

THE MESSAGE for Oct 16, 2011

John 1:1-18

How Is The Bible The Word Of God?

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How you would finish this statement, “The Bible is...”

Martin Luther said, “The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has hands, it lays hold on me.”

Consider this: “The Bible is the manger in which the Christ-child lies.”

Or this: “The Bible is a love letter from God to the world.”

Or this: “The Bible is the manual for a purpose-filled, Christ-centered life.”

The Bible is...

As Christians, who see things through a Lutheran lens, we tend to put a high value on the Bible. We always have and always will. We treasure this book. We say it's a gift from God for life. Studies show that the average Lutheran owns three Bibles!

One day a guy in our neighborhood was cleaning his house and he found a Bible from the early 1800's. He came over all excited to show me what he had found saying “it was his great-great grandfather's.” I opened it and asked him if he ever read any of it. He said, “No - but isn't it a beautiful book.” It was very well preserved. He was so proud of this Bible, handed down through the family, but he has never read it. That's like getting a birthday gift but never opening it to enjoy the true gift inside.

I'm told that less than 20% of all Lutherans in America read the Bible outside of church on a regular basis. I wonder why? We teach and profess that the Bible is important, so why don't we read it more often? It's probably not because we memorized it or know it so well already.

Consider these statistics:

- 60% of the population can only name five of the Ten Commandments.
- 82% of the population believes that the Bible says “God helps those who help themselves.” Actually, the Bible says just the opposite, “God helps those who can't help themselves.”
- 12% of the population believes that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. Truth is the Bible doesn't tell us the name of Noah's wife.

How might we clarify these misunderstandings? One way is to read the Bible regularly. And so I wonder, why don't we read the Bible more often? I'm sure we could come up with all kinds of excuses. Let's consider these two:

First, we tend not to read the Bible because it isn't easy to understand. That's true. It seems to be written to and for people who lived at a different times than we do. And there are passages in the Bible that both trouble us and confuse us. Other passages leave us wondering why they are in the Bible in the first place.

For example:

In Exodus chapters 31 & 35 Moses writes: “*For six days work is to be done, but the seventh day is a day of Sabbath rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day is to be put to death*” (Exodus 31:15).

Really?!?! That’s what it says. What are we to do with that verse??? And it appears three times in Exodus. And yet the Seventh Commandment says, “Thou shall not kill.”

Maybe this verse in Exodus is intended to point out the importance of coming to worship and spending time with God in the community of faith at least once a week. Maybe it’s pointing out that Sabbath rest with the Lord in worship is a life and death matter. That makes sense to me. It challenges anyone who believes weekly worship in the community of faith isn’t important. It is...

Second reason we tend not to read the Bible is because if it comes from God we must read it literally in order to be faithful. Like the bumper sticker that reads: “*The Bible says it, I believe it, and that’s all there is to it.*” But as we can see from the book of Exodus reading every verse in the Bible literally, can create big problems.

So there must be more to it, as we learned last week. Reading the Bible with our Lutheran lens and we understand that the Bible points to a larger truth. And that truth is this – *God’s love is for everyone and we are called to live according to God’s will.* Reading the Bible with that in mind and it takes on a whole new meaning.

That’s what Martin Luther and the Reformers in the 1600’s brought to the church and this life we share with Christ. They didn’t read the Bible with a literal viewpoint. They realized the Bible points to our *identity* and our *purpose* in Jesus in the one who offers life in this world and the next.

My hope is that you will find the tools and a framework to be set free and engage the Bible in ways that fire up your faith and empowers you for daily, faithful living.

The Bible is the Word of God. What does that mean?

It means the Bible points us to God through a relationship with Jesus. The Old Testament points to Jesus. The New Testament points to Jesus. That means that when we read the Bible it points us to Jesus. That also means everything we say and every thing we do ought to point others to Jesus too.

Question: do your words and your actions in the church and outside the church point others to Jesus?

That’s what the gospel writer, John, is doing in our reading for today. He points us to Jesus and through Jesus we receive God’s grace upon grace. (Read John 1:1-18...)

John is saying that Jesus is the greatest expression of God's love and grace. Jesus is the living Word of God. And we are the living body of Christ. That means we are God's living word too. We are to point others to Jesus. The Bible is our guide for life as the Body of Christ, the church.

The other day a guy stopped in the church office and on his shirt it read, "It's not about me. It's all about Jesus." That's what the Bible tells us. It *is* the Word of God and it is all about Jesus. Our lives are all about Jesus.

Notice we don't say the Bible is the "words of God." The Bible is what others have said about God. It bears witness to God. It points to God. It reveals God's work in the world through Jesus and the Holy Spirit and people like us.

The writers of the Bible were inspired by God to write about their experiences, their understanding, their relationship with God. And thank God they did!

Reading the Bible and we too experience God, gain an understanding of God, and strengthen our relationship with God. The Bible is the means by which God speaks into our lives. It reveals the way God confronts us, transforms us, empowers us, inspires us, and includes us in God's work of love and grace in the world.

We don't worship the Bible. We worship the One to whom the Bible reveals, the One who meets us in its pages, the One who is the Light and Life for the world. The one who lived, and died, and lives again for us -- so that we can too.

How *would* you finish this statement, "The Bible is..." Amen.