

“Is the Bible Inspired?”

Date: Sept. 25, 2016

Place: Lakewood UMC

Occasion: Making Sense of the Bible, series

Texts: Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

This sermon borrow heavily from the book *Making Sense of the Bible*, by Adam Hamilton, HarperCollins Publisher, NY, NY, 2014. Chapter 14 “Is the Bible Inspired?” pp. 129-143.

Today is week three in our series *Making Sense of the Bible*. The question I want to address is this: “Is the Bible Inspired?” The answer is “yes.” But maybe not in the way you have always thought it was. Let me explain what I mean.

Before we try to answer questions, it’s best to clarify what we mean by the terms we’re using. Very often when people discuss the inspiration of the Bible, they quote from today’s second lesson. “All Scripture is inspired (or, God-breathed) and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” (2 Timothy 3:16)

But what exactly do we mean by “God-breathed” or inspired? Well, it turns out inspiration is a difficult concept to define precisely. Many Christians assume that inspiration means God composed the Bible, word for word. For some people, the Bible is completely without error, and its statements are true, regardless of what science or history tells us.

But inspiration, at least in the English language, does not mean “perfection.” Beethoven, Mozart and others were inspired to write great musical masterpieces. Great authors talk about being inspired. Preachers claim to be inspired when they write their sermons. But none of these ever claim their work is perfect.

Perfection, without fault or error, is not what is meant when we say the Bible is inspired. Let’s look at the word another way.

Many of us when we read the scriptures are inspired to go forth and live a better life. Many people upon hearing the Bible proclaimed make a decision to give their life to Christ and follow Him. We are inspired by the Bible. We suddenly understand our life in a new light. Confusion gives way to clarity. God breathes life into us.

But what about the *writing* of the Bible, what do we mean when we say it was inspired? The people who wrote down the words we now have in front of us were clearly moved, stimulated, influenced, urged to do so something – because of the sacred events that happened in their lives – or that were told to them about the people of faith who came before them.

The authors of all the various books we have in our Bible, both Old and New Testaments, were moved – by the Spirit of God – to write their message. And yet, they did so in their own words, with their own cultural assumptions and using the limits of their vocabulary and knowledge.

They may not have communicated perfectly, but they were nevertheless used by God as they wrote. The men who wrote the Bible were ordinary people, like you and me. They were not supernatural beings and they didn't take dictation from angels.

I believe the authors of the Bible were inspired much like preachers today, or much like an inspired musician who simply has to write music to express deep thoughts or feelings.

So what makes the words of Paul, or the Gospel accounts of Jesus, or the books of the Torah of any more importance than something a contemporary Christian or Jewish author might write?

What gives those books any more authority than a book written by one of the many great Christian authors today?

Well, the books we have in the Bible were chosen to be a part of our Holy Bible for a reason. Not because they are the best literary works that have ever been written. There are certainly other literary works that are better written, more easily understood and put in an order that is easier for the reader to comprehend. Why, then, are *these* books (of the Bible) so important to us?

The writings of the New Testament, and let's just deal with that part of the Bible, are the earliest sources for our Christian faith. The Gospels are the earliest accounts of the life of Jesus – what he said and what he did – that we possess. And the letters of Paul and the other apostles represent the attempts of the earliest leaders of the church to describe both the meaning of the Christian faith, and what it means for the lives of believers.

These early Christians may have written under the same kind of inspiration as we experience today, but what differentiates their writings from ours is they were closest to the events described. They had seen Jesus, knew those who had, or had access to the earliest traditions of the Christian church.

Their writings served as instruments through which God spoke to the community of faith over long periods of time. These are the founding documents of our faith, just as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are revered documents of our great nation.

It is so important that we continue to go back to these books as the inspiration of our faith today. We can read other books written by

other authors. But the books of the Bible are the ones that God has chosen through which to speak to His people.

I don't have to believe the Bible is perfect in every way to value it, to treasure it, to respect it, to hold it in high esteem. God continues to speak to us through the words of this book, written by men long ago, men who were not perfect and who never claimed that their writings were perfect.

I don't believe Paul ever would have said his letters were Holy Scripture. And yet the early Church did. Why? Because when they were read out loud, God used Paul's words to them. God continues to speak through the words of the imperfect people who wrote the Bible.

God, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit today, continues to speak to people. Many people have been brought to faith simply by reading the Bible. It's one of the reasons Gideons place Bibles in hotel rooms and hospital rooms – so people have access to the book that changes lives.

This is the book we use when we teach your children about the Christian faith – in *Sunday Morning Live with Jesus*. From the Old Testament lesson today, God commands the Hebrews, *and us*, to teach God's commandments and impress them on our children.

The Bible itself tells us, "faith comes by hearing the words of Scripture." So, however flawed or imperfect the writers were, the message of God's love for humanity and the transforming power of faith in Jesus Christ comes shining through the pages of the Bible

Through the words of the Bible, the Holy Spirit has spoken to generations of people, and it continues to speak. The Bible is

inspired and it is inspires. I commend it to you. God is waiting to talk to you.