



A Lively Oracle

Psalm 48 & 1 Timothy 4
Pentecost 7 - July 7, 2024
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At some point during the coronation service of the new British monarch, the Moderator of the Church of Scotland steps forwards, presents a Bible to the newly coronated ruler of the British empire and says:

This Book [is] the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is Wisdom; this is the royal Law, these are the lively Oracles of God.

My hope is that the Bible that is presented is an edition that is eminently readable and easily accessible to the new monarch. I don't imagine that a good and thrifty Scot acquiring a Bible for such an occasion would waste a lot of money on an edition that was designed to be admired for its beauty of publication, but rather would provide a serviceable edition of the Scriptures; one that could actually be read.

That's the problem sometimes with Bibles, we say we respect it and inwardly admit that we ought to actually read it, but we keep Bibles like we would keep family keepsakes and treasures rather than a serviceable representation of the Moderator calls 'the lively Oracle of God.'

Despite what we have recently seen represented in some state governments, the Bible is not a textbook, nor is it a collection of doctrines that need to be defended or espoused., nor is it merely a decorative addition to our nightstand. The Bible is exactly what that Scottish Moderator calls it: the lively oracle of God.

Scripture, we believe is the living witness to the Word of God. The Word of God, we understand, to be the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ himself. It is to what God has done and is doing in Jesus Christ that Bible bears witness. It is from the scripture that God's great mercy and grace to humankind has been revealed. It is the Spirit of the living God that makes those words on the page become in our hearts and minds, the very Word of God to us. It is not the words themselves that have this power to transform, comfort and challenge, rather it is the very Spirit of God that inhabits those words and is operative in our minds and hearts.

But transformation, all the same is what is at the heart of scriptures – the transformation of the human soul. This comes about partly of course in reading the scriptures. The author of our passage from First Timothy is keen on encouraging Timothy, the recipient of the letter, to continue to delve into the scripture and to teach the faith not from speculation or wild-eyed

myths as those who troubled the little congregation appeared to have been doing. No, the author wants his associate to teach and live from the scriptures – the assurance of God’s love and grace in Jesus Christ.

Reading scripture is certainly one thing – an incredibly important thing. But living what we find there between the leather-bound covers is where the author of this text this day points us this day. It’s not enough to become biblical experts – we must live the faith that we find there; we must embody this witness to the word.

A.N. Wilson, British author and literary critic wrote a fascinating book about the Bible entitled *The Book of the Bible*. In the preface he wrote this:

The reason that my book is called *The Book of the People* is that the Bible has affected human life. It is not proved or disproved by a skeptic poring over its pages in a study. Rather, it is enacted when people such as Martin Luther King or Desmond Tutu are enflamed by it.

Wilson acknowledges a truth here about scripture. It is not meant to be a proof of our faith or of our convictions, it is meant to be the ‘lively oracle of God’, teaching us about who God is and how God is at work in our midst. And further, it is not meant just to memorized or studied only; it is meant to be ‘enacted’ as Wilson claims.

This too is the point of our passage this morning. The author of the text is not writing to some seminary student studying scripture in splendid isolation, but to one who is involved in the day in and day out ministry of the faith.

Here is how my old seminary professor, Thomas Long, puts it:

[The] gospel is not speculative wisdom but is instead firmly anchored in the event of Jesus Christ. It is the event of God incarnate in Jesus from which the truth of the teaching and good ministry spring. To teach this gospel is more than being an effective religious teacher; it is to be ‘a good servant of Jesus Christ.’

Being with God means being with others, in all the messiness that entails. Christians are not to flee from the brothers and sisters in the church but to invest in them, work alongside them, labor to repair the broken places in the community. Salvation is to be found not in the lonely desert but in rolling up their sleeves and doing good ministry in and for and with the church.

This is exactly what the ‘lively oracle of God’ that is scripture calls us to be and do; enacting the grace and mercy of God that we see convincingly in the work of Jesus Christ. Certainly, we must hear and read scripture, but ultimately, if we take it seriously, we must, with the help of God, enact, embody and live as the people of God. This is our call this day and each day God gives us.