

Psalm 1
Matthew 5:17-20
2 Timothy 3:10-4:5
July 10, 2011

The King's Speech

The Academy award winning film the King's Speech was about the struggle of King George the VI of England with his debilitating speech impediment. With his country on the brink of entering World War II and in desperate need of a leadership the King works with a speech therapist so he can give an inspiring speech. Today we celebrate the 400th Anniversary of the King James Bible in worship and we read the King's Speech. Although most Presbyterian churches no longer use the King James Bible, Ark and Dove included; we must acknowledge how much our English language and our faith language is dependent upon this classic translation of the Bible. Our cadence, our rhythms and our vocabulary are very much influenced by the King James Bible even into the 21st century. And when you do things like escape by the skin of your teeth, your phraseology comes also by the King James translators.

This 400th anniversary gives us the occasion to think about how we use our Bibles and to reflect upon the power of the word of God. In the Gospel reading from Matthew, Jesus speaks of the importance

of scripture in his Sermon on the Mount. He said don't change one letter of what we call the Old Testament. The Old Testament is considered sacred Scripture by both Christians and Jews. Many Christian scholars these days refer to the Old Testament as either the Hebrew Scriptures or as the First Testament. They do this out of respect for our sisters and brothers in the Jewish faith. Sometimes old has a connotation that would make it seem like less than or inferior to New. Both are sacred.

Jesus says Don't even change one dot of a "I" or one cross of a "T" until the end of time. He says don't change one letter. Wouldn't Jesus have been upset to learn that the 1631 edition of the King James Bible had a minor omission? The listing of the Ten Commandments urged people to go ahead and commit adultery. The printer accidentally left out the word "not" in "thou shall not." Yet time and time again Jesus made his own deliberate revisions and broke what the Jews called the Law. He healed sick and picked grain on the Sabbath, ate dinner with ritually unclean people and didn't require his disciples to wash their hands just to mention a few.¹ He constantly literally disobeyed scripture.

¹ See William Barclay Gospel of Matthew pp126-129

Jesus is being inconsistent? Jesus our Savior is messing with our minds? Jesus Rabbi is a hypocrite who teaches one thing and lives another. No, Jesus teacher is showing us how to approach scripture. Apparently we are called to take scripture very seriously but not always literally. Which is a very good thing because the 1795 King James printing had Jesus say, "Let the children first be killed" (Mark 7:27). What he really asked was that the children first be "filled" - that is, fed.

Presbyterians are a people of the word. The Bible is the central source and test of our faith. We Reformed folk assert that a collection of writings, composed between 750 BC and 150AD give or take a few decades either way, shall be the source and standard of the church's life until the end of time.² That's why pulpits are such honking big pieces of furniture in our sanctuaries. We ask our ministers, our elders and our deacons to affirm that the Holy Bible is the "unique and authoritative" witness to Jesus Christ. In all of today's decisions the Christian should ask - what does the Bible say about this? In all of today's challenges we should search scripture for parallels.

² Robert Macafee Brown, The Spirit of Protestantism p67

We take the Bible so seriously, that we like Jesus refuse to be fundamentalists. Unique and authoritative does not mean literal. We realize that parts of the Bible are poetry, some of it is story, some parts history, there are sermons and lessons. There are songs of joy and psalms of bitter disappointment. There is proverb, wit and humor. Scripture is rich with diversity of literature and when we read we are called to consider the context. For instance Paul or Paul's student urges us in the second Letter to Timothy to consider all of scripture as inspired by God. When the letter to Timothy was written, let's say 100 AD; did you know there was no New Testament? The canon of the New Testament was not settled until the fourth century. The Word Scripture at that time basically referred to the Hebrew Scriptures. It's quite perplexing, even odd that many Christians who are supposed biblical literalists hang their hats on this passage that supports a Bible with no stories about Jesus.

As we celebrate the King's speech let me share this illustration that one teacher uses when describing Bible study. When you study scripture remember the Bible is a Video not a snapshot. If you take one measly snapshot of your family's life from your online photo album, from lets say 2008; will it tell the whole story of 2008 for

your family? Even more than that – Will this snap shot tell the whole life story of your family? It sure won't. That snapshot will get you going on a story which will lead you to a story, which will lead you to three more stories. That is how we must explore the Bible. **All** scripture is inspired by God, you can't quote one sentence, one passage or one story out of the context of the entirety of the Bible. I also believe that God's Spirit is in the listening and reading as well as the speaking and writing and that the divine message, the kerygma if you will can be heard differently in different times and be nonetheless profound.

They tried to trap Jesus one day when they were quizzing him about the Old Testament. I'll bet he can't summarize scripture without goofing up. But he did. He told them that Bible in Two sentences is Love God with all your heart soul and mind; After all God loves us. Two love your neighbor as yourself. For if God is Love then so should we. Anytime you get into a snapshot discussion with another person about the Bible; try the Jesus' test. He summarizes the Movie. Is what they are saying square with loving a loving God and Loving our neighbors as ourselves. If their snapshot isn't square with love – they haven't seen the movie.

The Job of the Presbyterian Christian is to be a bible scholar as much as possible. And that would involve opening it. In the prayer of confession this morning we offered the words best seller. According to biblestudy.org/ as of 2007 an estimated 7.5 billion Bibles had been distributed around the world since the first was printed in 1456. That figure increases by a staggering 100 million worldwide each year, making the Bible without rival on the all-time best-seller list. Moreover, these numbers don't include all the digital versions accessed by countless people via computer, smartPhones and iPads.

The Bible is a living and historical document; just swarming with insight guidance and information – waiting anxiously to be in conversation with the researcher. But the Bible is a document written in a pre scientific world. If you take the Bible too literally, then you are buying into an ancient cosmology that flies in the face of what we know to be true. We are post Galileo and Copernicus. We have sent men and women into space. In fact this is the week of the last Space Shuttle Flight. The astronauts have photographed our globe. By using God's gifts of the mind and science, we know we do not live on a flat planet with water and heavens above and hell and waters below. We know that God is above us in the theological sense but in

a physical sense we realize that above us is sky and space, below the Chinese. If we take scripture too literally we will find our research inconsistent and our exploration frustrating.

Do you remember that Galileo was threatened with death by the church because he said the earth revolved around the sun and the sun did not revolve around the earth? He had to recant so that he could live. You see his learning's did not square with the Bible or rather some little snapshot of the Bible that truly bore no affect on God's Love, loving God and loving neighbors. We don't view women as property or evil. In parts, The Bible does. We don't believe that menstruation, blindness, and handicaps are ritually unclean. In snapshots, The Bible does. We don't describe illness as Jesus did by calling it demon. We watch the whole movie.

Every time we study scripture we enter into a covenant with the people of faith who came before us. We respect their memory of faith and God that they have passed on to us. We ask ourselves who wrote this section? When did he or she write? Who were they writing for? How did their worldview affect how they interpreted God's will? Were they hurt or angry or joyful or triumphant when they wrote. How have things changed since then? How can I use this snapshot of

scripture to help me in the video of my life which takes place in the so called postmodern computer/information age? Do the passages in scripture before and after this passage affect how I interpret it? Lastly - How do my experiences in life affect how I read this passage?

Study the Bible with others, debate, discuss share stretch and grow. Put your understandings to the test in church studies and in worship and don't let others do your work for you because the Bible is for you. And let's be honest when we come to the video of the bible and snapshots of certain passages and verses. Our lives affect how we read this book. You don't come to this video and you don't read these snapshots the same way I do. Your life is entirely different. You bring your unique perspective to the discussion.

Its like this. Have you ever tried on sunglasses? Some tint the world yellow. Some make it green. Some glasses go gray; they tint the world. The set of assumptions you bring to your reading and searching and knocking on scripture's door affect your discoveries and your conclusions. There is no such thing as neutral. There is no one who comes to scripture without bias and prejudice. It is not possible to take the bible literally because the literal truth is always

rooted in historical and personal experience. While we believe that the original Scripture were written with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we believe that the same Spirit guided those who translated and edited the scripture from Greek and Hebrew into English. And we also believe that this same Holy Spirit guides us when we read the Bible anew each time. God is to some extent in my sun- glasses, so to speak.

It's good to remember that the King James Bible however giant was translated from the Greek and Hebrew scriptures by a team of 47 scholars but that they had their marching orders. James gave the translators instructions intended to guarantee that the new version would conform to the ecclesiology and reflect the episcopal structure of the Church of England and its beliefs about an ordained clergy. He needed to surpress and control the Puritans and their perspective and he did.

Perhaps an even deeper reason for avoiding literalism when we read scripture is to remember the limits of language itself. God is bigger than words. Jesus is the Word. Jesus is the Logos. You can't come up with enough words or precise enough words or large enough words to describe God and the extent of God's Love. God's

Love is bigger than any word and any sentence any paragraph or any book about God. The Bible is the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ and the faith that came before him; but we don't worship the Bible. It's totally sexist and monarchical to put it this way, which is another reason we don't use the King James Bible anymore, but we worship the King not the Speech. We use the Bible to Love and study and worship God. And God is much larger than Bible.