

Unison Opening Words ~ *Common Prayer: Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*

Almighty God, thank you for the cloud of witnesses who have gone before us. Surround us with living saints who remind us of the sort of people we are trying to become. When we fall short of who we want to be, catch us in the arms of your grace. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Traditional Service Liturgy Following Opening Hymn **and** Contemporary Service Liturgy Following The Lord's Prayer before the Scripture Reading: This We Believe Document 'Article V and VI'

Article V – Of the Sufficiency of The Holy Scriptures for Salvation

The Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that is should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testament of whose authority was never any doubt in the church...

Article VI – Of the Old Testament

The Old Testament is not contrary to the New; for both in the Old and New Testament life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man being both God and Man. Wherefore they are not to be heard who feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the law given from God by Moses as touching ceremonies and rites doth not bind Christians, nor ought the civil precepts thereof of necessity be received in any commonwealth; yet notwithstanding, no Christian whatsoever is free from the obedience of the commandments which are called moral.

- II Timothy 3:14-4:5.
- We believe in the guidance of Scripture because we believe and/or are growing in our belief that the Bible is true...How, though? (1) How is the Bible true?
  - The Bible is true because Scripture contains the word of God.
  - Scripture reveals the actions of the Triune God as truth – through Scripture we come to know and have knowledge of the Triune God.
  - Scripture attests Jesus as the Word of God who was made incarnate in the world in order to serve, teach, love and save humanity.
  - Scripture is the means by which we encounter the Holy Spirit, who guides us in our service to others, and service is our appropriate response to what the self-revealing God has done for us.
  - Scripture proclaims that, through the mercy of God and the salvific death of Christ, humanity's broken relationship with God is reconciled and restored.
    - Scripture is true, as we affirmed in our Article of Religion this morning, in that it contains all things necessary for salvation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2008, "Article V – Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation," Page 60.

- To trust Scripture is to trust “God’s very self, the essence of which God revealed to be steadfast love.”<sup>2</sup>
  - The Holy Spirit’s movement in the lives of the biblical writers inspired and guided their writing.
    - The Bible does not claim to be inerrant.
    - Neither does it require literal interpretation at all times.
    - Rather, the Bible is a human construction, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and it expresses the word of God in a variety of literary forms.
      - Scripture is not meant to function as a science textbook: it tells its readers the Who and the Why, not necessarily always the When and the How.
      - During the development of Scripture, the Holy Spirit spoke to and guided the writers.
      - Likewise, when we study and meditate on Scripture, the Holy Spirit speaks to us through Scripture and shepherds us in interacting with Scripture in fresh ways.
  - The (2) ‘relevancy of Scripture’ is both a common and somewhat controversial topic today.
    - This was all written so long ago – it does not apply.
    - The God of the Old Testament is mean and not the same God of the New Testament.
    - I do not like you or your position, so I am going to ‘proof-text’ this Scripture verse to justify my position and minimize both you and yours.
    - Lay these arguments, and more, alongside the fact that in postmodern times we are inundated with books, blogs, podcasts and presentations by inspired teachers writing on spiritual matters.
      - With great excitement, they promise readers and hearers “new beginnings” and “new starts.”
      - These promises entice us; we have “a hunger, a thirst, a passion for what will inspire us and lift us out of the mundane and the ordinary.”<sup>3</sup>
      - What, then, is the relevancy of Scripture in this dynamic, and sometimes chaotic, environment?
    - It is possible through these teachers and teachings that we can be educated, convinced, rebuked, and encouraged in our faith.
    - It is possible that these books, blogs, podcasts and presentations are reaching a population that will not now nor possibly ever cross the threshold of a church.
    - It is also possible that (3) these resources *alone* will fall short in connecting folks to **faith in Jesus Christ through which our salvation comes.**
      - Scripture will never fall short.
      - “When we place our faith in the latest [book, blog, podcast, or presentation], we will always be waiting for the next “new” message to come along and save us. Even though we seek the new and novel, it is God’s grace that satisfies our longings. This is the sound doctrine that [Paul refers] to in this letter to Timothy.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Robert Doran et al., *New Interpreter’s Bible: 1 & 2 Maccabees, Job, Psalms (Volume 4)* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 1170.

<sup>3</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Year C Vol IV* 184.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

- Paul encouraged Timothy in our text this morning, “proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching” (4:2).
  - Or as the King James Version translates, “preach the Word...in season, out of season.”
  - Scripture is and continues to be relevant for us today.
    - It serves as humanity’s primary source for theological reflection and study as we grow in our knowledge and love of God.
    - It is where we “hear the voice, see the ways, and receive the guidance of the living God.”<sup>5</sup>
  - “God’s word in Scripture requires humble listening, informed discernment, and prayerful searching.”<sup>6</sup>
    - We do not read Scripture alone; we are always in the present company of the Holy Spirit who enlivens and enlightens the words on the page.
    - Better still is to read Scripture in community – to learn from one another through what someone else hears as the Spirit speaks both in the spaces between the reader’s lips and the hearer’s ear canals and through our personal experiences.
      - What we hear when the community reads and shares about Scripture together may affirm or even challenge our personal, idiosyncratic, and uninformed interpretations.<sup>7</sup>
      - Our God can and does use all of that for our good.
      - Reading Scripture in community is an act of prayer and it equips us for our shared discipleship work.
  - Consider your approach to Scripture.
    - Are you a person that believes “God said it. I believe it. That settles it!”?
    - Are you a person that uses your reason to “deflect, evade, or avoid Scripture’s claim upon [your life]? Is Scripture a means to confirm cherished prejudices or dodge the possibility of new light from God or personal moral transformation?”<sup>8</sup>
    - When I approach Scripture I want to be surprised.
      - I want to be surprised by what is written there, by what the Spirit says to me, and then how I am led in obedient living.
      - In order to be surprised, the questions I ask of Scripture have to change.
      - “Rather than ask of a biblical text (4) *Do I agree with this? Or say That seems about right to me* [the invitation to be surprised begins with] *How would my life have to change in order to show the world that this Scripture is true? ... This is an invitation to see firsthand what the grace of God can do in a life.*”<sup>9</sup>
- Wesley instructs the people called Methodist to search the Scriptures in this five-fold manner (5):
  - 1) constantly – some part of every day
  - 2) regularly – all of the Bible in order

<sup>5</sup> Will Willimon, *This We Believe* 65.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

- 3) carefully – with the Notes
- 4) seriously – with prayer before and after; and
- 5) fruitfully – immediately practicing what you learn there.<sup>10</sup>
  - The witness of Scripture accounts for the journey with God, rather than the destination.
    - The witness of Scripture is still being written with us.
    - Through our faithful discipleship, it can be and will be written beyond us.
    - To see ourselves in the story and to see the story as ours, we have to be familiar with the story, through constant and regular interaction with all parts of the story.
  - The instruction to carefully read means to take care while reading.
    - If something does not make sense – ask a question.
    - Grab a reference book.
    - Send your pastor an email or ask her to coffee – she’s buying!
    - Together we may not be able to answer the questions completely, but we can start and continue that journey.
  - Prayer before and after reading Scripture reminds us that we do not read alone, and that we are at our best when we read Scripture together.
  - Lastly, our reading of Scripture should bear fruit in and through us, making visible God’s transformation of us through obedience, enactment, and pointing towards God’s inclusive love and care.
- John Wesley held a strong conviction that faith and salvation “include the substance of all the Bible, the marrow, as it were, of the whole Scripture.”<sup>11</sup>
  - By our faith we are saved, and our faith results from our experience of the self-revealing Triune God through Scripture.
  - This we believe.

1 – How is the Bible true?

2 – The *relevancy* of Scripture

3 – These resources *alone* will fall short in connecting folks to **faith in Jesus Christ through which our salvation comes**.

4 – **From** *Do I agree with this?* and *That seems about right to me* **to** *How would my life have to change in order to show the world that this Scripture is true?*

5 – 1) constantly – some part of every day

2) regularly – all of the Bible in order

3) carefully – with the Notes

4) seriously – with prayer before and after; and

5) fruitfully – immediately practicing what you learn there

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<sup>10</sup> John Wesley, *Large Minutes*.

<sup>11</sup> “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*, Number 2.