

**St. John's Episcopal Church**  
Jackson, Wyoming  
Sermon for May 22, 2016 ~ Trinity Sunday  
The Reverend Ronald D. Pogue

Two questions frequently arise regarding the Bible. The first question is, "Do you really believe in the Bible?" Now, here I have a quick answer. I always say, "No, I don't. I believe in the Living God to whom the Bible points." Our Living God is not an idea, a concept, or something philosophical that great theologians merely speculate about. God really is the Creator and Sovereign of the universe, who came to us in the Son when he joined the human condition, and who now permeates all of it as the Holy Spirit. This Triune God is the source of my life and everything in my life. Through God, this book becomes Holy Scripture. Without God, the Bible is but a collection of nice, Middle East history, mythology, story material, and wisdom readings, all of which is great material to look. It becomes divine revelation only when the Holy Spirit works within us as we read it. When the Spirit is at work within us, we know that we are not just reading a Bible verse as we might read a newspaper item, a novel, or a magazine. The Bible is something special because it is a primary means through which the Spirit of God wants to work in and through us. So we must not make a paper god out of the Bible. As Martin Luther said, "It is not appropriate to give to the manger the adoration due the occupant of the manger."

The second question is, "Doesn't revelation happen any more?" People wonder: Is all revelation contained only in the Scriptures? Is all truth frozen for all time in the pages of a book? Aren't there any new truths? Are we merely the curators of what was deposited long ago? Are we only ears and nothing more? There are no quick answers to this question, but let's ponder it together.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus says, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:12-13a). Last week we celebrated the Feast of Pentecost. We celebrated because it was on the Day of Pentecost that the promised gift of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled. On that day, people of different languages and backgrounds could hear the mighty acts of God proclaimed as the God who continuously acts and is the center of our faith.

Scripture always talks about what God does, how God becomes involved in the affairs of humanity and directs our actions. Sometimes we think we do things on our own when it is really God working with us and through us and in us. That is the mystery of the covenant. I'm always impressed by the statement in the Book of Deuteronomy that tells us that the covenant was not made with our forbearers long ago at the foot of a mountain but with us who are alive, today.

This is what is happening to you and to me on this Trinity Sunday. We realize that Pentecost continues and this is in itself an answer to the question, "Doesn't revelation happen any more?" As we think and pray about the Scripture we are reading, as we live that Scripture in our daily lives, as we attempt to translate the Scriptural truth into living action, we ourselves become God's living, growing, unfolding revelation.

But just because revelation continues to unfold beyond the pages of Scripture does not mean it does not still appear there. An old name for Scripture is canon. The word canon originally meant a yard-

stick or a gage. It is a measuring device that we apply to our own experiences to check whether these experiences measure up to the standards established in Scripture. Whatever is voiced in our lives should align with the sacred text. If it does not, we search the Scriptures to understand why that is. We search through the lens of the God given gift of reason. We also search through the lens of tradition, for this may not be the first time one of God's people has encountered an inconsistency. And, we search through the lens of experience, that of others and that of our own, because such observation is valuable and necessary in any process of verification. One of my seminary professors used to say, "One cannot destroy in the armchair what has been confirmed in the laboratory of the human soul."

The truth that I know today may not rise to the level of sacred Scripture, but that does not invalidate it, nor does it mean that it is not of God. Our Church teaches that Christian faith and action must be grounded in Scripture as understood in our contemporary context and examined through the lenses of reason, tradition, and experience. Here's where Martin Luther comes in again. He said, "The Scripture's task is in the mind of the Lord to enable you to write your own scripture with your own life." And the scripture we write is always measured against that revelation exclusively contained in Jesus Christ who comes to us out of that book that the Church gives us, who speaks to us out of the great traditions, doctrines, and teachings of the Christian faith, who confronts us through and ultimately must be known to us in human experience as we share with others in the fellowship of the Church.

So, while we say that the Scriptures contain all things necessary for salvation, we do not mean that there is no truth beyond Scripture. The doctrines of the Church are an example. Trinity Sunday is the only major feast that is based on a doctrine rather than an event. Like other doctrines, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is a human attempt to describe God's activity in our lives and to convey meanings so that the Christian faith may be meaningful. While it is rooted in Scripture, this doctrine expresses truth beyond Scripture and was formulated by human minds to meet the needs of human beings who are asking for understanding.

This we proclaim on Trinity Sunday: We know God as the Creator, the One from whom all things come – that which was, that which is, and that which shall be; We know God as the Living and Risen Son, Jesus Christ, who appeared in the form of a human being so that human beings would through him be drawn back to God; We know God as the Holy Spirit who is in all places in all times. We are not suggesting that this all that can be said about God. Certainly there will be more. But in this formula of Holy Trinity, we hold a beautiful sign that came out of Scripture, a symbol that was formulated by our forbearers on the basis of Scripture, and a word that pronounces itself as a Unity in which three persons are speaking to us with one voice. God will be much more on the last day toward which all of us are moving.

So, revelation is ongoing and is measured against Holy Scripture. But it was the Holy Spirit moving in people's lives that enabled the Church to set down in the Scriptures what was God's revealing in the first place. Even so today, what God is revealing to us must be set down in our own lives and relationships so that God may reveal truths through us in our own time and place.

As the Holy Spirit fills the Church and inspires the minds and warms the hearts and guides the lives of her members, then it is that this book becomes Holy Scripture and serves as the primary source and guide as we keep ourselves constantly open for revelation in God's activity in our daily lives.