

...*In Christ*. A sermon preached at St. Giles Presbyterian Church, Prince George BC on November 19, 2017 by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: GENESIS 1:1-5
EPHESIANS 1:3-14

This will be the final Sunday morning message that specifically addresses the contributions of the Protestant Reformation and the Reformers to the church then (16th Europe) and today (21st c)

For next Sunday we are going to jump start Advent one week to move from Reformation to the land of C.S. Lewis' Narnia

Specifically, the land of Narnia as described in The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe – hereafter referred to as TLWW.

You see that the bulletin board in the lobby or narthex is decorated appropriately Wait until next week as we turn this worship space into Narnia of TLWW.

Though I am sorry to tell you I will not be dressing up as Mr. Beaver.

Those of you who have been attending the Narnia Bible Study or who have read the story know that there are some resonances with the Bible story.

Remember though Lewis never wrote TLWW as a straight allegory of the Bible story.

If you begin to search out specific scripture characters and references and try to compare them to TLWW or work in the opposite direction – TLWW to scripture – you will become both frustrated and disappointed.

Certainly there are touch points between the Bible story and TLWW – some of these are named on the bulletin board – wonder, temptation, prophecy, restoration, goodness.

But please do not begin to see Aslan as a type for Jesus or Mr. Beaver as a type for Isaiah –

Lewis never meant you to. We will speak about this in more detail in the weeks ahead.

Next Sunday evening at 6:30 we will show TLWW the movie--in its entirety.

And yes, there will be popcorn available!

This morning – French Reformer – John Calvin.

One of the second generation of Reformers

Calvin was in his teens when Luther posted his 95 debating points on the Wittenberg church door.

Like all the major players of the Reformation, there are reams of biographies, studies, analyses on their life and times.

There are a whole lot of primary sources – their own writings.

So as with Luther and Knox, only a brief snapshot of John Calvin's life.

All the material we have about Calvin point to him growing up in a very privileged household.

He enjoyed a way of life and opportunities for education enjoyed by few Reformers.

Calvin was never ordained, but through his father, Gerard's influence, Calvin received income from certain ecclesiastical posts near Noyon (about 60 miles north of Paris),

The earliest being assigned to him before the age of 12.

Consider for a moment that piece of reality and tell me that the 16th century Church was not in need of reform!!

Calvin was educated at the University of Paris and the University of Orleans – both pricey institutions and both noted for their scholarship.

So, Calvin is not some rube from the country – he is clever.

He is still a humanist in 1532

Sometime between 1532 and 1534, he experienced what his biographers call a 'sudden conversion'

But none of his biographers, nor does Calvin himself set down the circumstances surrounding his conversion.

One wonders – was it prompted by the death of his dominating and overbearing father – the death of a surviving parent?

For at the time of his father's death, Calvin changed studies from law (his father's choice) to the study of theology – Greek, the intense reading of both the Greek and Latin Church Fathers.

Along the way, Calvin learned Hebrew.

Was his conversion prompted or aided by some of Luther's early writings – now being circulated in academic circles – thanks in no small measure to the increasing use of the printing press.

Was his conversion prompted by a personal awareness that life on the horizontal was just not sufficient?

There had to be more to life than just the here and now, the immediate, the same old, same old.

That is of course speculation,

But what is abundantly clear is that belief in a living God, the conviction that God's will must be obeyed guided Calvin's thoughts and his writings after 1534 for the rest of his life.

For Calvin,

And for all the Reformers what drives such convictions,

What energizes such assurance is not just what was wrong with the existing church and its practices,

But the restoration of the Bible to a central position within the life of the church – and consequently in the life of every believer.

The growing number of translations of scripture into the language of the people and the push to have this happen

Meant that God's Word was no longer some book of hidden knowledge, reserved to be read by privileged elite.

Through the work of the Reformers, the western church recovered the knowledge of the original languages of the Bible

For the first time in centuries, scholars and teachers were able to read the Hebrew Old and the Greek New Testament and examine the extant Latin translations of the Bible in the light of the original.

Now, let's be clear,

We are not at the stage of easily affordable Bibles.

Books remain expensive and well beyond the resources of most people – at least until about the middle of the 18th century

BUT the importance of being able to read scripture for oneself is now in play as never before.

This is one reason John Knox pushes for universal education in Scotland – to enable people to read the Bible in their own language.

An important side benefit of universal education is that it makes Scotland an intellectual powerhouse in such disciplines as law, medicine, engineering, the sciences and theology at least a century before other developed European nations,

Permit me to sidebar Calvin for just a few moments – we will come back to him – trust me

And say something more about being able to read the Bible in our own language – *one of the primary contributions,, some would say THE PRIMARY contribution of the Reformation to the Church – then and now.*

Consider for moment what it would have been like to never have been able to read or to hear read the Bible in your own language – understandable Suddenly you are able to do both!....

Today, with a variety of versions readily available – digitally, on tape or cd, or in print,
How easy it is to take such a gift for granted.

To be able to read for ourselves or hear read the scriptures,
For me, it still brings up emotions akin to what must have been running through Moses' heart and soul as he approached the burning bush

Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground (Ex 3:5)

A bit of exaggeration Herb? No – I think not

The world in which I live and many in the denomination in which I serve, continue to play too fast and too loose with the authority of scriptures for living out a God centred life

And reap the whirlwind if such an attitude continues and grows, we all certainly will and in fact already are.

For I believe the world in which you and I live is becoming more not less like the time described in the last verse of the Old Testament book of Judges

...all the people did what was right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25)

Which is why we need to hold tenaciously to one of the central tenets of the Reformation – the Bible’s central position in the life of the church in the life of the believer.

We as God’s people do in fact have a great story to tell and to share,
But how are we going to do that with any degree of credibility if we don’t know about that story beyond our own immediate experience.

And how do we gain insight and knowledge about the story?

Under the guidance of God’s Holy Spirit,

As we read the scriptures, we open ourselves to ask that questions – what is being said in a particular passage.

What is being said to me in this particular passage?

I just love the no nonsense of Thomas Cramner’s Book of Common Prayer

The language is not the language of today,

But one cannot say the instructions are dated.

From the Second Sunday in Advent

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by

patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. AMEN

No nonsense...

Think of how beige, dull, lifeless, bordering on hopeless our lives as God’s people would be if we could not read the scriptures and inwardly digest them.

At my mother in law’s celebration of life service within St. Mark’s Presbyterian Church, November 9th, I heard scriptures that I myself have read at such times,
But in that context they spoke to me with freshness and hope that I have always received as I have read them

And hope and the promise that this life is not all there is,

Is what was needed that day.

Let me do what the BCP asks of us every time we hear a passage of scripture read or read it for ourselves.

Daily devotional books are great, but they should never be a permanent substitute to reading the scriptures.

First lesson Hilary read – opening words of Genesis.

Think about what the writer is saying.

In the beginning, God...

The story, our story, yours and mine – begins with God...

Not a chance but a purposeful beginning.

What does that say about God to you, right now?

Second lesson – Ephesians 3

In the original Greek, these twelve verses constitute a single complex sentence.

Okay – important point...Paul is very excited to get this out.

He is like any of us with something exciting that has happened to us,

Some realization we have come to and we just gotta get it out.

There is no pause for breath

No use of proper punctuation. Grammar is not of primary importance here – the exciting realization Paul has come to is....

We read it and what do we see – you may wish to turn to Ephesians 3 and follow along again....

A call to praise God – yes,

God the Father is the source or origin of every blessing which we enjoy

God's love and grace

God's will, purpose and plan.

The phrase 'in Christ' or 'in him' occur 11 xs

It is 'in Christ' God has chosen us IN ETERNITY

It is 'in the Beloved' that he has bestowed on us his grace.

Paul mentions the Holy Spirit

No blessing has been withheld from us

We are chosen by God **before the foundation of the world (vs. 4)**

What does that passage say to you right now?

I wonder, does this truth of chosenness by God from the foundation of the world? change how you see yourself.

Does it humble you?

Do you see from it that one response is and maybe the only response must be humbling, adoring gratitude?

We are God's possession

We depend upon His will

Living for God's glory is the only way to live
 Maybe that is not where you are at right now, but your emotions do not change
 the scriptural declaration here in Ephesians 3 do they.
 You can do this with any story, passage, and verse in scripture – because you can
 read it or have it read to you in your own language
 And ask those questions – what does it say in the context of the passage
 What does it say to me right now? What reminders or truths is the passage
 pointing to or lifting up for my life now?
John Calvin and the Reformers never veered from the truth that the Bible was
 God's book for God's people for all time.
 It is in that light, Calvin wrote the Institutes of the Christian Religion.
 Not to replace scripture, but to help people understand Biblical truths.
 Hear me,
 The Institutes is not a light read.
 However, the Institutes expand upon the Biblical story in an orderly and
 systematic way.
 Read sort of like a commentary on God's actions for us.

The book is structured deliberately on the Apostles Creed, and begins with a
 beneficent God searching out sinful humans.

The Institutes was Calvin's main gift to the Reformation, and I believe to
 the church.

For it set down in an orderly, very structured way the truths that Luther and
 others were attempting to re-discover and reapply to the church so much in need
 of reform.

The Institutes were also an important stepping stone to the Confessions and
 catechisms of the late 17th century

There is no historical evidence that leads us to believe that when Luther, Knox,
 Calvin and the others, save for the Anabaptists, set out they were intent on
 founding a new church or developing a new theology.

Rather, like those who seek to help modern day hoarders, the Reformers
 sought to tidy up, get rid of the unscriptural and unhealthy stuff of the
 established church in order to make the church truer, more faithful to the living

God, and to help individual believers be truer and more faithful to the God who had already chosen them in Jesus Christ.

How fortunate we as God's people today are owing to their work, tenacity and faithfulness to the one true God.