

Roots and Wings: Sweeter Than Honey  
Psalm 119:1-16, John 1:1-5  
Dr. Alan H. Landes  
Crestview Presbyterian Church  
October 11, 2009

I don't know if you remember it or not- but several years ago, the Muslim world was in an uproar over the news that an American soldier had flushed a copy of the Koran down a toilet in Guantanamo. Riots took place around the world, and 17 people were killed in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Outrage was expressed by leaders of the Muslim community around the world, including in the Tri-County area. I began to understand their outrage as I learned more about their respect for the Koran; apparently, they regard it as if it was Allah himself... that to them, flushing the Koran down the commode was nearly the same as flushing Allah down the toilet. Their view of scripture is very high... and I think we can sense of that same thought in this morning's scripture: (Read John 1:1-5).

We don't have quite the same intensity about the Bible that Muslims have about the Koran- but perhaps we might want to re-consider the way Muslims approach their holy scriptures and give the Bible another look. After all, the Bible continues to be a perennial best-seller, and something we acknowledge to at least be a classic- if not something more. But- is it God? What does the Bible mean to you, anyway?

Avery and Marsh were a Presbyterian pastor/music director team in New York who often found creative ways of expressing important truths. One Sunday, Dick Avery once nailed a Bible to a plank of wood. There were gasps of outrage- until he asked how

many of them had nailed the Bible to their coffee tables... with dust! So often we may own a Bible- but leave it nailed to our bookshelves by never using it.

We are instead like the mom once visited by the pastor, who concluded his visit by asking if she'd like him to read a passage from scripture. She turned to her little girl, and asked her to bring the book Mommy loved best. After a few minutes, the girl came trudging into the room- lugging the new Nordstrom's catalogue! What is it that we love best, and where do we turn for inspiration, for guidance, for truth, and for authority in our living? What website do we turn to when we want to put down some roots to secure us in an uncertain world?

I love the way the classic Westminster Confession of Faith puts it: the Bible is "the whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory; man's salvation, faith and life is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequences may be deduced from Scripture... we acknowledge the inward illuminations of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word." The whole counsel of God... awesome!

Yet, as important as it is, the Bible still isn't God; here, we diverge from the Muslims. The Bible is not so much God as more like a window through which we see God. Too many folks only use the Bible to club someone into submission... children, obey your parents; wives- be more submissive... or to justify their own self-interest- like the minister who parked his car in a no-parking zone and attached this note to his windshield: "I've circled the block ten times. I have an appointment to keep. `Forgive us our trespasses.' When he came back, he found a ticket on his car, with this note attached:

“I’ve circled this block for ten years. If I don’t give you a ticket, I lose my job. ‘Lead us not into temptation.’”

Scripture isn’t so much an instruction manual as it is a recording of God’s interaction with God’s people, offering guidance in how to live... sort of like a sacred GPS or a holy road map of sorts. Study the words of scripture, those events, those stories... and insight begins to grow within us as we consider what happened, how it happened, and why. For instance- reading the accounts of God’s people moving from Egypt to the Promised Land, or some of the journeys of Paul- and we find ourselves being led into a consideration of the providence of God... that in spite of some difficulties along the way, we begin to suspect that God is ultimately dependable. God has a plan for our lives, and scripture will help us figure out what that means... so, keep the faith! Those scripture-led ruminations on our part are often the beginning of wisdom, and some pretty profound insights begin to grow within us... why is that?

I think it grows out of the conviction that the Bible is the “inspired Word of God.” What does that mean? *In-Spiritus*... inspired... as we read Scripture, we discover something very important beginning to happen... as we immerse ourselves in personal Bible reading, we begin to discover that it isn’t always just a matter of us reading the Bible as it is that the Bible begins to read us- what the Westminster Confession called “inward illumination.” God’s Holy Spirit begins to interact with us... bringing our opinions, our feelings, our thoughts, our life circumstances face to face with the words we are reading... *in-Spiritus*. I’ve always appreciated the way Martin Luther puts it: “Scripture has hands and feet; it runs after me- it grabs hold of me.” That happens to me; does it happen with you as well?

The question, I suppose, is what we're going to do with it. Sometimes, we discover comfort in the Word of God, and peace like a river begins to flow through our hearts. Other times, sin begins to itch within us as the light of God's holiness begins to shine through the words we've been reading; as the Psalmist puts it: "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. I've laid your word up in my heart that I might not sin against you." I suggested to someone recently that she read through the Psalms, and she was surprised at the times she read words that spoke exactly to that day's issues... coincidence, or God's Holy Spirit at work? Guidance in making a decision? A light of hope shining in darkness? The Word of God is a lamp unto your feet... turn it on, and use it to illumine your way, and even share it with others.

A missionary once told of an African man to whom he had given a copy of the Bible. The African was deeply grateful and thanked him profusely for the gift. Several months later, they met once again and the missionary was surprised to find that the Bible he had given the man was battered and torn; it looked as if a number of pages were missing. "I thought you'd take better care of the Bible I gave you," the missionary remarked. "I assumed you wanted it."

The man replied, "It is the finest gift I have ever received. It is such a wonderful book, I gave a page to my mother and my father. Then I gave a page to everyone in my village." There is something powerful in the Word of God that changes our lives, and compels us to share it with others; are you reading it?

That power is not only the Holy Spirit at work within us; there is power beyond that. The Logos of God is more than words on a piece of paper; it is something more than inward illumination forming and shaping your opinions about things. Listen to what

the Gospel of John went on to claim about the Word of God... (can you put “John 1:1” on a slide and then add....) remember: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” In verse 14, (and then add .... “John 1:14”?) we learn that the “Word become flesh and dwelt among us- full of grace and truth, and we have beheld his glory as the only Son of the Father.” (turn slide with John 1:1... John 1:14 off) Jesus!

Once the Word of God begins to move within you- it wants to take form and shape... become fleshed out... it wants to become visible to the world we live it. It roots us, and grounds us... and then it begins to fly. The Word of God wants to become incarnational once again... and so we have people sensing that God is sending them out... in a missional way... to “incarnate” God’s love in some fashion.

(Show Whiz Kids logo) Today, we’ll be commissioning a whole host of people- 22 from this church all together- who will be fleshing out the love of God in a year’s worth of Monday afternoons as Whiz Kid tutors... helping some second- and third-graders become better equipped for success... learning how to read or figure out their numbers well enough to keep up with their classmates. (close Whiz Kids logo)

That’s the Word of God- pushing its way into and through 22 lives like a soft rootlet of love... bring life, and hope, and love and joy to a bunch of kids. Are you open to God’s Word at work in your life?.....