

Sermon for Christ & Grace Church Petersburg, VA

Proper 10, Year A, July 16, 2017

The Rev. Bill Queen

**“The Word of God”**

**Psalm 119:105-112; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

**in both our psalm and gospel readings today we see the importance of ‘God’s word;’ in the Psalm, God’s word “is a lantern to my feet and a light upon my path;” without it we walk in darkness and can have no idea where we are going; in the Gospel’s parable about the different ways that seeds are cast upon the earth and either grow or die, those seeds are interpreted to stand for God’s word, and how it either grows or dies within us; so what is this important “word” and how do we make sure we recognize its importance in our lives?**

**we might first presume that the phrase ‘God’s word’ is just another way of talking about the Bible, about the words that have come to us over the centuries from holy scripture; the Bible often refers to itself in this way, so that certainly is one way to understand it; but as we look more closely we find that is not the only way to understand it**

**the Bible also tells us that it was “by the word of the Lord” that the heavens were made (Psalm 33:6), so the word includes God’s creative power; another Psalm (107:20) tells us that God’s word healed his people from sickness and from sin, so the word includes God’s powers of healing and of forgiveness**

**time and again it is the word of the Lord that comes to the Hebrew prophets: Isaiah (38:4), Jeremiah (1:4), Ezekiel (1:3), Daniel (10:1), Hosea (1:1), Joel (1:1), Amos (3:1), Jonah (1:1), Micah (1:1), Zephaniah (1:1), Haggai (1:1), Zechariah (1:1), Malachi (1:1), (notice any that were not on the list?; they all are); and the final prophet who precedes Jesus, John the Baptist (Luke 3:2), God’s word comes to him too; this is what we mean when we say in the Nicene Creed that the Holy Spirit “has spoken through the Prophets;” and God not only gave them the words we have recorded in their respective Bible books, but the Holy Spirit also gave them the will and the courage to speak out and confront the powers and the people who were not following God’s word, often at great danger to those prophets; so the word is also a power within us to do the will and the works God wants us to do**

and continuing on throughout the New Testament the word of God has more meanings; John's gospel tells us that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, so the person and presence of Jesus himself is a manifestation of God's word; the book of Hebrews (4:12) uses that same kind of personification when it says "the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart;" so the word of God includes words from God, words of believers spoken about God, and as something beyond any words within us, something which lives within us, something we do as much as anything we hear or we say

in our worship, we encounter the word of God in our Bible readings and preaching, to which we listen and reflect upon in order to discern what God wants each of us to hear and how God wants us to respond; in our praises and singing, we extol God's actions, mercy, and grace given to us; in our creeds, we proclaim our shared faith; in our prayers, we enter into dialogue with God; in our confession, we make our peace with God; in our passing the peace, we make our peace with each other; and even in our announcements, we are invited to participate in fellowship, education, and ministries which are all outgrowths of God's word; you could say that everything we do in worship is an interaction with the word of God in all of its senses

outside of our worship, in the things that each of us can do daily, we also encounter the word of God: as we do our own reading of the Bible; in our personal life of prayer; in our sharing of our faith and of God's peace with the people around us, using both actions and words; recognize that it is possible for us to be mindfully engaged with the word of God in everything we do in our daily lives; imagine, for a moment, just how differently the hours of your days would pass at work, at home, in any of your activities, if they were lived with such an intentional interaction with the word of God

I recall one point in my life when I went from having such a connection with God's word to feeling an almost complete lack of it; when I left home for college, I left behind all of the regular exposure to God's word I had grown up with through high school in church, Sunday school, and youth group; I tried going to the college chapel services, but for some reason they didn't speak to me; I felt a deep emptiness in my life; so, even though I wasn't taking any religion classes, I bought a study Bible in the college bookstore, with thick pages and wide margins I could write in, and I read the Bible to stay connected

**to it; I also volunteered with a group of students who made weekly visits to a senior citizen's apartment building (this was in St. Pete, Florida, so there were plenty of those around); through that I got to know a couple with whom I stayed in touch long after college; the Bible and the engagement in a ministry helped me sustain that important connection with God's word in a way that shaped the rest of my life; how connected with God's word do you feel?**

**to bring the words from our gospel's parable home to us: is something or someone snatching away God's word that had been sown in your heart?; are you falling away from God's word that at one time brought you joy?; are the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choking God's word within you?; or are you providing God's word good soil to grow on?; are you hearing God's word and understanding it?; are you indeed bearing fruit from God's word and yielding a hundredfold, or sixty, or thirty?; are you recognizing the importance of God's word in all aspects of your life?; make sure that God's word is the lantern to your feet and the light to your path; without it any one of us will walk in darkness and will have no idea where we are going**