

## **Chewing on God's Word**

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday September 19, 2021

*Psalm 1 Mark 9:30-37*

A long, long, time ago, in a land not too far away, I was starting out in my first charge. I was learning how to be a pastor and how to preach week in and week out.

At the beginning, there were times when I would hear the scriptures read in church on Sunday morning, and suddenly would feel like I'd missed the boat, or I had understood one part of the scripture, but maybe hadn't grasped the whole of the passage. I had come to the scriptures, studied and read on Friday, and written my message, but somehow that wasn't enough.

And so I changed what I was doing – I started reading the scriptures on Monday. Sometimes I would even read ahead, and read several of the passages that were coming up. And I would mull over the scriptures for the week or weeks.

The results were much better, I had time to chew and reflect on the scriptures, but the scriptures also had time to shape my thinking and teach me.

I know that some of you do that. You read the Bible daily, or many days and then you reflect on it... you chew on the words, that's the picture of how we are to read the Bible.

It's not an answer, research text, but meditation literature that will not only teach us, but it will mold us, guide us in learning God's ways, but it will also bear fruit within us.

Psalm 1 describes this.

*Blessed is the person who obeys the law, the Torah, the teachings of the Lord.*

*They don't follow the advice of evil people.*

*They don't make a habit of doing what sinners do.*

*They don't join those who scoff at the Lord and his God's teachings.*

*<sup>2</sup> Instead, the Torah of the Lord gives them joy.*

*They think about God's teachings day and night.*

*<sup>3</sup> That kind of person is like a tree that is planted near a stream of water.*

*It always bears its fruit at the right time.*

The Bible is meant to be read again and again, later parts shining new light on the earlier parts.

So think for a moment where in the Bible do we hear about trees being planted by springs of water – trees that bear fruit at the right time.

This is the first Psalm in the Bible, and so you might think about the first stories of the Bible- the creation story where there are fruit trees and rivers.

Peterson in his translation of Psalm 1 in The Message says:

*"Instead you thrill to God's Word,*

*you chew on Scripture day and night.*

*You're a tree replanted in Eden,*

*bearing fresh fruit every month", (The Message)*

And at the end of the Bible, in the Revelation given to John, we read:

**22** *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life. It was as clear as crystal. It flowed from the throne of God and of the Lamb. <sup>2</sup> It flowed down the middle of the city's main street. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing 12 crops of fruit. Its fruit was ripe every month. The leaves of the tree bring healing to the nations.*

Psalm 1 tells us that as we learn to chew on God's word day and night, as we learn to live God's words, we become like a tree in God's garden – watered by the river of life, restored as we were intended to be, blessing the people around us.

So as we turn to Jesus' teaching, I encourage you to bring the same attitude of meditation, and chewing on these words, letting them become part of you, and letting these words change and transform you.

Jesus is wanting to teach his disciples, so he gets them alone, away from the crowds for awhile. And tells them that he is going to be handed over to death.

If you looked up the phrase “being handed over” in the Bible you would hear it time and again. Israel is handed over to their enemies when they turn away from God. And as Israel turns to God, and seeks God’s ways, then God gives them victory and their enemies are handed over to them.

No wonder the disciples are confused.

Jesus, the Messiah, the chosen one of God, who fulfills God’s plan, wouldn’t be handed over to sinners, God would hand their enemies, including Rome, over to Jesus.

And yet we know that Jesus was over – the Righteous One, for all of us the unrighteous.

That also makes the disciples conversation a lot more understandable. The disciples know Jesus is the Messiah, the Holy One, and so God will establish His Kingdom.

I’m sure they had a great time jostling and one-upping each other deciding who would be Jesus’ right and left hand person. Of course, they would all have a special place in Jesus’ kingdom, they were the inner circle, the closest to Jesus.

How slow we are to understand Jesus and his ways; the ways of his heavenly Father.

Jesus’ throne was the cross.

Jesus was exalted to name the above every name on the cross when he gave his life for the sin of the whole world.

His ways aren’t our ways.

And so he tells his disciples – do you want to be number one - be the servant of all.

Serve the least- and Jesus put a child in their midst, enacting a parable for them.

Children, in Jesus' day, were not seen as we see them. Children were powerless, often they were slave labour. You're not going to gain power or status, a child isn't going to be able to repay you.

Embracing a child, as Jesus did, is an act of kindness and generosity- not strategic, not effective, it doesn't further their cause or their membership.

Be a servant, is Jesus command.

And by doing so you serve Jesus, and the Father who sent him.

And here is where the chewing on God's word comes in.

Who are those we are to serve?

Who are the powerless, the least, the forgotten, the ones who are of no account?

What does it look like today for you, for me, for the church, to serve the least?

When we answer that question well, today and tomorrow, when this word gets a hold of us and we live these words of our Lord, we find ourselves becoming like trees flourishing in the garden, producing fruit that brings healing to our world.

When we answer these questions well and then live the answers then we find that we are embracing Jesus, and the Father who sent him.

Thanks be to God.