

A Sermon for Robbinsdale United Church of Christ
by Rev. T. Michael Rock
Sunday, October 11, 2009

Scripture Readings: Hebrews 4:12-16 and Mark 10:17-31

Sermon Title: "A Book of Faith"

(open with prayer)

During our Bible Study most weeks we remind each other, "The Bible is a book of faith, not a book of fact."

"In the United Church of Christ we take the Bible seriously, not literally." – Marcus Borg

"Make your own bible. Select and collect all the words and sentences that in all your readings have been to you like the blast of a trumpet." – Ralph Waldo Emerson

"The Bible among other books is a diamond among precious stones." – John Stoughton

"There are more scriptural reasons to oppose homophobia than to oppose homosexuality" – John B. Cobb

"No man ever believes that the Bible means what it says: He is always convinced that it says what he means." - George Bernard Shaw

"It is a mistake to look to the Bible to close a discussion; the Bible seeks to open one." - *William Sloane Coffin*

"The Holy Book of the living God suffers more from its exponents today than from its opponents." -Leonard Ravenhill

"It will greatly help you to understand scripture if you note – no only what is spoken and written, but of whom and to whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstances, considering what goes before and what follows." -Miles Coverdale, in his introduction to his Bible translation.

"When you read God's Word, you must constantly be saying to yourself, "It is talking to me, and about me." --Soren Kierkegaard

"We do not read the Bible the way it is; we read it the way we are."
-Evelyn Uyemura

"Bible reading is an education in itself." --Lord Tennyson

"Reading the Bible without meditating on it is like trying to eat without swallowing." --Anonymous

"What we really need, after all, is not to defend the Bible but to understand it." --Millar Burrows

"The longer you read the Bible, the more you will like it; it will grow sweeter and sweeter; and the more you get into the spirit of it, the more you will get into the spirit of Christ." --Romaine

"The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring young and old to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into God, that they may delight in God's Presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of God in the core and center of their hearts." - A. W. Tozer

Is the Bible the word of God? "Yes, if it grasps you. No, if you grasp it." – Paul Tillich

I could go on and on. This book has been read by more people than any other, and most of them have had an opinion about it. No doubt that is true of all of you. This book holds both light and dark. It has stories of human failure and success. It has stories of redemption and stories of contempt. This book contains a journey of understanding. Often times people have thought the book was about understanding God, but the truth of this book is always revealed when we finally realize that this book is about understanding ourselves. When we begin to approach the Bible as a way to look at ourselves the arguments about its authenticity and truthfulness come to an abrupt halt. Imagine never having to defend how you understand God or Jesus. The truth of this book does not reveal how the world was made, where God lives, whether Jesus was human or divine, describe the perfect church, or even how to pray. The truth of this book is revealed when we walk its path and when we allow the word of God to separate our soul from our spirit.

This book is about you and me. God doesn't need it, and doesn't need us to read it. God is, with or without this book. Nothing separates us from the love of God, except us. Millions of people have walked the journey of light and love without every seeing this book. Millions have kept this book on the shelf while they went out and lived its message of hope,

redemption and love. The reason we turn to it in church week in and week out is so we can share in the journey of soul and spirit. By reading the pages together, we can help each other see God within ourselves. That is how these stories come alive. So, it is most important to consider one simple Bible lesson. The Word of God is a person. Word in the Greek language is logos. Logos is word. The logos was in the beginning. The logos was with God and there was nothing separate between God and the logos. And the logos became flesh and dwelt among us. God is revealed in the Word. The Word reveals God. Jesus is the Word of God. Jesus is logos. We understand God and ourselves through words. Jesus helps us by revealing the nature of God, not as separate by as a part of us. Our church seeks to follow the way in which God is revealed. God is revealed in Jesus and God is revealed in us. These pages reveal the truth when the Word dwells in you. Our lives are blessed when we take the hard and wonderful journey of seeing God within. It is where forgiveness happens, where healing happens, and where transformation begins.

Indeed the word of God is active and alive, for if we smile, God smiles, and if we cry God cries. When we laugh God laughs, and when we are in pain, God hurts, too. That is why being separate from God is so hard. In the acts of violence, in the words that tear down, in the closed attitudes of dogma, there is no sharing, no companion. It is a shallow existence. The hope that is contained in the early church and our church today is that we understand God deeply. It's that we allow ourselves to let the word live in us and to taste its sweetness. To know love and to know ourselves will reflect a living God and a vibrant community.

This is Jesus in the Gospel. Look at this story. God is good. Don't you want to touch that. Jesus loved him and said, "Great job on the whole following the commandment thing, but you lack one thing. You've got too much stuff. It is weighing down. You don't live as if God is within you. You are so busy tending to your stuff and acquiring more stuff that you don't see how beautiful you really are. You think that you are actually defined by what you have rather than the sacred being that you were created to be. So, sell all your stuff, give it to the poor and then you will understand that all that is good is God's."

Jesus isn't so concerned with being wealthy. Jesus is concerned with being defined by wealth. Jesus is concerned with the indwelling of God in the heart. So Jesus comes to separate the soul from the spirit. The Word is here to remind us that giving money away is not the pathway to eternal life, but the indwelling of God in your heart. The Word reveals that the way to that place to give everything away. Give away your attachment to all things. Be thankful tonight for all the people who have ever lived in your house and all the people that will ever live there in the future. You are taking care of it for a short time. Don't let your belongings consume you or the fear of losing them take you away from your living.

Imagine every dollar that passes through your wallet in cash, check or card, not as your right and your own, but as a part of this greater whole of community, economy, and world. We are in this together and in order to get deeper, it is our attachments that we need to let go of. Two-thirds of the parables are about our relationship to money. This book is not about who God is, it is about who we are. It is about our relationships. It is about our ability to love and serve.

Mother Teresa would teach her sisters of charity that whenever they were tempted to read the bible, they should go out and visit the sick and feed the poor. "Allow the Bible to live through you. Christ is not revealed on the pages in the book, but in the eyes and hearts of those you meet." On this day when we gift the children of church with the Bible, I hope that each of you embrace this book, not as a club, but as a mirror. I promise that it will reveal who you really are. In fact, I guarantee that it will take you to a deeper place and understanding of who you really are. A people of love, grace, courage, and peace.
AMEN.