

“Words of life”
By Rev. Frances Savill
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Readings:

Psalm 19

Nehemiah 8:1-3,4-5,8-10; Luke 4:14-30

This morning I am struck by our scriptures, all of them have people responding to God’s word with passion.

Psalm 19 says; “the law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple;

the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes;

the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

When you come to God’s word this morning, or any morning, noon or night, do you say God’s word is

perfect, reviving my soul, God's ways are right bringing joy to my heart?

I am learning to say those words.

I am learning that God's wisdom is *far far* greater than my own, that God's ways bring life and truth and joy reviving my soul.

Every day I see that more clearly, and grow in understanding.

I am learning the joy of God's word as I spend time in God's word, as I come to God asking God to help me to see the beauty of God's word, and above all else to see God and see Jesus revealed in this word. The Bible project reminds us that the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus.

Jesus was a student of the Bible.

Jesus memorized scripture, it was a part of who was.

God's word was hidden in Jesus' heart so that when Jesus encountered any situation he had wisdom, and the Holy Spirit could bring to mind words of truth.

In our passage from Nehemiah we have a time when the people had been without God's word for years.

The people had forgotten God's word, they had forgotten who they were.

They had lost their story that they were God's people, called to worship God, set apart to be a light to the nations, called to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly before God.

They had lost the stories of how God had cared for them, brought them into their own land, and promised them a hope and a future.

On the day when they were back in their land, and they heard God's word they stood for hours listening, hungering, weeping for love of God's word that was being spoken over them.

Then the people bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law.

Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD, and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

When the people hear and respond to God's word with worship, and turning back to God with their whole hearts, they are told to feast and celebrate for the joy of the LORD was strength and their delight.

When we do not soak ourselves in God's word we forget who we are.

We so easily forget who God has made us to be, and the truth of our lives, that we are God's people, that God's ways bring life, and hope and a future.

Where is truth found?

Where will learn what it means to be truly human and live the good life as we were intended?

In the Bible, sitting under God's word.

But there is a warning that comes with this word, for the Bible speaks the truth, which can be difficult to hear.

I always find the passage from Luke so troubling.

Jesus is in his hometown, reading the scripture passage from Isaiah that all the people long to hear fulfilled, and Jesus says I'm here, and I'm going to fulfill this scripture promised long ago.

And at first the people are happy, but Jesus continues to tell them that things are not going to be as they expect.

He is going to bring good news and healing and life, but Jesus was coming to all people.

Jesus wasn't going to overthrow Rome and give the people vengeance, or set them on thrones to rule the government.

Jesus' kingdom didn't look like their wish fulfillment, and it wasn't *their* kingdom that they wanted to see come.

And they rejected Jesus and his word of life and truth.

Jesus' truth is not easy sentimentality that makes all our dreams come true.

Jesus' plan is not to give us the easy life.

But learning Jesus' ways brings us life in abundance – life to full that begins and never ends.

I appreciate this quote from Tim Keller.

He says;

“Love without truth is sentimentality; it supports and affirms us but keeps us in denial about our flaws.”

On the other hand, “Truth without love is harshness; it gives us information but in such a way that we cannot really hear it. God's saving love in Christ, however, is marked by both radical truthfulness about who we are and yet also radical, unconditional commitment to us. The merciful commitment strengthens us to see the truth about ourselves and repent. The conviction and repentance moves us to cling to and rest in God's mercy and grace.”

What Keller says about God's love, also applies to God's truth found in Jesus and found in our Bible. The Bible speaks radical truthfulness to us about our world, and about what is life giving and life taking, what is right for our flourishing and what is wrong and leads to brokenness and death. But it does it through the life and love of Jesus and his unconditional commitment to us.

Jesus leaves the people in the Synagogue, and he goes to teach, to heal, and he turns his face towards Jerusalem so it would be clear that nothing can separate us from his steadfast love including our own waywardness and foolishness.

As we see Jesus as he's described in Luke's gospel we are "surprised to see tenderness without any weakness, boldness without harshness, humility without any uncertainty, indeed, accompanied by a towering confidence. Readers can discover for themselves his unbending convictions but complete approachability, his insistence on truth but always bathed in love, his power without insensitivity, integrity without rigidity, passion without prejudice." (Tim Keller)

This is Jesus we meet in scriptures, who is the fulfillment of the promises of God, who leads us to life.

He welcomes us with open arms and open hearts, even when we turn away, even when we struggle with the truth he brings, even when we are blind. For the central message of the scriptures of the story of the Bible is not how much our hearts are set on God, but how unshakably God's heart is set on us, and the lengths that love will go in Jesus, the Messiah.

So I invite you to read God's word, to ask God to teach you, to bury this word in your heart, and let it teach you and grow you in love and trust of our great God.

Thanks be to God.