enters dressed in rags. If you focus your attention on the well-dressed and say, ‘Come and sit in the best seat,’ while, to the poor one you say, ‘Stay standing, or else sit down at my feet,’ have you not, in fact, made a distinction between the two? Have you not judged, using a double standard? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters, God choose the poor of this world to receive the riches of faith and to inherit the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?”

Personal Reflection

There is never a reason for Christians to show favoritism and not respect the rights of each person. James speaks of faith-killing distinctions within Christian communities (like ours at CTK or wherever we worship). James says those who are “well off,” though not necessarily “rich,” profane the name of Christ, if they look down on fellow parishioners of, say, “lower station.” James warns that those who act in such a manner profane the name of Christ and bring contempt on the Church. James invites each of us—as he did his audience—to examine ourselves on the way we treat others, whether at Mass, in our families, or on the streets. A healthy and sincere self-examination based on this reading never “goes out of style.”

— *When was the last time I noticed someone in church and said to myself (or to someone else), “Look how that person’s dressed (or speaks or acts)!”*

“Did God not choose the poor of this world to receive the riches of faith?”

— *When I look around my parish and its ministries, who are the “worker bees,” the ones who keep our community thriving in faith and service to the whole community?*

Proclamation from the Gospel according to Mark (7: 31-37)

“Again, Jesus set out from the country of Tyre. He passed through Sidon and, skirting the sea of Galilee, he came to the territory of Decapolis. There, a deaf man, who also had difficulty in speaking, was brought to him. They asked Jesus to lay his hands upon him. Jesus took him apart from the crowd, put his fingers into the man’s ears, and touched his tongue with spittle. Then, looking up to heaven, he said with a deep sigh, ‘Ephphatha!’ (that is, ‘Be opened’).



*Image found at
[Osprey Observer](#).
Image source unknown*

“And immediately, his ears were opened, his tongue loosened, and he began to speak clearly. Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone about it; but the more he insisted, the more they proclaimed it. The people were completely astonished and said, ‘He has done all things well; he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak.’”

Personal Reflection

“They asked Jesus to lay his hands upon (the deaf man).” Keep in mind that the folks in this gospel story lived in a land outside the Jewish sphere of influence. At that time in history, most societies had no honorable place for anyone not physically “perfect.” Still, these foreigners recognized Jesus as a holy man of God. They brought this deaf and speech-impaired man to him. They asked him to heal the unfortunate man. By this healing gesture, Jesus communicated to the impaired man and those who brought him that he had within himself the power to provide the man with a second chance at living a “normal” life.

As an interesting sidelight, this miracle of Jesus depended—as others did—on healthy people’s love and concern for the impaired person’s health and welfare.

Note: Most translations of the gospels—and people in general—use outdated language when speaking of physical ailments and handicaps. In this instance, the gospel writer uses the terms “deaf” and “had difficulty speaking.” Today, we’d prefer to use something like “hearing impaired with a corresponding speech impediment.”

Mark says Jesus breathed a deep sigh” while speaking the word, “Ephphatha.” Take a moment to speak the word aloud slowly while breathing out (sighing). Pronounce the 3-syllable word, EF - - *fah* - - *thaw*. (It might take a couple of “practice shots.”)

— *What did it feel like to breathe that word? How did it change your understanding of Jesus and the whole scene?*

— *What spiritual/mental/physical impairments do I experience today? How strong is my faith that Jesus can heal me . . . if I truly believe in his desire to make me whole and if it's in my overall best interest? What avenues lie before me that can lead me to healing help?*

— *In my opinion, why did Jesus use a word and physical gestures and, in this case, even his own bodily fluid (spittle), in the performance of his miracles? Why not just say (as he did on a number of other occasions), "It's done. Go home to your loved ones and have a good life"?*

For Inspirational Viewing/Listening

Video:

Bishop [Robert Barron](#) addresses the topic, "[Should Suffering Shake Our Faith?](#)" (8 min.) Recorded in 2021 during the Covid pandemic. This relates directly to a question we might ask about the miracle in this week's about the innocent man with a hearing and speech impediment.

Music:

"[Healer](#)" by [Hillsong Worship](#)

The Week Ahead

Journaling Prompts

— *Based on this weekend's Scripture readings, what does the Risen Christ ask me to do TODAY regarding . . .*

(1) the quality of the love I bring to my personal relationships . . . and

(2) my life as an emissary of Christ, committed to bringing God's love to the people with whom I interact in person and on social media?

Who this week needs to hear from me some expression of love?

Who needs to receive from me a moment of laughter and personal concern?

Why do I hesitate?

In the light of this weekend's Scriptures, take some time to write about events occurring in your life this week and what you see happening in the world.

Preview of Next Week's Scriptures

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 50: 5-9 "The Lord God opens my ear to hear."

Psalms 116: 1-6, 8-9 "I shall walk before the Lord in the land of the living."

James 2: 14-18 "What good is it . . . if someone says he has faith but does not have works?"

Mark 8: 27-35 “Who do people say that I am?”

Closing Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

A Prayer of Thanks for Summer

Thank you, God,
for the pleasures of summer,
the bright sunny days
and perfect moonlit evenings,
the smells of mowed grass and fresh air.
Thank you for vacations and festivals,
picnics and cookouts,
baseball and concerts,
swimsuits and popsicles.
Thank you for watermelon sweetness,
for summer's pace and summer's grace,
for all your beauty and power,
faithfulness and fruitfulness
displayed in summer.
Amen.

Source: [Prayers for the End of Summer](#) on [Guideposts.org](#)

Questions?

Send any questions or comments you might have to algarrotto@comcast.net

Gender usage in writing: We are conscious of gender references to God in the Scripture texts. Often, attempts to rewrite these passages result in awkward sentence structures. We have left the biblical translations as they are but do our best to be inclusive in all other parts of the reflection.

The Sunday readings are from [Christian Community Bible: Catholic Pastoral Edition](#)

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Follow this link to my spiritual novel, [Bishop Myriel: In His Own Words](#).

Coming soon!! *Inspector Javert: At the Gates of Hell*

(a novel exploring “what happens next?” after we die)