



Summer Preaching Series: Questions of Faith
Why and How Should I Read the Bible?



A Sermon By
The Rev. Richard D. Meadows, Jr.

July 16, 2017
Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

An audio version of this sermon may be found on the Grace Church website at <http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/2017-07-16-RDM.mp3>.

The Rev. Richard D. Meadows, Jr.
Grace Episcopal Church
The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
July 16, 2017

“Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Why and how should I read the Bible? First I'll tell you, Why I read the Bible? When I was a teenager in St. Phillip's Episcopal Church in Buffalo, our new priest Father E. Don Taylor, asked the teenagers of the parish if we knew the 23rd Psalm. I had no clue what he was talking about. Yes, I knew that Jesus was symbolized as a shepherd, holding sheep gently in his arms. However I didn't know the 23rd Psalm. It was my fault, I remember at Episcopal Youth Camp that if the subject for class was the Gospel of Matthew of Teenage dating, I chose the dating class. This one question by a parish priest was life changing for me. I knew then that if I was to be a believer in Christ I needed to read the Bible.

Look at our Gospel reading today. What a wonderful interpretation of a parable about a person who is considered an agrarian. Once upon a time this country was an agrarian culture before industry came. We've become so industrialized and techno savvy that there are fewer and fewer farmers in America. We are living in an age where living off the land becomes less and less sustainable, so it's nice to remind ourselves that God gave us the earth and it is good. If you take a seed and place it into the soil it will grow. That is the promise of God and the earth that if you do as instructed there is a good possibility that the seed will produce a harvest.

What's ironic for me is on our recent mission trip to Atlanta with the youth and we visited two urban farms. Both full of animal life and agricultural vigor. Both had to be worked in order to reap the bounty that was possible. Our young people worked hard and helped each farm with its daily chores. They are two of the many community growers in urban areas and both reminded us of how wonderful planting, nurturing, growing, sustaining can be. I think that is key to understanding why and how we should read the Bible. Yes, we can compare the word as seed, the sower as God and the believer as ground. Life as seed, God as sower and our hearts as ground. In the case of Caroline who we celebrate in baptism today; Love as seed, her loving parents as sowers and Grace as a place where she can grow. Today we begin the journey of helping the Pugh's by planting, nurturing, growing and sustaining the heart of Caroline. This is why this parable is so important and it is important for us to read the bible, to help Caroline and to help ourselves to be planted, nourished, enabling us to grow and be sustained. The Bible is as Rob Bell says Some people see the Bible as an outdated book of primitive, barbaric fairy tales that we have moved beyond. And so they ignore it, missing all of the progressive and enlightened ideas that first entered human history through the writers of the Bible—ideas and ideals we still fall far short of, ideas and ideals that are still way ahead of our present consciousness and practice. Paul tells Timothy in one of his letters¹⁶. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and that it is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: ¹⁷That the man and woman of God may be complete or perfect in him, thoroughly prepared for all good works.

It is the telling of stories of the lives of many people, their journey, their struggles, tragedies, joys, wars, and some who drew upon faith to overcome hard trials and tribulations. There are many genres to the words found therein. They are songs, melodies, poetry, history, allegory, metaphors, proverbs and parables. They are meant to be told over and over and over, they are handed down from generation to generation reminding those who are to come about the majesty and awesomeness of God. For some it is a guide for living life to the fullest. It gives us a road map for the perilous journey of life. A storehouse of wonderful stories for children and grownups. The Psalmist says it is a light unto my path and a lamp unto my feet. Solomon has filled it with the sweet smell aloes, cassia and love. Psalm 19 - The word of the LORD is perfect, good for the soul; the word of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the word of the LORD is right, making the heart glad; the word of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes; the word of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the word of the LORD is true and righteous altogether. More to be desired than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb. That if we did indeed taste and see we would find out that the Lord is good and his word will last throughout all generations.

We are all in need of what the word can offer us. It is in these words of the word we find solace, we find comfort, we find guidance, we find joy in sorrow, we find the words of eternal life. As Jesus spoke to the crowd he was reminding them that the heart is the sacred holding place of the word of God. By reading daily, we obtain a sense of who God is and the word gives us understanding how great God is. Without this understanding it is so easy for the world's forces to come and disappoint us and we lose a sense of love of God that is sown in the heart. The word of God is like a seed and the heart is the soil. If the heart is hard for whatever reason, the solace and joy that the word brings will be short lived. If the word or the seed does not find its way deeper into the heart you will not be able to endure the hardships of life and falling away becomes easy. You'll lose sight of Caroline and what's important in life. We can become so busy with life itself, the cares and our occupations and our own dreams and destinies, the surge in the seeking of wealth, at the expense of peace, that all of a sudden our own words become empty. We are unable to see God and others, the seed does not take root, as if it was sown among thorns. The cares of life chokes life itself. We read it because it will enable us to bring life to ourselves and others. It will be as if we planted in good ground. Because we read the bible it means we have seeds to plant into the lives of others. We can see the harvest of good, the harvest is plentiful and full of life. The more we read it the more we will understand it. The result is we can help someone. We can help Caroline, we become the good soil that yields a bountiful, wonderful, increase of fruit. The fruits of righteousness, the fruit of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, patience, kindness, temperance, faith and meekness. The fruits that matter, the fruits that bring joy to others. Today we take time to remember this moment where the Bible came to life, we become the sowers, Caroline is the seed and we find ways to nurture her heart. Nurture our own hearts through the Word of God. Finally the word gives life. If it is planted and the soil is good. It has the unique ability to bring forth enormous good. Jesus describes it as 300, 60 or 100 percent greater yield. I imagine your life is connected to a greater good. This is the potential of the life of Caroline we now bring into this family of God. That she will in a time appointed in the future be the beneficiary and benefactor of a better world she and the Word of God brought forth. Just like at creation when there was nothing, the earth was without form, void and dark. Light was brought forth because of the seeds planted in creation. Perennial love, perennial joy all because you took time today to plant, nurture and sustain our child today. Why and how should I read the Bible? Read it because of Caroline, read it because you too will be established, nurtured, sustained and loved by God.