

Divinely Inspired?

Pondering Questions: Part 2 “Divinely Inspired?”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – August 28, 2022

12th Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Romans 16:1-16,21-23; Luke 1:1-4

Reflection: Psalm 15

Greeting: The Lord gives wisdom, from him comes understanding. The Lord stores up sound wisdom for the upright. He guards the path of justice and preserves the faithful. Let your wisdom enter our hearts and minds, O Lord! (*Proverbs 2*)

Prayer: O God, keeper of wisdom and understanding, you have brought us together into your presence this day. Grant us grace to worship you as we seek your blessing and your knowledge. Help us to grow in heart and mind with you, Lord. Build us up in your spirit so that we may know your love and be strengthened by your righteousness. Help us to be bold in our faith so that we may do your will joyfully and eagerly. May we worship you in a spirit of truth, that we may follow you all the days of our lives, through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 15

O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? Those who walk blamelessly and do what is right and speak the truth from their heart; who do not slander with their tongue and do no evil to their friends nor heap shame upon their neighbors; in whose eyes the wicked are despised but who honor those who fear the Lord; who stand by their oath even to their hurt; who do not lend money at interest and do not take a bribe against the innocent. Those who do these things shall never be moved.

(Psalm 15 NRSVue)*

We read the words of Psalm 15 and hear what God seeks in his people. That the Lord calls us to speak the truth. That we should seek to be impartial in giving justice to all people. That we are called to treat people fairly. Do you do your best to honor God in all that you do? How do you share God’s love as a way to honor God? How do you help others to share in God’s love in their lives? How can we celebrate God’s love as a community? How are we all inspired by the Holy Spirit to live in the love of our Risen Savior?

Prayer: O God, you are our hope and our praise. Help us to seek your wisdom in all that we are and do. May we be strengthened by your steadfast love and faithfulness as we come before you in prayer this day. Help us Lord, that you lift us up in both our joys and our sorrows. Be with us in both our laughter and our tears. May your light guide us and lead us to life everlasting, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today comes from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from 2 Timothy chapter 3 verses 14 through 17.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have known sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (Acts 2:43-47 NRSVue)*

Our next reading for today comes from Romans chapter 16 verses 1 through 16 and 21 through 23.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord, as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well. Greet Prisca and Aquila, my coworkers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but also all the churches of the gentiles. Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ. Greet Mary, who has worked very hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Israelites who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our coworker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. Greet my fellow Israelite Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and greet his mother—a mother to me also. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who are with them. Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you. Timothy, my coworker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my fellow Israelites. I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus greet you. (Romans 16:1-16,21-23 NRSVue)*

Our final reading for today comes from the gospel according to Luke chapter 1 verses 1 through 4.

Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I, too, decided, as one having a grasp of everything from the start, to write a well-ordered account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may have a firm grasp of the words in which you have been instructed. (Luke 1:1-4 NRSVue)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This week's question to ponder is about what it means for the Bible to be divinely inspired. This is a question that has popped up in various places and comes up often when discussing the authorship and status of the Bible within the church. There is often a failure by the people discussing what it means to admit that this term does not have a universal definition. Often, people decide that their definition is the one that counts and anyone who doesn't believe in their definition does not believe that the Bible is divinely inspired. These views can run the entire spectrum, from thinking that God dictated the Bible word for word to the concept that the authors were merely thinking about God when they wrote. As you might suspect, this has created some difficulty when people of differing opinions try to use the same phrase while meaning different things. When we look for the United Methodist view, we can turn to the Book of Discipline. "United Methodists share with other Christians the conviction that Scripture is the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine. Through Scripture the living Christ meets us in the experience of redeeming grace. We are convinced that Jesus Christ is the living Word of God in our midst whom we trust in life and death. The biblical authors, illumined by the Holy Spirit, bear witness that in Christ the world is reconciled to God. The Bible bears authentic testimony to God's self-disclosure in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as well as in God's work of creation, in the pilgrimage of Israel, and in the Holy Spirit's ongoing activity in human history. As we open our minds and hearts to the Word of God through the words of human beings inspired by the Holy Spirit, faith is born and nourished, our understanding is deepened, and the possibilities for transforming the world become apparent to us." This speaks to both the way the Holy Spirit works in helping us to believe and understand, as well as how the Holy Spirit moved the Biblical authors to write the text that they wrote. I would like to introduce a concept here to keep in mind as we move through this idea. It is one I borrow from Peter Enns in his book "Inspiration and Incarnation." He uses a parallel that I find helpful, which is that he compares how we view the Bible with how we see Christ. We accept that Christ is both fully human and fully divine. When we think about the Bible in the same way, as a collection of texts that are both fully divine and yet fully human, we can hold to both those ideas and the tension they create. This can help us to keep both in mind without having to pick one or the other.

We come to our first reading for today, from 2 Timothy. This is usually the source for statements about the Bible. It is reflected again in the Book of Discipline on Scripture saying that the Bible is the source for all that is "necessary" and "sufficient" for salvation, and that it is to be received through the Holy Spirit. We hear that the purpose is to teach salvation through

Christ. Now, there are a few interesting things to think about when we read this, but one thing I need to note is differences in translation. Some will say inspired, some will say God-breathed, some will say God given. Even this creates a debate, so something you might have noticed is that this topic is rife for debate at every turn. But this actually informs us of something about Scripture and interpretation. Whenever we read the Bible in English, we are reading an interpretation of Scripture, because someone had to decide what words in English we would read. So, in some ways, when we read an English translation, we believe that the Holy Spirit will illumine us so that even in English we understand the words of the Biblical authors. Something else that might strike you as odd is that when this was written, only the Old Testament may have been thought of as Scripture. Which means that when we apply it to the entire Bible, we may be expanding beyond the meaning from the original author. For me, this is an ever-present part of the Bible, that there may be many layers of meaning behind any text in the Bible. It gives us both a view of how people would have seen God in their day and helps us to understand God here in our time right now.

Something that we can see is the way that the authors can shine through in the text. We can see this in Romans. You might wonder why I picked a reading that is just a long personal greeting from Paul. The reason was because it is a personal greeting. It is a section that is very specific to a very specific church. It reminds me of our joys and prayer concerns or our prayer list. Paul is talking about welcoming people into the church that he knows and is greeting people. This is such a human touch that I wanted to stop to highlight it today as we look at the inspiration of the Bible. Now, if you read a little further, you'll get another example of the very human aspect. You get the people there with Paul adding their own greetings. That includes Tertius, who is the one physically writing the letter. This also speaks to the Holy Spirit moving through many people, as the Spirit would move in Paul for the inspiration of the letter, but also through Tertius to accurately record Paul's letter. With this, we can also reflect on Paul's reason for writing the letter. He was writing to a church. Paul isn't sitting down saying "and now it is time to write Scripture" but he's writing a letter to a church to share his good news. And this is part of the fascinating part of divine inspiration. Paul could be inspired by the Holy Spirit to speak the truth of Christ and to reveal that truth in his writing. Even when his writing wasn't intentionally written as the word of God.

We can see that in Luke. I included this from Luke because I think that understanding the Biblical authors intent is helpful. Now, I do have to note that Luke doesn't actually name the author. The Gospel, like all the Gospel accounts, is anonymous. But we have the traditional attribution, and we use the name Luke to refer to the author. Here we have a statement from Luke about why the author is writing the Gospel. To give Theophilus an account of the good news of Jesus Christ. Luke was looking to compile all of the accounts of the life of Jesus so that Theophilus would have a firm grasp of everything they'd been taught. Luke has a very human reason for writing his account: to make a well-ordered account for another to study. The question then would be if that discounts God's role in the text. I would say no. Because Luke is

inspired by the Holy Spirit and writes the good news of Christ revealing the character of God. But Luke doesn't sit down and say, "I heard this from God" or "this is a message from God." Instead, Luke writes to say that since he knows this story well, he's going to put an account together to share. As the story has been passed down from eyewitnesses, Luke is going to pass it on now. The question that comes in is where is the divine inspiration? For me, I see the Holy Spirit at work in Luke here. That Luke's account is inspired. But I can also recognize that this is still written by a very human Luke. It is written by a human with human style choices and human decisions. But that doesn't detract from the divine inspiration. If anything, it helps us to understand why each of the four gospel accounts is different. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are all inspired writings, but each has a different author giving us different focus and a different telling. But I don't see God directly dictating to them. They weren't stripped of free will to only write exactly what God told them. They wrote in their own voice for their own reasons. But I don't discount God's role in all of this either. What I see is that they were doing their best to understand God's character through the Holy Spirit. The reason I like the idea of thinking of the Bible as fully human and fully divine is because it allows us to see both at work. We can see a human author writing within their own understanding and their own circumstances. We can see the divine shining through as well, with the author revealing the truth of God within their writing. And this can help us understand how we get different versions of the same event from different authors while still understanding that all Scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Because we never completely remove the human author just as we can never completely remove the inspiration of God.

This raises another question for us, and this one is another that is open for debate. I do not present my opinion here as the only answer, but the simply the answer I can provide. If the authors were inspired by God, is God still speaking? And if so, then should we be adding to the Bible? For the first, I firmly believe that God never fell silent. I don't think the Holy Spirit ever stopped inspiring authors to write the truth of God revealed in Christ. I think that we still see God's people being moved by the Holy Spirit. I believe God is still speaking and that we see God's love reflected through human words inspired by the Holy Spirit. One example I give of this is that I believe that Martin Luther King Jr's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" is divinely inspired. I read in it the truth of Christ in action for today. That raises another question of if that means we should expand the Bible to include that letter. To that, I would say no. The reason is that I do believe that part of the specialness of the inspiration of the Bible is that in it we have everything necessary for salvation. Does King's letter enhance my understanding of the Bible? Yes. Does it add anything to what is necessary for salvation? No. And that is an important distinction that I do make. Do I see the Bible as authoritative? Yes. Can other writings enhance my understanding of the Bible and God? Yes. I can read the works of John Wesley and see divine inspiration. I can read other authors and feel the work of the Holy Spirit. But again, the Bible is special and unique because it does have everything we need. But I don't think that means God doesn't still speak to his people. We are still called to prophesy.

I know that I might not have answered every question that you may have had, so if there is anything that you want to hear more of, please get those questions to me. I am also working on the other questions that I have been given so I will have those coming up soon as well. But for today I really wanted to look at the way that I see the Bible as an authoritative text that is fully human and fully divine, revealing God through human authors. And that I think God is still speaking to us today. That I can rest assured that we can follow the love that we find in Scripture and know that the Holy Spirit is still inspiring us today. That we walk with the Holy Spirit, growing closer in the love of the Father, as we live our lives in our Risen Savior. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Pondering Questions

Our series will have Pastor Cameron answering your questions! Get them to him however is most convenient for you and he will be using those as the basis for our weekly message!

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Eric Veach	Ed & Verna Titus
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke
Family of Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gabel	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Ruth Ann Finley	Jodie Bunch	Tom Finley
Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Susie Callahan	Kenny Holmes
Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Jackie Potter	Family of Don Holsapple
Family of Loise Roberts	Jeremy Klinger	Phil Hawickhorst	
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson	Nick & Leana Ochoa
Family of Bunny Sparks	Greg Williams	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte			

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