

Pentecost 21 (Proper 24) C2010
Genesis 32:22-30
II Timothy 3:14--4:5
Luke 18:1-8

“Jesus loves me, this I know.” How do you know that Jesus loves you? Because you feel it in your heart? Because you think that you are so darn loveable that He just can’t help Himself? Because you’re so healthy, wealthy, and happy, the sure and certain signs that Jesus loves you? No. Jesus loves you, this you know, because the Bible, which is the very Word of God, tells you so. So, what makes the Bible so special that it has the authority to overrule the feelings in your heart and your own opinions of yourself and the circumstances of your life? Or to put the question another way, why can you say, “Jesus loves me, this I know,” even when you don’t feel His love for you, even when you’re not very loveable, and even when the circumstances of your life are the pits? This is the question that we’re going to wrestle with this morning, just as Jacob wrestled with the Lord. There’s a wonderful blessing to be had from the Lord in understanding and accepting where the authority of the Bible comes from. So, we’re going to wrestle with the Lord for this blessing until we get it, because we believe that this is just the blessing He wants us to have and is anxious to give to us.

So, what makes the Bible so special? What gives the Bible the authority it claims to have? Paul writes to Timothy saying, *“All scripture is breathed out by God.”* The scriptures are nothing other than God’s own breath. When God made man, He formed his body out of the dust of the earth. And then He breathed out His breath into the man *“and the man became a living being.”* In the same way, God has breathed out His breath into the writings of His prophets and apostles and the Bible is a living Word. Not only is it a living Word, it is a life giving Word. Paul calls the Scriptures the *“sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation though faith in Jesus Christ.”* God gives us His Word to enrich us, to keep us in the faith, to correct us, to give us Jesus Christ and eternal life. It is not to be ignored. It is not mere information that once we heard it, we know it all and don’t need to hear it again. It is a living, active Word.

When Peter writes to the Church in his second epistle, he says that we must put our trust and confidence in the writings of the prophets and apostles, not because they were so wise or such spiritual people. He writes: *“Know this first of all, that no prophesy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”* (2 Peter 1:20-21). God’s Word is God’s Word, not yours or mine or anyone else’s. There’s no human breath mixed in with what God has breathed out. We men and women who are by nature sinful and unclean have bad breath. Whenever we try to add our breath to God’s breath, we end up making the whole thing smell bad. When we add our thoughts and opinions and personal interpretations to God’s Word, we foul it all up. We live **under** the Word of God if we are believers. We don’t live over it. We don’t judge or interpret the Word, it judges and interprets us.

In fact, since the Word is God's breath and nothing else, you really can't separate God from His Word. God is the Word and the Word is God. In the beginning, God breathed out His Word and through this Word created everything, and apart from this breathed out Word, nothing was made that has been made. God breathed out His Word into the Virgin Mary's womb and the Word took on human flesh and dwelt among us. So when men and women heard the incarnate Word speak to them, they were hearing God. When men and women crucified the incarnate Word, God spoke to them saying, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* When the incarnate Word rose from the dead and declared His victory over sin, death and the devil, that was God who rose from the dead and proclaiming that all who believe in His Word will rise with Him. God and His Word are one. You cannot say "I believe in Jesus" but "I don't believe this or that from His Word." They are one and the same. You reject, ignore and despise the Word, you reject, ignore and despise Jesus, who is Himself the Word made flesh.

One day Moses was tending his father-in-law's sheep in the desert, when he saw a bush on fire. When he went over to see this strange sight, a voice from within the bush called out, *"Moses, Moses. Take off your sandals from your feet for the ground on which you are standing is holy ground."* That was God speaking to Moses from a burning bush. Now in these last days, God no longer speaks through burning bushes but through the Scriptures, through His Word written and proclaimed. And that's why we call them the "Holy Scriptures." This is "Holy Ground" because God is present and in this book and is speaking to us through it just as He was present and spoke to Moses in the burning bush. The Holy Bible is where God speaks to you just as personally as He spoke to Moses, David, Peter, Paul and all of the prophets and apostles. So if you want to hear God speaking to you, don't go looking deep inside yourself or gazing far out at the stars. Go to the Bible, hear the Word in preaching and listen to Him speak to you and then speak back to Him in prayer.

Now, because the Word of God is God's Word, it's unlike any other word there is. Since God doesn't change, God's Word doesn't change. The times, they are a changin', as we're always told. But God's Word is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. Since God doesn't lie, God's Word doesn't lie. It's the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Since God doesn't make mistakes, God's Word is without mistakes. It's without error. If anything in it seems to be wrong or not understandable, the problem is with us and our limited ability. The problem is not with His Word. Since God never fails to accomplish all that He purposes in Jesus Christ, God's Word is infallible. It accomplishes His purpose. And His purpose is made clear, *"these things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and by believing, have life in His name."* (John 20:31). The Word creates belief in Christ in you and it keeps and preserves you in the faith, continually.

Now on the other hand, since God is all-powerful, God's Word is all-powerful. Just as God created the world out of nothing by His Word, He creates faith in the human heart out of nothing by His Word. *"Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God."* (Rom.10:17) He takes human beings who are dead in their sins and raises them up to a new and glorious life by

the power of His Word. On the day of Pentecost, the Apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke to those gathered in Jerusalem and many who heard the Word were convicted of their sin and cried out, *“what shall we do.”* Nothing’s changed since then. Still to this day, every time you hear this same “Spirit filled Word,” the miracle of Pentecost is happens again. The Holy Spirit is convicting you of your sin, turning you to repent and pray to God for forgiveness and mercy and life. Which is precisely what His Word says He wants to give to you. *“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”* This is a daily reality for the Christian and why a Christian needs to feed on the Word daily.

Everything that we have been talking about so far can be all wrapped up and bundled together by a nice, neat label. This is called the “doctrine of verbal inspiration,” the doctrine, the teaching that God’s Word is breathed out by God, filled with the breath of His Spirit. Now, I know that some people don’t like that word “doctrine.” Doctrine tells you what to believe and how to think, and you might be one of those people who like to decide for yourself and think for yourself, or at least think that you think for yourself. But doctrine is a good thing. Doctrine helps us to keep the message straight. And only by keeping the message straight are we able to get the message out accurately.

Doctrine is important in our day. Especially the “doctrine of verbal inspiration.” Paul writes to Timothy saying, *“The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”* Those “times” that Paul warned were coming, have certainly arrived, and in fact were already there in Paul’s own time. It’s very tempting right here to do a little ranting and raving against all those ears that are itching for someone to teach whatever contradicts the Bible. But Paul is writing to Timothy telling Timothy what he should expect to find within the Christian Church, among those who count themselves as Christians. Within the Christian Church there are many ears that are itching for someone to tell them that when Paul says, “ALL Scripture is breathed out by God,” that it doesn’t really means “ALL.” And so there are many teachers in the church who will teach that the Bible isn’t the Word of God, but merely “contains” the Word of God. It’s up to you to figure out which is and isn’t.

There are Christians with itchy ears who want to hear someone tell them that when God said, *“It is finished,”* He wasn’t really finished. He’s still got more to say. And hopefully His new word will be better than His old. There are Christians with itchy ears who want to hear someone tell them that their “gut feelings” are more reliable than the Bible and they should put their gut before their God. There are Christians who don’t want to hear what the Bible says if it contradicts their own opinions. They like to remake Jesus in their own image. Against all of this, Paul tells Timothy, *“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom, preach the Word.”* The Word that is breathed out by God, and therefore *“profitable for teaching, for reproof, for*

correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may,” not scratch his itching ears, but that he may *“be competent, equipped for every good work.”*

The Word is breathed out by God so that it breathes God into those who will hear it and believe it. The Word that not only tells of the forgiveness of sins and a new life of faith, but does what it says and gives what it does to all who will receive it. This is God’s “strong Word” that doesn’t just talk, talk, talk about righteousness and what you need to do, but that “bespeaks us righteous,” as the hymn put it. It breathes out the righteousness of Jesus Christ, crucified, died, buried, risen, and ascended. And breathes into you the same Jesus who did all of that because He loves you. God breathes into you His breathed out Word through the breath of the preacher’s mouth spoken into your ears, through the water of holy baptism splashed over your head, through the bread and the wine of the Holy Supper, given to you to take and eat and drink. Jesus loves you, this you know. How do you know? Not because your feelings or your thoughts or your circumstances tell you so but because the inspired Word of God tells you so. In the name of Jesus, the Word made flesh. Amen.