

The St. John's Pulpit

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THE BIBLE:

READING TO HEAR THE LIVING WORD OF GOD

Deuteronomy 6:4-8; Psalm 119:105; Matthew 7:21-29; Hebrews 4:12

Season of Kingdomtide: A Season of Spiritual Renewal, October 30, 2016

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Have you heard about *Envision Charlotte*? Some of you may be involved in this public & private collaborative effort for our Queen City. Leaders are strengthening connections between our economic, social, educational and informational resources through innovation. One significant initiative of *Envision Charlotte* is to prepare us to be at the forefront of The IoT Revolution; The IoT represents The Internet of Things which is changing how we live.

Twenty-five years ago, in 1991, the internet was introduced. Today, satellites use the internet to connect computers, phones, microscopes, garage door openers, tractors, baby nursery monitors, televisions, pacemakers, irrigation systems, security cameras, trucks, trains, planes, food distribution systems, water purification plants, etc. By 2020, more than 50 billion things will be connected through the internet; thus, the phrase, 'The Internet of Things.'

Our world is very different from that flat planet where ancient people wrote on animal skins with berry juice offering the first stories included in The Bible. The last word of The Bible was written almost 2,000 years ago when the population of the planet was less than 400,000. Today's global population is 7.5 billion. More than 350,000 births will happen today; more than the world's population when Jesus was born. Yet, here we are interpreting our experience of The Living God through the pages of this ancient collection of stories, laws, hymns, poems, letters, prayers, etc. – which we call Holy or sacred. Our Protestant Bible consists of 66 books written by 40 to 50 different persons over 1500 years.

Let me tell you about these two Bibles. This first Bible belonged to my maternal grandmother, Mae Ketcherside. She cared for me during my preschool years. I still remember her reading her Bible. There are numerous passages she marked. This second Bible was given to me by my parents on Christmas Day of my twelfth year. It was my first Bible with the words of Jesus in red and my father told me to read some of those words each day.

The Bible has authority in my life. But, I do not worship The Bible. When I was young, my parents had authority in my life; but I did not worship them.

Today, I ask you to consider a question with me: In our world of being connected with The Internet of Things, how can we still use The Bible to strengthen our relational connection with God? I offer two ideas: First, Consider why The Bible should have authority in your life and Second, Consider how you can read to hear The Living Word of God through The Bible.

FIRST, THE BIBLE SHOULD HAVE AUTHORITY IN YOUR LIFE BECAUSE THE BIBLE HAD AUTHORITY IN THE LIFE OF JESUS.

In the stories of Jesus' wilderness temptation, between his commitment to ministry by baptism and his calling of disciples to begin his work, Jesus responded to each temptation by quoting a verse of The Hebrew Bible. He quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 when he said, "*A human being does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.*" That verse was given to the Hebrews to warn them against focusing more on the daily manna than on their relationship with God. As followers of Jesus, you should allow the words of the Bible to have authority in your life because they remind you of foundational truths. God inspired people long ago to write down principles and truths which prevent you from focusing on the sustenance of life while missing the substance of life. What makes you alive is your relationship with God; not merely the provisions of God. Repeatedly, Jesus quoted scripture and referred to passages in the Hebrew Bible. He knew Psalm 119:105 – "*Lord, Thy word is a light unto my feet and a light unto my path.*" Most likely, Jesus' parents followed Deuteronomy and taught Jesus the truths of scripture; just as Stacey and Russell will do with Alex.

We cannot ignore problems that arise when we try to force ancient texts into a twenty-first century scientific world. However, we will not return to the days when people thought the Earth was flat covered by a dome with holes called stars allowing humans to view the eternal light of heaven during the night. We will not try to prove the Earth's soil is only 6,000 years old or that dinosaurs never existed. We will not use The Bible ever again to support antisemitism, racism, prejudice against anyone, slavery, subjugation of women, violence against minorities or the social oppression of children. Even Jesus said, '*You have heard The Bible quoted to you, but I say unto you...*' The Bible both helps us learn more about God's nature and vision and helps

us learn more about ourselves and how we are to live in humility toward God and one another. The Bible may be old; but it is relevant with every new generation.

SO, FIRST, THE BIBLE SHOULD HAVE AUTHORITY IN YOUR LIFE BECAUSE THE BIBLE HAD AUTHORITY IN THE LIFE OF JESUS. AND SECOND.....

HERE ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS FOR YOU TO HEAR THE LIVING WORD OF THE LIVING GOD BY READING THE WRITTEN WORDS OF THE BIBLE.

First, create a place and time in your life where you will not be interrupted for at least 15 to 20 minutes. Pray, asking God to speak to you through the Bible passage you will read. Ask God to show you ways of following Jesus more obediently through the passage. Commit to God that you desire spiritual renewal and transformation, not merely information.

Second, read a short passage of The Bible. If the passage is confusing to you, move on to another passage. Once you choose your passage, ask these questions as you read: What is this passage teaching me about God or about life? How is this passage of scripture offering me an insight or clarity or an idea that I would never have on my own? How do these ideas relate with what I know about the Active Faith of Jesus? What practical life lessons are here for me?

Third, pray asking God to plant these practical life lessons deep within you as commitments in your discipleship as a follower of Jesus. Listen for how you are being guided toward peace, reconciliation, hope and love? Ask God to help your life become a reflection of Jesus' commitment to living in relationship with God and to living as a servant of other people.

When I was a child, my parents had authority in my life. Yet, over time, I have learned that what they taught me which was true had been taught to them by their parents and so on. The Bible should have authority in your life because it reveals to you the truths of God which have made individuals, relationships, families, communities, cultures and populations more healthy, vitalized and life-giving throughout the ages. The way these principles have been applied have changed. Yet, wherever love, hope, peace, patience, justice, redemption, grace, forgiveness, reconciliation or Active Faith are expressed, the lives of those persons become more godly!

Mark Twain once said, *“Many people are bothered by those passages in Scripture which they cannot understand; but as for me, I have always noticed that the passages that trouble me most are those which I do understand.”*

Friends of God, you can study today’s world or human history. When humans have been at our best, you will find the principles and truths taught in the scriptures, as confirmed by Jesus, were being followed. When we have been at our worst, you will find the principles and truths taught in the scriptures, as confirmed by Jesus, were ignored. And, sometimes – actually many times – humans have followed or ignored principles taught through The Bible without being aware of their actions.

In the life of St. John’s, we are in a season of spiritual renewal which includes deepening our commitment to and our capacity for hearing the Living Word of The Living God through The Bible. Jesus said, *“...if you do what I teach you to do, it will be like you have built your life on a solid rock to withstand the storms of life.”* Jesus himself allowed The Hebrew Bible to have authority in his life; but he did not worship the scriptures. He listened for The Living Word of The Living God. So, as we continue to plug into The Internet of Things, let us renew ourselves to being connected with God by listening through The Bible for God’s Truth. Let us listen through the written word for The Living Word. AMEN!