

THE MESSAGE for October 23, 2011

Luke 1:1-4

Where Did The Bible Come From?

The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller

There are some things about the faith that just don't make sense. There are theological things that can make your head spin. For example, it's hard to understand the nature of Jesus. That was an issue in the early church so the Nicene Creed was written to sort it all out. With all due respect to the writers of that Creed, I still don't get it. Is Jesus fully human or fully divine?

I had a Systematics Professor in seminary who answered that question by saying "Yes! Jesus is fully human – 100%, and fully divine – 100%." I thought that was pretty cool answer until I got to thinking about math and it doesn't add up. How can you have more than 100%? How can Jesus be 200%? That doesn't make sense! How do you wrap your head around that one? I've come to realize some things we simply need to accept by faith.

Today, we continue our series *Making Sense of Scripture*. And today we are challenged to accept something else by faith, the Bible and its origin. Where did the Bible come from?

There have been a lot of things written about the Bible and where it came from. Is it from God or from humans? We Lutherans have historically said, "Yes!" to that question. So let's consider what that means.

Some people say the Bible is the divine, inerrant word of God. Meaning that God dictated the exact words that God wanted in the Bible to humans who wrote down exactly what God said. "Inerrant" means that everything in the Bible is factually true.

As Lutherans we say the Bible is the divine, inspired word of God. And we mean something more than factual truth. In fact, *Martin Luther said that the Bible is like the manger. It has a few crooked nails and a few warped boards, but what really matters is that it holds the perfect Christ.*

When we say the Bible is divine, we mean that God uses the words of the Bible to accomplish God's divine will in our lives for the sake of the world. The Bible points to Jesus, the Lord and Savior of all. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible points to Jesus. That's what we historically mean when we say, the Bible is divine.

At the same time, we Lutherans believe the Bible is a human book. The Bible was written by ordinary people, like you and me, who were so gripped by their experiences of God in their lives they had to share with others.

These faith-filled people throughout the ages – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Malachi, Matthew, John, Paul, Peter, James and many more – wanted others to know and experience what they had discovered,

- that God is awesome – can I have an “Amen!”?
- that God’s love is bigger than the universe – can I have another “Amen!”?
- that God has a plan for the world and everyone in it – Amen!
- that God is active and alive everywhere at the same time – Amen!
- that we are invited to join in God’s mission of grace and love for the world – Amen!

We say the Bible is a human book because it contains the stories of people’s experiences of God. God uses these stories in the Bible

- to draw people closer to God and one another,
- to birth and grow faith in more and more people,
- to transform lives and offer a new life with Christ Jesus
- to empower people for worship and service in the world.

Divine or human, it’s both. That’s where the Bible comes from. We see both the divine side and the human side of the Bible in our reading today from Luke’s gospel. (*Read Text Luke 1:1-4*)

First, the human side. This third book in the New Testament never says who the author is. It’s attributed to a man named, Luke. But his name doesn’t appear anywhere. It’s believed that Luke was a physician because of all the healing stories. He is *not* an eyewitness to Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. He lived some 50 to 60 years after Jesus. So, Luke must have heard the stories about Jesus and wrote them down some time around 85-95 A.D.

Point is: someone told Luke about Jesus. But they didn’t just say, “Hey, there was this guy named Jesus, a carpenter’s kid. A really nice guy. Great teacher. Got really popular with the crowds. Too popular for the Roman government. So they killed him by nailing him up on a cross.” No, whoever told Luke about Jesus - shared the stories and the meaning behind the stories. Luke’s gospel is a story of faith pointing out that Jesus is

- the Savior of the world,
- the Son of the living God
- the one to bring God’s Kingdom to earth,
- the one who sets us free from the power of sin and death and the devil.
- the one who is our hope for the world

Hearing the Jesus’ story changed Luke’s life. It connected him to God in a powerful way, connecting him to what God was up to in the world. It transformed his life. Luke couldn’t keep this awesome news to himself. He had to share it. And so he wrote it down.

It appears that Luke had a friend named Theophilus. I love to say that name, Theophilus. It just rolls off the tongue. It's a Greek name meaning "friend of God." We don't know if this was a real person or if this was Luke's way of writing to a Greek audience. Let's assume that Theophilus is a real person.

- Someone who hadn't heard about Jesus,
- or didn't have the full story,
- or was struggling with doubts about Jesus.

I wonder if there isn't a little bit of Theophilus in each one of us.

Luke writes Theophilus this long letter explaining the events and meaning of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. If that's the case then when we read Luke's Gospel we're actually reading someone's private mail. Who knew that reading the Bible was a federal offense? No doubt, if Luke knew we were reading his letter today, calling it sacred Scripture, he'd probably be flabbergasted! That's the human side of Luke's Gospel.

Now the divine side.

* It was God – through the work of the Holy Spirit – that motivated Luke to hear and accept the Jesus' story in the first place.

* It was God – through the work of the Holy Spirit – that moved Luke to share the Jesus story with his friend, Theophilus.

* It was God – through the Holy Spirit – that has preserved this letter for millions of people to read over the years.

* It is God – through the work of the Holy Spirit – that continues to create faith and transform lives as we read Luke and the other books of the Bible.

Warning: reading the Bible will transform your life because that's where the divine and the human come together. Where did the Bible come from, God or humans? For us the answer is "yes." It's both/and.

The Bible is an amazing book, not because of how it came to us, but because of how God continues to speak to us through it. Reading the Bible and we are invited into a living relationship with God through Jesus, challenging us to live the grace-filled life Jesus offers. I invite you take time this week and read from the Bible. May God speak to you through it changing your life for good. Amen.