

Two men looked out through prison bars. One saw mud; the other saw stars.

On almost any day of your whole life, you can see two things: mud and stars.

Mud is the stuff that's sticky, ugly, and makes the going rough. The mud is problems, issues, obstacles, aches, pains, stresses. There's lots of mud now. There's public mud: Our conflicts with terrorists. Our country can't think what to do short of killing them all, which God isn't allowing. The collapsed house market. The recession. The state's low water supply. Forest fires costing a fortune. Beaches getting degraded. No clear solution to the energy crisis. Global warming. What will happen to social security when the baby boomers retire? The epidemic of gang violence. What do we do with the immigrants? The school system desperate for funds. And our reputation in the world at maybe an all-time low.

And then there's personal mud. Issues you and your family are wrestling with. Mine.

The Gospel reminds us of another day when there was mud. People gathered far from villages, in a deserted place, without sufficient food. Not higher gas prices, strain on the power grid, cutting back on water to sprinkle the lawn. We're talking food. "Dismiss the crowds," is all the apostles can think of us. "Let everyone fend for themselves."

But Jesus does something different. He says: Stop a moment, everyone. Sit down on the grass. There's more here than just mud and troubles.

Then Jesus does something very important. He lifts his eyes to heaven.

He'd complained to his disciples that they had eyes but didn't see. Later he would grieve that they couldn't keep their eyes open in the Garden. He would later bring St. Paul to faith by taking the scales from his eyes. For now, Jesus follows the advice of the Psalms: Lift up your eyes and see. I lift up my eyes to the mountains.

Lifting your eyes means not looking too long, and certainly not exclusively, on mud. Lifting your eyes means taking in God and God's possibilities, infinite as the stars. You refuse to be paralyzed by mega-problems and mega-issues, because your gaze is out to the mega-God.

Jesus lifted his eyes, saw the stars, and heard the voice of God, crying out like a street vendor; "I've got your bread. Fresh hot bread. I've got your milk, your wine, your grain. It's free. You are never alone with your unsolvable problems." Jesus faith ignited, and he knew: "Nothing can separate me or this crowd from the love of God. Not anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness or peril or the sword. He did the tiny thing he could ... and God did the rest.

The next time you feel like you're in a deserted place glommed down by mud, remember: you can choose to look up like Jesus. There are stars ... and you are not alone. You are I and God will find away. Because God, and the universe God made, are very generous. Two men ... two women ... two teenagers ... two kids ... looked out through prison bars. One saw mud, the other saw stars.