

October 13, 2019

Love 301: "Reading and Living the Love Story and Recipe"

Matthew 4:4

Philippians 2:16

Luke 11:28

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This sermon stands to be one of my most personal ones yet. So, I hope you will indulge me as I share some very personal thoughts and experiences.

Today, was scheduled to be a Bible milestone day for some of our children. One of our kids couldn't make it, so it will be next week. The bulletin was already done when the switch occurred, so I have chosen to stay the course for today and talk about the Bible: Reading and Living the Scriptures.

As many of you know my mother had a massive stroke five years before her death in 2013. As she continued to deteriorate, it became harder and harder for my father to visit her. His already weakened heart could not bear this mounting sadness. So, in his absence, I thought I might make him present to her by reading all his letters to her from college. Yes, she kept every one sent over those four years. So, every time I would visit her, I would read to my Mom, one of my Dad's love letters to her from 1944-1950.

The Bible is a way for our ancestors, those who are in our faith lineage to be present with us in the here and now. The first mistake one can make when reading the Bible is presupposing it is just an ancient book with no contemporary relevance or commentary. As my father was present to my mother in her later days, so our mothers and fathers of faith are present to us in and through holy writ.

Second, the Bible is a way for us to hear God's great love story for us, and all humankind. Yes, there are a lot of human actions that don't sound or look so loving between the covers of the "Good Book". Yet, despite the evil characters that seem to be a part every book, there is the overarching story of God's great love which culminates in the final chapters of the book in incarnated and emboldened in the life of Jesus and his followers.

The Bible is our antidote for all the poison and toxins that are currently in our world. It is God's prescription that must be taken regularly, if we are going to ward off disease and disease. The world is facing a pandemic of hatred, racism, exclusion, and injustices. It needs God's plan as outlaid in scripture, if we are to divert world destruction and mass annihilation.

One day, as I was browsing in Barnes and Nobles a book shouted at me and then leaped off the shelf. Its title Pastwatch: The Redemption of Christopher Columbus by Orson Scott Card. Turns out it is an altered history in which the story of Christopher Columbus is meshed with the story of a future scientist who believes she can alter human history from a tragedy of bloodshed and brutality to a world filled with hope and healing.

One day, as God was browsing through the world, something leapt off the page with a shout, the idea of God coming in human form to redeem the world from bloodshed and brutality and fill it with hope and healing.

In order to get the truths of our world and the truths of God, we need to get to know God's book/God's play book: read it, reflect on it, pray about it, seek to live it.

So then, the Bible is both the greatest love story ever written, and a book of altered history and that would be wonderful in and of itself. Yet, we would be amiss if we did not see God's word as a cookbook.

We admit it; our household is a big fan of the Great British Baking Show. A component of that show is contestants getting a partial recipe with some missing elements. Then the time is set and they are asked to, "Bake".

The Bible gives us the whole recipe, including all the measurements and proportions. I am a recipe cook. I need all the ingredients and their measurements, if you are going to be able to digest what I am dishing out.

Lynne is not solely a recipe cook. She periodically looks through our kitchen cabinets for what has been on our shelf for a while, and then she whips up something wonderful from what she has found, just like her chef father and Pennsylvania Dutch cook mother did.

The Bible is for recipe and non-recipe cooks alike. We are given all the ingredients we need to live a full life and help our world do the same. Yet, we are also allowed to decide the measurements – in other words how much of this and how little of that, and what no to include in the mix, never ever. The scriptures give us both a thumbs up, and a thumbs down. In other words, do a lot of this and little if any of that. When we are called to stir it up, we often have the chance to determine the ingredients and the proportions or we can choose at times

to exercise less of our individuality and follow God's recipe exactly how it is given.

There are an endless amount of recipes for baking bread. Yet, in the face of that, we should heed God's advice. Let's not settle for bread machine bread, when we can get homemade bread from the oven. Let's not merely swallow the bread the world gives us. Rather, let's digest what God is trying to give us, the very words that proceed from God's mouth. In other words, from God's mouth to our ears; then from our ears into our hands and feet.

The warning is against a high carbohydrate diet where all we get is the bread from the world. It leads to dementia, obesity and undernourishment:

- When all we take in is what the world has to offer, we end up forgetting: who we are, whose we are, why we are here, what we are to do, where we have been, and where we are going.
- When all we take in is what the world has to offer, we end of being overweight: feeling like nothing fits, trying to find our size, feeling we don't look good, and sluggish as we drag our self through life.
- When all we take in is what the world has to offer, we end up being undernourished: we miss out on the high quality food God makes available to us through God's word. National Geographic reports that the problem of one billion undernourished people worldwide is not food, but access. The real truth is you and I not only have the food of God's Word, we have the access too. Luther made that possible, so does our iPhone. We have the Bible readily accessible to us 24/7 no matter where we go - through "the cloud" (same way Moses got the info 😊). And, we

have it in a language that is accessible to us, no longer the world of King James only.

Let me end, with this word of encouragement and story. Some of you know and some of you don't, that in my teens evangelicals and fundamentalists heavily influenced me. I was told nearly fifty years ago, that if I woke up late on a school day and I had to choose between reading the Bible or having breakfast, I should read the Bible and go to school hungry. And some mornings I did. To some degree it was about following the rules and not making God disappointed or even angry. Yet, for decades since then, my regular reading has been for the purpose of wanting to stave off hungry, a desire read and reread the love letter, being reminded of the altered history God has in store and my part in helping that come to be, and following the recipes and occasionally adding my flare to what was already listed in God's cookbook.

October third, was take your Bible to school day. At one time, I would have said, "Hallelujah, Amen." Now, I'm thinking it's more like grandstanding and quite a bit in your face." What I hope for all those kids and us too, is that we so carry the Word of God within us so that we are God's Word made flesh. Because we may be the only Bible some people ever read.

When I read scripture in the morning, I place my Bible in my lap and my "begging bowl" in my hand. Then I offer this prayer:

"I grab ahold of your Word, so it may grab ahold of me. (pinch the Bible and put it in the begging bowl)
I savor its sweetness and contend with it challenges (look into the begging bowl).

I release into the world that which you have given me (put hand in bowl and throw contents outside of the bowl).
I am still and know you are God. Amen. (put bowl down and close the Bible)

Given all this and more, I encourage, implore and even beg you to read, reflect, digest, savor, dream, and live out God's words to you, not merely for your own sake, but also for the sake of the whole world. Amen and Amen.