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# Grace Peace

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Christ the King Presbyterian Church

October 6, 2008

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## What holds my Bible together?

Several months ago an article appeared in the Saturday edition of the Press-Journal which raised an important question: “How do you read and understand the Bible?” Anyone who has undertaken to read the Bible, whether cover to cover or a particular book within ‘the book’, has wrestled with that question. Just a few minutes with the Bible confronts you with a dizzying, sixty-six different books, authored by dozens of people from differing cultural settings, across a millennium and more of history, written in three different languages, and representing a bewildering array of types of literature. How **do** you make sense of it all? **Is** there a unifying theme? **Is** there something that ties it all together? **Is** there a storyline, with a main character, conflict, development and a final resolution? After all, these are the kinds of things we expect from ‘a book’. Should we expect them when we come to the Bible?

I suggest that we should. Indeed, I would humbly suggest that while the Bible does answer the questions ‘What is God like?’ and ‘What does God ask us to be?’ the answers are given in connection with the Bible’s central theme and its main character. The central theme is Redemption and the central character is the Redeemer.

Too often we dive into the Bible and fail to take our interpretive cues from someone who knows more than we do. We are amateurs, novices at best. We lack the interpretative tools and skill needed to make sense of this daunting book. That is what drives us to scholars; people who do know more than we do. Yet even that is frustrating, because there seems to be little agreement among them!

But suppose the central character in **this** story was not an imaginary character (like the characters in other ‘stories’). Suppose he was someone who really **lived** the story. And suppose we were given the opportunity to **ask** that character what the book was all about. Suppose that character gave us the ‘key’ to unlocking the mysteries of the book. Suppose, in fact, that the central character happened also to be the author.

That is the opportunity we have when we come to the Bible. We take our cue for interpreting the Bible from the central character Himself: the Redeemer, Jesus Christ; the One who is, as well, the author of the book.

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This is what Christians have affirmed through twenty centuries of church history: Jesus Christ is at the center of the Bible. All of the Old Testament anticipates him and all of the New Testament records and interprets the significance of his appearing. During Advent Christian churches read prophetic passages from Isaiah, Micah, Zechariah and the Psalms. Services of Lessons and Carols include readings from Genesis, as well as the prophets and the historical books. The season of Christmas culminates in the high feast day, Epiphany, the presentation of Jesus Christ as the Savior, not of a nation, but of the nations. All of this is because the church has understood from its inception that Jesus Christ is the center and unifying theme of the Bible.

But the church has not been left to its own devices in coming to this conclusion. Historic, orthodox Christianity also affirms that Jesus of Nazareth, being supernaturally conceived, having lived a real life at a real place in real time, and having died a real death, was subjected to a real burial. But this story did not end there. His resurrection from death to life was every bit the reality that all the other events of His life were. Following His death and resurrection, His disciples witnessed His real ascension to the right hand of His Father where, now, this minute and for all eternity, He rules, governing all people and nations for the well-being of His church (Ephesians 1:22). And from this place of glory, together with the Father, He has sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in the midst of His people. And among other diverse and Christ-honoring ministries, the Holy Spirit is given to lead His people to a knowledge of the truth; He is called the Spirit of Truth (John 14:17; 15:26) and our teacher (John 14:26). What does He teach us about? About whom does He teach? Jesus, the central character of the story of redemption (John 15:26). It is the Spirit of Jesus whose ministry this is. And because we make no division of essence among the members of the Trinity, we understand that it is, in fact, Jesus Himself in the person of the Holy Spirit who is our teacher. He is the interpreter of His own story. He is the One who makes sense of the Bible.

That is what He did after His resurrection, on the road to Emmaus with two downcast and despondent disciples. You may read the account in Luke's gospel. In his conversation with them, He, the central character in the story, gives them the 'key' to understanding the entire Old Testament: Himself. Let me quote Luke 24:27 and 44-45:

“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning **himself**.”

“He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about **me** in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.”

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What He did on the road to Emmaus, He continues to do with His disciples today. He Himself, dwelling in the midst of His people in the Person of the Holy Spirit, continues to be the interpreter of the story.

The Bible is the grand story of the **Creation** of the world by a good, wise and beneficent God. It is the story of a cataclysmic act of disobedience...a tragic **Fall**, with cosmos-wide and catastrophic consequences. And it is the story of God's determined purpose to **Redeem** the world from this catastrophe and bring it to a condition of consummate beauty, glory, perfection and blessedness. The Hebrew word for this **Consummation** is Shalom...a pervasive and comprehensive condition of well-being. In the first words spoken after the tragedy of the Fall, God promises that He will accomplish this through a Redeemer...a Champion...a Conqueror who will destroy the serpent, the evil enemy of God; the tempter, Satan. In destroying him, in crushing him under His feet, He will suffer a wound (Genesis 3:15). The rest of the Old Testament enlarges upon this promise and prepares us for the coming of this conquering King. It prepares us, as well, for this ultimate conflict. It also contains songs that express the longings of God's people for His arrival and final victory (Psalm 2, 110). It includes snapshots of what the world will look like when He finally does come and establish His kingdom in its final, consummate form (Isaiah 35). Even the laws of the Old Testament are instructive. The priestly laws and sacrificial system prepare us for the manner in which this 'wound' would be inflicted, and what would result from it. The Old Testament civil laws show us what a righteous, just and compassionate society would look like when the King rules in might and power.

Creation...Fall...Redemption...Consummation. That is the basic structure of the story. And the main character? The Triune God of heaven and earth; the eternal Son Who comes into this world executing the mission His Father entrusted to Him; a mission in which he fulfills all that is anticipated in the Old Testament. The New Testament, then, is the record of His appearing and the explanation of its significance.

What holds my Bible together? Jesus Christ...Conqueror, Redeemer, King.