

This message was prepared by Rev. Pamela Graf Short for the People of Prayer of the Tontogany Presbyterian Church for October thirteenth, the eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost in the year of our LORD two thousand and nineteen. It is a topical sermon on the written Word of God.

Psalm 19:7-10

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;
the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple;
the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever;
the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

Psalm 23

The LORD is my Shepherd;
I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down
In green pastures:
He leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul:
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness
For his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the
Valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil:
For Thou *art* with me;
Thy rod and thy staff
They comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
Thou anointest my head with oil;
My cup runneth over.
Surely Goodness and Mercy
Shall follow me
All the days of my life:
And I will dwell
In the House of the LORD for ever.

Jeremiah 31:33-34

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,
says the LORD:
I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts;
and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other,
"Know the LORD," for they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD;
for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

II Timothy 3:14-17

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

II Kings 22

1 Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath.

2 He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.

3 In the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent Shaphan son of Azaliah, son of Meshullam, the secretary, to the house of the Lord, saying,

4 "Go up to the high priest Hilkiyah, and have him count the entire sum of the money that has been brought into the house of the Lord, which the keepers of the threshold have collected from the people;

5 let it be given into the hand of the workers who have the oversight of the house of the Lord; let them give it to the workers who are at the house of the Lord, repairing the house,

6 that is, to the carpenters, to the builders, to the masons; and let them use it to buy timber and quarried stone to repair the house.

7 But no accounting shall be asked from them for the money that is delivered into their hand, for they deal honestly."

8 The high priest Hilkiyah said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord." When Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, he read it.

9 Then Shaphan the secretary came to the king, and reported to the king, "Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of the workers who have oversight of the house of the Lord."

10 Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "The priest Hilkiyah has given me a book." Shaphan then read it aloud to the king.

11 When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes.

12 Then the king commanded the priest Hilkiyah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary, and the king's servant Asaiah, saying,

13 "Go, inquire of the Lord for me, for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our ancestors did not obey the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."

14 So the priest Hilkiyah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the prophetess Huldah the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; she resided in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter, where they consulted her.

15 She declared to them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Tell the man who sent you to me,

16 Thus says the Lord, I will indeed bring disaster on this place and on its inhabitants—all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read.

17 Because they have abandoned me and have made offerings to other gods, so that they have provoked me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched.

18 But as to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall you say to him, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard,

19 because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the Lord, when you heard how I spoke against this place, and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and because you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, says the Lord.

20 Therefore, I will gather you to your ancestors, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring on this place." They took the message back to the king.

In our Bible stories for today the Word of God revives the soul and pierces the heart of a king.

The written Word of God is seen as odd by many in the 21st century;
as optional by others.

Some find it annoying and others outrageous.

Does it move your own heart to rejoice or recoil;

To repent or reject;

to see clearly or to be utterly confused?

Is the presence of the Bible in your life as important as having a roof over your head
or don't you remember the last time you lifted it off your shelf?

I am pretty convinced that we live in the time of Josiah.

That is, we live with very little idea of what the written Word of God has to say.

The people of Israel did not stop calling themselves Israelites just because they stopped reading the Torah.

We have not stopped calling ourselves Christians just because we have stopped reading the Bible.

For the ancients, the scroll of the Torah was thrown way in the back of the temple.

Since it seems it was found in the same place as the money was found,

I suppose you could make a case that whoever put it there thought that it was of some value.

Or maybe they thought,

"If I put it in with the money, then when all the money is gone and the people stop relying on themselves and their cash to get through life, they will find a true treasure."

Paul chooses an interesting word when describing Scripture:

"All Scripture is Useful" this may also be translated "All Scripture is Profitable" .

Profitable.

If something is profitable it yields a gain;

that is, what I get out of it is more than what I put into it.

Do you believe that about the Bible?

Do you believe reading your Bible is an investment?

That whatever time you put into reading and studying will in fact pay large dividends in wisdom,
in understanding, in courage, in love?

Some folks have stopped reading the Bible because it is filled with violence and destruction,
with abuses and hatred.

Are these stories profitable or polluting? Are they like fresh dew or like Agent Orange?

Certainly humans have used the stories of the Bible for their own gain—

for their own power over women and slaves and children and creation and nations.

If the Bible was used to prop up Hitler's reign of terror isn't it better to ripe it up than it is to read it?

How can it possibly lead to love and dignity?

To justice and to peace?

When we find the Word of God appalling we can close it and cut off relationship with God,
or we can shout a little and fuss at the God who named God's children "Israel" which means
"to wrestle with God"

In Isaiah 1:18 God says "Come! Let us argue it out!"

I believe the Bible is best read not necessarily
as a history book
or a science book
or a political treatise
or even as a doctrinal manual,
though it surely intersects with all of this knowledge and nuances.

I believe the Bible is *best* read as God's love letter to us;
as God's revelation of God's own aching heart and hopeful imagination.
Of God's desire to be with us,
reaching for us,
groaning in the face of our sufferings
and calling to us in the deepest shadows of the valleys of death.

For most of my life I understood "All Scripture is inspired by God" as a sort of one-time thing:
Once upon a time God inspired writers to put things down on scrolls.
But I get a little different insight when I hear
"All Scripture is God-breathed".
What if it is true that God is breathing through the Bible every time you open it and begin to read.
What if the breath of God that filled the first human with life is willing to rise from the pages of the Word?
and fill you with life and understanding and faith and healing and grace and generosity and peace?
What if God wants to have a conversation with you through the Word?
What if God longs to speak to you every day and is simply waiting for you to open the letter?

One of the great joys for me over these 8.5 years has been those of you who internalized the Word of God
through memorization. Christian with his story of Jesus' baptism; confirmation students with their life verses;
mentors who worked and worked as an example to their students.

One of my great regrets over these years is that I have not pressed you and pressed you and pressed you again
and again and again to memorize Scripture.
Don't tell me you are too old.
Don't tell me you are too forgetful.
Don't tell me you can't afford the time.
I suppose the most honest answer you and I can both give each other is that we are not really interested in
memorizing.
O but God is so very interested in you.

Finally any study of the Bible,
any memorizing of Scripture,
is best done, is best understood
when we encourage one another;
when we are not afraid to go to each other as Josiah went to Huldah;
when we share insights with each other;
when we yell at God together;
when we give thanks to God together.

You don't have to wait for your next pastor before you gather around the Word.

Call a group together.

Open up the Bible.

Say a prayer and begin reading

and reflecting

and wrangling.

Set a table of before one another

and let the Word of God nourish you.

There is not one single person in the church who is not qualified to gather a group together and being reading the Word and asking questions.

Who is God in this story?

What does this passage tell me about humans?

What role does creation play in this chapter?

What bothers me about this text?

Where does grace show up?

Open the Word and hear God's call of love to you!

Now may our God of Word and Spirit

The One who writes to you in love

Speak to you in astounding grace

Call you in mysterious mercies

And set within you words of

Wonder, holiness, joy and peace

Now and for a thousand generations.