

“Inspiration for us All”

Exodus 24:1-18

As we move through the windows in this series we now to come to the window in the far corner, the picture of the bible. The picture of the bible is simple, it shows an open book with a bookmark in it. It's a deceptively simple picture, because we know that the Bible is far from being a simple book. No, it is a book that a whole faith rests upon and has been mired in controversy since it was first compiled in one document over 1500 years ago.

A theme that has come organically in this series is that of inspiration. We discussed how communion can inspire us and how Christ was inspired to use the act of communion in order to show that there was a new covenant between God and human. We discussed prayer and how we should be inspired to pray, because Christ gave us the foundation and inspiration for prayer, and ultimately how Christ prayed for us disciples, which still stands for us to this day.

Today I plan to look at how the bible can inspire us. I plan for us to explore the various ways of experiencing inspiration through various views on the Bible As you can imagine there is not just one single way of interpreting this holy text. We'll also touch base on the origins of the Bible and then look at how we can use the Bible as a source of inspiration in our lives looking at a passage in Exodus.

If you remember back far enough, I preached a sermon on the Bible back in the Fall. In that sermon I was specifically looking at how the Bible was put together and how it came to be the document that we know of today. I don't plan on repeating that sermon today, but for those of you who missed the sermon, I'll bring you up to speed quickly.

Our faith ancestors have had sacred texts since the beginning of the story that we have in the Bible. The earliest known compilation of what we know of the texts is mentioned in the Bible

date to about 600 BC, when King Josiah found a compilation of texts in the temple. This was a finding of a biblical texts that did have a profound impact on the Israelite people. It formed a foundation that laid claim to the legitimacy of the sacred texts that they were holding dear in their worship of God.

The Hebrew scriptures are composed of three components, the Torah, or law, the Nevi'im, the prophets, and the Kethiv'im, the writings. These three components form up what is known today in Judaism as the Tanakh. The content of the modern Hebrew Bible that we have in our bible is nearly identical to what is used in Judaism. The only difference is the order of the books.

Later the Bible in its original Hebrew language was lost and we then had a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures that we know of today as the Septuagint. What happened is that the Israelite people were no longer speaking Hebrew but rather they were speaking Greek as that had become the language of their around 250 BC. The Septuagint was the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures and is actually the oldest form of the Hebrew Scriptures that we have and laid the foundation of the vocabulary and thought of the New Testament.

The New Testament came about after the life of Christ. The earliest believed text of the New Testament is actually the letter James, dating back to about 50 AD. Following that, Paul was writing to the churches between that time and until about 65 AD. These texts show that very soon after the life of Christ there were communities and individuals that were definitely living and understanding the importance of Christ and showing us to this day that the people of that time were indeed affected by the life of Christ.

The Gospels were written down just a little later after this time. The first Gospel that was written was that of Mark, starting around 80 AD. Then following were Matthew and Luke,

starting around 85-95 AD and the finally John was the last gospel to be written down, starting around 100 AD.

Now you may notice that the Gospels were written down about a generation after Christ had lived on the earth. This is not to diminish the authority of the Gospels or their accuracy. It should be noted that the oral tradition of the ancient world is far better than the oral tradition that we would experience in this day. It was very common for Rabbis at the time to memorize the whole Torah and they could not comment on the Torah until they had it memorized perfectly. The gospels would have been passed down this way, where the account of Christ's life would have been passed perfectly from person to another. Considering this oral tradition, then the gospels were written down rather quickly.

The canon, or set books of scriptures were set down at the Council of Nicea in the 4th century. This set down the books that would be considered to be authoritative in the church. These books are what the church was to use to teach others about the faith and build up people in belief of Jesus Christ. Today, the canon of scripture has changed somewhat. Most of the changes are reflected in the Hebrew scriptures, where there are differences between Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Bibles. What is consistent between these three major branches of Christianity is that the New Testament is accepted without difference on what books are considered authoritative. I think this is a powerful statement and shows that there is indeed some consistency and common ground between our brothers and sisters of faith.

One thing that often comes up to with us as people of faith is the accuracy of the Bible. I can answer yes to that question. Looking back at the ancient copies of the bible, back in the original languages, we have thousands of copies of the text. They are all remarkably consistent and accurate within each other. So therefore, when you are looking at the Bible have confidence

that indeed the text that we read and hold dear to us in our faith is indeed the same text that we have been looking at for thousands of years. While the languages have changed over time into the translations, the grounding of those translations is rooted in scriptures that have been around consistently for a very long time.

Now we come down to the ways that we can understand the Bible. Sometimes we hear terms on what the Bible is that affect how we get inspiration from the text. I interact with these terms and ideas on frequent basis in school, but I know that people who are not in theological education do not understand what is being said. I hope to clarify these by providing three views. These three views are the Bible as the Inspired and Inerrant Word of God, the view that the Bible contains the Word of God, and finally, the Bible is a record of our spiritual ancestors past. These are not the only three views on the Bible, rather they are markers on a greater continuum of understanding of the Bible.

The first view that I'll share is that view that the Bible is the Inerrant and Inspired Word of God. This has biblical roots in its view and the scriptures that I have chosen for today's worship support this. This view holds the Bible up that it is the complete and utter revelation of God. Some understand that what is stated in the Bible is exactly what we should follow in our lives. Some would say the Bible is the complete rule of faith. To go against the Bible, would be complete heresy.

The next view is somewhat of a middle view of the continuum. It is the idea that the Bible contains the Word of the God. This view holds that the Bible contains the Word of God, with this views foundation rooted in the beginning of John. The Bible contains important facts of life and there is a great deal that we can learn from the Bible. It should be a guiding rule of faith.

However, it recognizes that there were human authors of the text. Therefore, there may be errors in the text or the ideas presented may not make sense in our modern day.

A third view is that the Bible is a record of our spiritual ancestors. This view discounts the Divine aspects of the Bible and shows that it is more of a human document than a divinely inspired one. It takes into account very much that there are errors in the text and that what is contained in the Bible represent a culture far different than our own. This view is held by many who do not follow Biblical principles or consider the Bible to be the New York Times of the ancient world, rather than a text that is useful for teaching.

So there you have three views on the Bible that represent markers on a vast continuum. What do we do with that? Well, I cannot answer for you, but I take a middle approach that reaches out to both ends. I recognize the Bible as God's Word and I recognize that there are Divine elements in the text that may seem strange to us today. I recognize that this is indeed an account of a spiritual ancestors but there is much that we can use today. I structure my life around Biblical principles and use it as a guide in my life and in my ministry.

So that's a long thinking portion of the sermon on how we can look at the bible. But we can find inspiration to appreciate the bible just by looking throughout the text. Today I have chosen a text from Exodus, that shows the connection and foundation of the scriptures that we know of to this day.

Here in Exodus we have an account of Moses receiving the Law from God. He wrote the Law down so that others may have an understanding of the law. But rather than just taking the law and saying "here you go, take it and enjoy" there is more to it than that. He takes the law and performs a ceremony at the altar and took the blood of the sacrifices and spread it out from the people stating that the blood represented the covenant, the law between God and human.

The covenant was important because it gave an identity to the people in addition to the way of living prescribed by God. The Bible is an important part to our identity as well. It is what separates us from other religious groups. Our reading of the Bible and inspiration from God gives the way that we form our identity as well. Just like in the days of Moses so are we still working with this imagery and thoughts in our faith journeys and in our faith communities.

God gave the people the Law as a way of finding inspiration for the people. Until this time the Israelites did not have really any sort of guidance on how to live their lives outside of knowing the covenant of Abraham and other interactions between God and human. We have the beginnings of scripture laying out a foundation for us to work with today, just like back in the wilderness when Moses received the law.

In this story, I find the imagery of being on the mountain with God highly important and rich in its thought. It shows that to reach the law Moses himself had to take up a journey. He had to work towards finding the ways of God. He had to go forth and find the Word for the people to have and to live their lives according to. When we engage in Bible study and the reading of the Word on our own time we are engaging in a journey to seek out God. We are engaging a journey to seek out inspiration and guidance in our lives.

The greater Exodus story is a story of the Bible that we can find great inspiration from. It represents an early story of faith that we can share with the greater community. It's a story of faith that we can draw inspiration from. We can look to the bible and find stories that will give us the inspiration to live into our lives as Christians in this world and better prepare ourselves for the next world that we will encounter in life.

So with all of that heady information in today's sermon, I find that we can use that information with the Bible itself in finding inspiration for our lives. We have it in our other

readings today how important the Bible is to faith. It is through the scriptures and through acts like that of Moses that we can move forward and live the full and complete life that can be found in Jesus Christ.

I believe that if we are a community that is going to be ready to make disciples of Jesus Christ, then we need to get ready to read our Bibles and ready to share the story that we know. No matter how exactly you find inspiration in the Bible, throughout its origins or in the way we read it, it is our standing document that shows our faith to the world. It is my prayer that we can be a community that reflects the Bible and uses it as a tool to share the Gospel. I encourage us as a community to engage the Bible and be prepared for the inspiration that we can find in the text for all people, not just within ourselves. Amen.