

Romans 8:14-17

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

“When Scripture Is Primary”

February 7, 2010

Rev. Ray Miller

(Fourth arm of the Quadrilateral: Tradition, Reason, Experience and Scripture)

There's another Scripture reading, I don't have it listed in the bulletin, but I'm going to read it now.

"In the beginning, which occurred near the start, there was nothing but God, darkness and some gas. The Bible says the Lord they God is one, but I think he must be a lot older than that. Anyway, God said, 'Give me a light' and someone did. Then God made the world. He split the atom and made Eve. Adam and Eve were naked, but they weren't embarrassed, because mirrors hadn't been invented yet. Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating one bad apple, so they were driven from the Garden of Eden. Not sure what they were driven in though, because they didn't have cars. Adam and Eve had a son Cain who hated his brother as long as he was able. Pretty soon all of the early people died off except for Methuselah, who lived to be something like a million. One of the next important people was Noah, who was a good guy, but one of his kids was kind of a ham. (It's only funny if you know the story of Noah.) Noah built a large boat and put his family and some animals on it. He asked some other people to join him, but they said they would have to take a raincheck. After Noah came Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jacob was more famous than his brother Esau because Esau sold Jacob his birthmark in exchange for some pot roast. Jacob had a son named Joseph who wore a real loud sports coat. Another important Bible guy is Moses, whose real name is Charlton Heston. One of Moses' best helpers was Joshua, who was the first Bible guy to use spies. Joshua fought the battle of Geritol, and the fence fell over on the town. After Joshua came David. He got to be king by killing a giant with a slingshot. He had a son named Solomon who had about 300 wives and 500 porcupines. My teacher says he was wise, but that doesn't sound very wise to me. After the Old Testament came the New Testament. Jesus is the star of the New Testament. He was born in Bethlehem in a barn. I wish I had been born in a barn, too, because my mom is always saying to me, 'Close the door, were you born in a barn?' It would be nice to say, 'As a matter of fact, I was.' During his life, Jesus had many arguments with sinners like the Pharisees and the Republicans. (That's not a political statement.) Jesus also had twelve apostles. The first one, the worst one, was Judas Asparagus. Judas was so evil that they named a terrible vegetable after him. Jesus was a great man, and he healed many leopards, and even preached to some Germans on the mount. But the Republicans and all those guys put Jesus on trial before Pontius the Pilot. Pilot didn't stick up for Jesus, he just washed his hands instead. Anyways, Jesus died for

our sins and then came back to life again. He went up to Heaven, but will be back at the end of the aluminum. His return is foretold in the book of Revelation."

That can be found in the Book of Hezekiah, of which there is none.

We've been considering, this is the fourth week now, the four legs of the Quadrilateral. The four legs that support our faith as Christians. Pastor Chuck has talked on previous Sundays about tradition, reason, and experience, and today we focus on Scripture. Martin Luther is said to have been a person who believed "sola scriptura", Scripture alone. John Wesley was known as a 'man of one book', and Karl Barth, one of the great theologians of the 20th Century, was asked as he was in his older years to tell what it was that was at the heart of this theology. And the people who asked him to do this expected a theological dissertation, which he gave, except that this was it. He said, "This is it. Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Now, I don't know. When did you first start learning about the Bible? A lot of you, like me, right from the time you were very small. My mother used to read Bible stories to me, usually just before I would go to sleep at night, from a children's Bible story book. Sunday School was a lot of fun. We learned all these stories about David and Goliath, you know that big guy and the little boy. And we learned about Moses leading the Israelites through the Red Sea, escaping from the King, because we couldn't pronounce, Pharaoh, of Egypt. And about Jesus, born in Bethlehem, and how wonderful that was, because there were angels singing in the sky, and shepherds, and wise men following a star. And then we tried to read the Bible ourselves, as we got a little older. It was difficult. So many names. They didn't have names like Denver and Fort Collins. They had strange names of places. And people didn't have names like Sam and Joan. They had strange names. Older brother was reading the Bible to younger brother and he said, "The characters in this story are real, but the names have been changed because brother can't pronounce them." My two favorite names in the Old Testament - get into the New Testament and you've got names like John and James and that's no fun - but in the Old Testament, all these interesting names. The sons of Isaiah. I love this - Mahershalalhashbaz. Shear-Jashub. I always wondered whenever the parents were going to call the kids in for lunch, what did they say? How did they do that? It wasn't, "Come in, Johnny," it was, "Come here, Maher..." I don't know. They probably said, "Kids, it's time to eat."

Well then we got older, and we began to think about some of these things, and we asked the question, what does the story of David and Goliath have to do with my life. Is it just a fairy tale? And as a person living in the 21st Century, can I possibly believe that God stopped the Red Sea from flowing, and when the sea bottom was dry, the Israelites went across? And what about Jesus, born of a virgin? And angels in the sky? And wise men following a star, and Herod killing all the baby boys under the age of two in Bethlehem? What do I make of all this? And the thing is, if I'm just operating out of what I understand of the Bible, what I got as a child, it seems so irrelevant. But we need to grow in our understanding of Scripture and the message that is there. We grow in every other way.

I was trying to help a grandchild do algebra. Now, I was good in algebra in high school. Of course, that was a long time ago. I had no clue how they do algebra these days. I looked at it and I thought, "Doesn't look like anything I ever studied." Things change, and we adjust to them. Think of all the things, I mean in my lifetime. Landing on the moon. Space travel. This thing orbiting around up in the sky, whatever it's called, the space station. TV. Color TV, and soon to be 3-D TV. And Twitter and Facebook. I haven't figured out how to do that yet. You know, there are some things I figure I can get through life without knowing, but then at my age, that's okay. At the age of some of these other people, no way. We've changed, we've adjusted, we've come to other understandings. We no longer think of the world of a three-storied universe. We know that. There is no "up" there is only "out." And so with our understanding of Scripture.

About 25 years ago, I went on a two-week preparation for teaching the Bethel Bible Study series. Very intensive study of the Bible. Two-year study, one year in the Old Testament, the other year in the New Testament, classes every week, two and a half hours every week. It was a powerful experience. One of the lasting learnings that I had out of that was to come to the realization that the Bible is a whole. There are unifying themes that run from Genesis to the Book of Revelation. The God of the Old Testament isn't different from the God of the New Testament. The Old Testament isn't all about law, and the New Testament all about grace. There are unifying themes. I just want to share with you two this morning. One is relationship. God has created us for relationship with God. Take the story of Adam and Eve, and it doesn't matter, as far as I can see, whether you look at that literally or metaphorically, the message in that is that God created them to have a relationship with God. And that is what God wants for every one of us. God wants to have a relationship with us.

And Abraham. God spoke to Abraham. I have no idea how God spoke to Abraham, whether it was the way I'm talking today, although I rather doubt that, but it could have been. I don't know how, but that's not the important thing. The important thing is that Abraham heard God speaking to him, because Abraham had a relationship with God, and Abraham set out, at God's direction, to go to a new land, where God was going to make of his descendents a great nation. Abraham had a relationship with God. Isaiah, in the temple, worshipping, and he heard a voice. "Whom shall I send, and who will go for me?" and Isaiah said, "Here I am. Send me." And that was his call to be a prophet.

We are called to a relationship with God. Jesus says, "I and the Father are one. If you have seen me, you have seen the Father." Jesus says, "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, so that you can be with me." And Paul, in the Scripture, Paul says, "When we cry Abba-" Do you know "Abba"? Abba means "Daddy." What more intimate relationship is there than a child with Daddy or a child with Mommy?" When we cry "Abba," Daddy, it is God's spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs of God, and fellow heirs with Christ. And in the book of the Revelation of John, God says, we're told, that God will make God's dwelling with human beings. A relationship with God is what God

created us for, and it is both important and possible. And how do I know that? Because the Bible tells me so.

The second unifying theme that I want to lift up this morning is, the way of salvation. We live in a world and we live lives that are broken. We as humankind have really messed up the Creation that God made. Pollution, decimation of forests, you name it. Polluting the waters, what is there, there is a huge thing floating around in the Pacific Ocean that keeps getting bigger. It's scary. We have broken creation. We live in broken relationships with other people, so that nations against nations, religions against religions, we live broken in our churches, in our homes, in our marriages, in life. How can we be healed? How can we be restored? The way of salvation is grace. That is a word that we find throughout the Bible. Grace means God's unconditional, unmerited, undeserved love. Unconditional, unmerited, undeserved love. God acts that out for us in forgiveness. How many times have you and I, and maybe we do it today, have felt guilty about something, and we have carried that guilt with us for years. And we have tried to do things to make up for what we did, and it didn't work. The guilt is still there. God's grace is God offering to us, to you and me, forgiveness, and God doesn't wait for us to say, "God, I need to be forgiven." God offers the forgiveness even before we ask, and even if we choose to live in unawareness of that offer. It is God's gift, the gift of salvation. The gift of a new life. The gift that enables us to live as people of peace and faith and life and love and joy, in the midst of the world. God's grace.

It was there in the first story - I didn't see this for a long time, but in the story of Adam and Eve, after they disobeyed and ate the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, and they were cast out of the garden of Eden, they saw themselves as naked, not because they didn't have mirrors yet, but they saw their nakedness, and, it says, "God sewed skins for them to cover their nakedness." They had totally disobeyed God, broken God's arrangement with them, and here the story says, God makes clothing for them. That's grace. The younger son, who went off and first said, "You know Dad, when you die, and I wish you were dead now, I could have my inheritance. Can I have it anyway?" Goes off and wastes it all, becomes a reprobate. Decides to come home. Grace is that father running out and embracing his son, receiving him back, restoring him to son-ship, and having a celebration because "My son who was dead is alive." That's grace, and that's what God offers to us. How do we know that, unless we explore the Bible and see the way God works with us and people from the beginning of time, and even today. We learned a song when we were children, and it went like this. "The B-I-B-L-E, yes that's the book for me. I stand alone on the word of God, the B-I-B-L-E." When we have that foundation of Scripture, then we can look at our tradition, we can use our reason, and we can explore our experience and discover whether they have credibility in relationship to the witness of Scripture. May God bless us all, as we become schooled in the word that God has for us in the pages of the Bible. Amen.