

## Opening Minds

So it's just after 9 on a Sunday morning and what could be better than an early morning history lesson!

As I'm sure you all know, one of the proudest moments in the Anglican Church is when our ancestor William Tyndale came out with the very first translation of the Bible into English.

Before that, if you wanted to know what was in the Bible, you had to know Latin or Greek or Hebrew, and if you didn't, you relied on what the clergy told you was in there.

So Tyndale is not only our hero, he's the hero of everyone who today reads the Bible in their native tongue: Tongan, Chuukese, Mandarin, Ilocano....you get the idea.

But opening up the Bible to every Tom, Dick and Harry also has its problems.

It's no secret that people read all kinds of crazy things into the Bible, and then act on them, because, well, it's in the Bible!

Slavery and the second-class status of women and people who are completely sure the last days are coming a week from Friday — these are the results of ordinary folks reading the Bible.

That mega-church pastor Jim Jeffers, who says Donald Trump is authorized by God to use nuclear weapons against North Korea, says such horrific things because that's how he reads the Bible.

True believers of all stripes point to this or that Bible passage to justify what is nothing more than violent, death-dealing behavior.

And because of that, how we read and interpret and understand the Bible has huge consequences, not only for our personal lives, but for the life of the world as well.

Now, I say this to you because this is what Jesus is talking about this morning, when, after the disciples finally calm down and begin to come to grips with who just showed up, Jesus “opens their minds to understand the scriptures.....”

Meaning, you can't just open the Bible and start reading and think you know what's going on.

Well, you can.

But you're asking for trouble!

Our minds, like the disciples' minds, need to be opened.

And perhaps what Jesus says to them, to us, this morning, is something like this.

The Bible is not dictation from God.

The Bible is not even one book.

It's a collection of over 60 books, written over more than a 1000 years, in different cultures, in different circumstances, with both men and women having their say, because, at its root, the Bible is not so much a Guide to Better Living as it is the record of a very long conversation between humanity and God.

Sometimes humanity speaks and sometimes God speaks.

One fellow compares it to two vines wrapped around each other, one vine being the voice of humanity, the other the voice of God.

Yes, the vines are intertwined, but they are also separate, always distinct.

And the \$6 million question is: How do we sort out which is which?

That's the question Our Lord answers this morning.

Folks then are not much different from folks now.

Then, the zealots argue that God's word requires armed resistance against the Romans.

After the Iraq invasion, the Pentagon famously delivered various scripture passages to President Bush to put a stamp of Biblical approval on that war.

We see similar use of another holy book by groups like ISIS that use the Koran to justify all sorts of horror.

We Christians for centuries used scripture to demonize and ghettoize our Jewish sisters and brothers.

How we understand scripture has enormous consequences, and Jesus shows up this morning to get us on the right path.

I don't know if you've ever had your eyes examined when the doctor puts those funny glasses on your face and then flips through a whole series of lenses while stuff goes in and out of focus.

Or if you've seen a 3D movie where, because of the funny glasses, some stuff comes floating right in front of your nose.

When it comes to understanding the Bible, Jesus is the funny glasses, except what we look through aren't glasses as much as through the nail holes in his hands.

Looking through those holes, Jesus helps us distinguish man's voice from God's voice in Scripture.

And the key is that "the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day."

Meaning, that the true nature of God is found in suffering, surrender, and even death — but death doesn't have the last word.

Meaning that when we read scripture that seems to support violence or bigotry or hate, we can know, because of Jesus, those passages reflect our conversation with God, humanity's vine running throughout the Bible.

It's no secret that we are in love with violence and bigotry and hate, especially when we are afraid.

But God's vine in this long conversation with us, is always and everywhere found in those passages that speak of compassion and unity and hope — and a willingness even to die — because death does not have the last word.

Perhaps that's the insight that Jesus gives to his friends this morning — that the way of God is marked by love of enemies and turning the other cheek — and even a willingness to die — because death does not have the last word.

Just last week on the radio there was the story of a small church minister explaining why he is encouraging his members to bring their guns to church, so folks at prayer can protect themselves in the event of a mass shooting.

We go to war and buy assault rifles and we fortify our lives and the lives of those we love because we are scared to death of death!

But maybe what Jesus is assuring us of this morning, as he stands there in his everyday clothes, having an everyday conversation with his

friends, ("I'm hungry, whatcha got to eat?"), is that death, and its little sisters named loss and change, are not to be feared any longer.

In Jesus, death and loss and change have all been made into something new, something even beautiful, something even amazing.

Jesus greets his friends this morning not bathed in blinding light, but as himself, as their friend.

Yes, wounds and all.

He eats, they talk, a breeze blows through the open window, and the holy and the divine become one with the ordinary and the profane.

Because that thing that we call death, that instigator of wars and torture and hate and fear, it is defeated.

"Whatever death is, it need not control our lives anymore, because, in Jesus, it is nothing more than an empty suit, a bark without a bite.

None of us has any reason to fear being dead, something which will certainly happen to all of us, because death cannot separate us, ever, from the real source of life. J. Alison, Raising Abel, 33, paraphrased.

That's what the author of the letter to the Hebrews tells us:

"Since we are made of flesh and blood, it makes sense that the Savior takes on flesh and blood in order to rescue us by his death.

By embracing death, taking it into himself, he destroys the Devil's power over death and frees all who muddle through life, scared to death of death." (Heb. 2:14-15)

So the next time you decide to take a peek inside the Bible, look for the conversation that God is having with us, "that true vine that carries nothing but forgiveness, grace, love and life.

Hunt for that vine, because its grapes are sweet – they nurture the soul – transforming all people into one people.

God's vine is there from the very beginning.

God's vine joyfully announces the true personality of God – one that Jesus knows intimately; in life, in death, in resurrection." (paraphrased, source lost)

This God of absolute compassion, who calls you by name, this is the God revealed to minds that are opened.

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