

THE BIBLE- THE LIVING WORD

Gracious God May these words be your words of grace. Amen

Two weeks ago when I was at a retreat, I spotted across the room a small worn-out Bible held together with elastic bands. When I asked the owner about it, she took the elastic bands off and the book fell open before me. You could tell a little bit about her journey by the pages that were worn and marked...the verses she read to the sick in the hospital and those read as reminders of God's love. Flowers were pressed between the pages. It had traveled around the world and through many decades with her.

When Luke was young, he tore a couple of pages of my Bible and began to eat them, literally ingesting "the scripture". It made me begin to think what life would be like if we really did chew on the Bible, not literally. What would it mean if we truly depended on it to feed our spiritual hunger?

In Deuteronomy the scripture calls for people to bind the law on their arm or on their forehead. Some did, using a piece of leather or clay. J. Jacobs, who wrote "The Year of Living Biblically" trying to literally follow the Bible, Xeroxed the 10 commandments and tied them to his head. It was hard to forget them, always looking around them. He imagined them soaking into his brain like a nicotine patch. The point of this scripture was, make sure the law is at the center of your life. Give yourself constant reminders. If Jesus' law is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul, and love your neighbor as yourself", how do we remind ourselves of it every day? We carry cell phones, we carry blackberries with us, but do we carry God's message with us?

Scripture is sacred. Much of the division in the Christian Church has been due to how scripture has been interpreted or used. Often scripture has been used as a weapon. For many decades and centuries the Bible was quoted in order to keep women as "less than", to affirm slavery, which still does exist in many parts of the world. Scripture is still used to create a second class of people who in many churches are not allowed to marry or be ordained.

I love a story from Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, quoted by Bruce Bawer; Huck has helped a slave escape from his owner. His conscience gets the better of Huck and he decides to do "the right thing" and wash himself clean & write the owner and tell where Jim is---so he could escape the fires of hell. But after posting the letter he begins to think of Jim – how they had traveled down the river – talking and singing and laughing. He thinks about what a good friend Jim was to him. Huckleberry takes up that letter, holds his breath, says "All Right, then, I'll go to hell" and he tore it up.

The scripture had been used to reinforce a cultural norm that was immoral. If we are looking for a major emphasis in the Bible – being in solidarity poor is mentioned more than anyone else. Being in ministry with the poor is a major call. Yet through the centuries, the church has used the Bible to reinforce prejudices and oppression. We have

not looked deeper with the understanding that naming cultural norms is not an affirmation of God's love. Our emphasis always must be to discover God's love.

If we see the scripture as a gift to explore, we will discover something, not to use, to promote what we think, or for "Bible battles" but to savor as a guide for our spiritual journey and give us insight and vision.

There are layers and layers to scripture. It is not to be taken literally, but seriously, in the context of the culture of its time. We all see the scripture through our senses, and our own history both private and cultural. But it is important to understand the culture at the time the scriptures were written and at the time the scriptures were written people spoke in story and images. The question: Is this factually true? - would have been a foreign concept. Scientific, factual understanding of the word came later. The scriptures are not about science. They are about truth on a deeper level. We understand the Bible better by looking at the original language – hear its texture and understand its feel.

The scriptures tell us many things, and sometimes these things conflict. This is because this is gathering of sacred stories told by many people as they have experienced God. We see God unfolding in the ways of love through out the Bible. Everyone sees something different. The Gospel writers all had a different view of Jesus. Mark saw him as a rebel ready for action. Matthew saw him as a wise man. Luke saw him as a peacemaker and healer, and John saw him as a mystic. If these 4 Gospels can have such different perspectives of Jesus, then we can too experience God in diverse ways as we read. So at the end of this sermon, we end by beginning to think about what the Bible is and how it may impact our lives. May the scripture be as the living word. Let yourself be fed. Let's explore, journey and question. And God will journey with us.