

Shiloh United Methodist Church

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

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What the Bible Is, and What the Bible Is Not

1 Corinthians 2 Common English Bible (CEB)

2 When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I didn't come preaching God's secrets to you like I was an expert in speech or wisdom. ²I had made up my mind not to think about anything while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and to preach him as crucified. ³I stood in front of you with weakness, fear, and a lot of shaking. ⁴My message and my preaching weren't presented with convincing wise words but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power. ⁵I did this so that your faith might not depend on the wisdom of people but on the power of God.

⁶What we say is wisdom to people who are mature. It isn't a wisdom that comes from the present day or from today's leaders who are being reduced to nothing. ⁷We talk about God's wisdom, which has been hidden as a secret. God determined this wisdom in advance, before time began, for our glory. ⁸It is a wisdom that none of the present-day rulers have understood, because if they did understand it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory! ⁹But this is precisely what is written: *God has prepared things for those who love him that no eye has seen, or ear has heard, or that haven't crossed the mind of any human being.* ¹⁰God has revealed these things to us through the Spirit. The Spirit searches everything, including the depths of God. ¹¹Who knows a person's depths except their own spirit that lives in them? In the same way, no one has known the depths of God except God's Spirit. ¹²We haven't received the world's spirit but God's Spirit so that we can know the things given to us by God. ¹³These are the things we are talking

about—not with words taught by human wisdom but with words taught by the Spirit—we are interpreting spiritual things to spiritual people. ¹⁴ But people who are unspiritual don't accept the things from God's Spirit. They are foolishness to them and can't be understood, because they can only be comprehended in a spiritual way. ¹⁵ Spiritual people comprehend everything, but they themselves aren't understood by anyone. ¹⁶ *Who has known the mind of the Lord, who will advise him?* But we have the mind of Christ.

“A legend tells how, at the beginning of time, God resolved to hide himself within his own creation.

As God was wondering how best to do this, the angels gathered round him.

‘I want to Hide myself in my creation,’ he told them. ‘I need to find a place that is not too easily discovered, for it is their search for me that my creatures will grow in spirit and understanding.’

‘Why don't you hide yourself deep in their earth?’ the first angel suggested.

God pondered for a while, then replied, ‘No. It will not be long before they learn how to mine the earth and discover all the treasures it contains. They will discover me too quickly, and they will not have had enough time to do their growing.’

‘Why don't you hide yourself on their moon?’ a second angel suggested.

God thought about this idea for a while, and then replied, ‘No. It will take a little longer, but before too long they will learn how to fly through space. They will arrive on the moon and explore its secrets, and they will discover me too soon, before they have had enough time to do their growing.’

The angels were at a loss to know what hiding places to suggest. There was a long silence.

‘I know,’ piped up one angel, finally. ‘Why don’t you hide yourself within their own hearts? They will never think of looking there!’

‘That’s it!’ said God, delighted to have found the perfect hiding place. And so it is that God hides secretly deep within the hear of everyone of God’s creatures, until that creature has grown enough in spirit and in understanding to risk the great journey into the secret core of its own being. And there, the creature discovers its creator, and is rejoined to God for all eternity.

Retelling of a traditional story”

Over the last few years the term “fake news” has become commonplace in our public discourse. I believe the intention of folks who use this phrase, “fake news,” commonly is to blur the lines between truth and fiction. Additionally, we live in an information age. An age where in less than an hour I can make a professional website and claim a truth. If I am good, I can make it look as convincing as a national news outlet who has existed for over a century, a well-researched scientific paper, or a work by a learned scholar. This leaves me wondering, “Where can we find truth?”

One of my favorite pieces of wisdom “The more vehemently a rumor is denied, the more likely it is to have some truth in it.” To constantly claim many things are “fake,” and never claim what is truth, is to live in a world where no one knows what a person stands for. Perhaps truth has always been hiding somewhere between what our hearts tell us individually, and what our combined wisdom tells us when we form community. Perhaps in this information age, our best hope is that truth is found when we work together to search for it. When we collectively work to point out the false narratives that restrict the life Christ points to in the gospel of John. When we collectively discover truth in the hope of a kingdom born of God’s love.

Over this month I want to spend time learning how we as Christians work in community to find truth in scripture. For over 2 millennia we have used this book to find truth in our lives, and as a guide for following Christ. When some claim that the “Good News” is not factual, and others claim the Bible is written by the fire of God and never touched by humans. What is true for us?

In our culture today the prevailing perception of Christianity is that “everything” written in the Bible is the rule of our faith. This notion comes primarily from a movement in American Christianity that believes the Bible is the inherent word of God, as in God took a pen and wrote each word and only these words. These are the people who refer to the Bible in the way the following acronym describes.

Basic
Instructions
Before
Leaving
Earth

In this mindset the Bible becomes an exact description of the universe and how it functions. Drawing rules for how to live now and in this life and the next. The challenge comes in that there are sections of the Bible that disagree. When the rules in one section do not match another then we are left in a debate about our eternal salvation, and forget the reason of our faith is to love one another. When in Leviticus it reminds us we are not to wear cloth made of two different fibers, are we to stop worship and check everyone who came in. Or instead do we listen to Christ who says love God and love your neighbor.

There are other Christians that treat the Bible like the old “Magic 8 Ball.” I am sure many of us remember the “Magic 8 Ball” that can be found in the toy aisle. On one side is the circular piece of plastic and

behind it the mysterious blue liquid. Inside was a 20-sided dice with 20 different answers. You would shake the ball and turn it over and see what answer rose to the glass. You ask a question like, “Should I plan to look for a new job?” And an answer like “Signs point to yes” would rise to the glass. The Bible has been treated the same way, shake it, open it, and take the answer.

United Methodist Pastor Adam Hamilton writes about both of these uses of the scriptures in his book “Making Sense of the Bible.” These are the two things he describes that the Bible is not for United Methodists. It is not an exact rulebook and it is not a “Magic 8 Ball” for finding personal prosperity. Both of these uses of the Bible lead to a nightmare in which God gave us a text to tie us either into an eternal game of who is in or who is out, or to play roulette with our lives. I don’t believe either of these uses of the Bible helps to deliver the dream we learn about in Christ, the dream shared of a relationship with all creation.

(Show Animate Clip)

One of the best analogies for scriptures is that good use of it is a refining process. That like the gold ring you choose to wear on your finger, it takes a process to get to that point. The Bible is like the gold found in a vein of rock. It has to be extracted with fire, in this case we believe it is the Holy Spirit, God in this world, through prayer, reflection and community discerning God’s will together. Only after a process do we find the truth within.

Today as a part of our sermon I want to review in 10 minutes the entire Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, so you know the raw material we are starting with. This is meant to raise more questions than to give answers.

10 Minute Old Testament

2000 BCE – 430 BCE – Old Testament (Hebrew Bible)
Our order, Jews order, Catholic order.

Old Testament (Hebrew Bible)

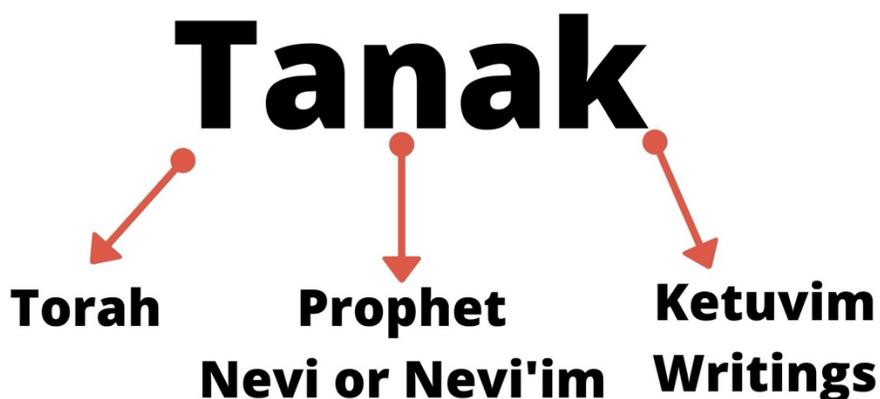
(At this point in the sermon I reviewed the entire Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) in a general overview.)



Primeval history

Formation of Israel

Exodus – law – promised land



Formation of new kingdom, judges

Bravery of individuals

Beginning of kings

Israel constantly trying to find a leader...not trusting God

Large kingdom and then....560

Chronicles different version of history

Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther (formation of kingdom and people of Israel beginning to find their way, through the meek and small)

Wisdom books

Major Prophets

Order

Isaiah 1 - 8th century

2 - 6th century

3 - after return from exile

Minor Prophets

Old Testament

- 1. Five books of Moses**
- 2. Historical Books**
- 3. Writings (Wisdom Literature)**
- 4. Prophets**

New Testament

- 1. Four Gospels**
- 2. Acts of the Apostles**
- 3. Letters from the Apostles**
- 4. Revelation**

23,145 Verses in the Protestant Old Testament

7,958 Verses in the New Testament

The scripture from the letter of Paul to the Corinthians we read today is a reminder of this ongoing process of living into this text and living with this text. Paul reminds the followers of Christ that he is trusting the Holy Spirit to help him share his words. A reminder for us that we do not have to have the perfect place to start this journey. We just have to trust that God's truth for us is somewhere between our heart, the hearts of others and the heart of our God. It is why Jesus asked us to love ourselves as we love others and love God. Jesus knew truth was located somewhere in that space, that God was in that space.

As I leave us I would like to leave us with a quote from one of my favorite Christian authors, Rachel Held Evans

“When you stop trying to force the Bible to be something it’s not—static, perspicacious, certain, absolute—then you’re free to revel in what it is: living, breathing, confounding, surprising, and yes, perhaps even magic. The ancient rabbis likened Scripture to a palace, alive and bustling, full of grand halls, banquet rooms, secret passages, and locked doors. “The adventure,” wrote Rabbi Burton L. Visotzky in *Reading the Book*, lies in “learning the secrets of the palace, unlocking all the doors and perhaps even glimpsing the King in all his splendor.”

Evans, Rachel Held. *Inspired* (p. xx). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

The Bible is filled with ancient stories that describe the intimate relationship with God and God's people. At first God's people is a select group and then later God's encounter with us begins expanding this notion to all people, specifically in our scriptures those encountering Christ. The stories that make up our scriptures are an invitation for us to study the power of faith through part of human history. More specifically for us to experience Christ, Jesus' spiritual background in Judaism, and to learn how God can be in our lives to invite us to a life of love, hope, peace and joy.

Blessings to us all as we seek the truth that leads to the full life, a life found in Christ.