

McCabe United Methodist Church
September 15, 2012
“Messages for Life”
Jim Jennes

The topic for today’s sermon is the importance of reading Scripture. It is the second in a series about the family link topic started last week by Pastor Rick. Last weeks topic was “sharing of family time.” As I mentioned, Ray asked me to fill in for him tonight, so I invite you to come back tomorrow and see if we both have the same idea.

Let me start by reading an e-mail I found on the computer a while ago:

“Just up the road from my house is a field with two horses in it. From a distance each horse looks like any other horse. But if you stop your car or are walking by, you will notice something quite amazing . . . Looking into the eyes of one horse will disclose that he is blind. His owner has chosen not to have him put down, but has made a good home for him,

“This alone is amazing. If you stand and listen, you will hear the sound of a bell. Looking around for the source of the sound, you will see that it comes from the smaller horse in the field. Attached to the horse’s halter is a small bell. It lets the blind friend know where the other horse is so he can follow.

“As you stand and watch these two friends, you will see that the horse with the bell is always checking on the blind horse and that the blind horse will listen for the bell and then slowly walk to where the other horse is, trusting that he will not be led astray.

“When the horse with the bell returns to the shelter of the barn each evening, it stops occasionally and looks back, making sure that the blind friend isn’t too far behind to hear the bell.

“Like the owners of these two horses, God does not throw us away just because we are not perfect or because we have problems or challenges. He watches over us and even brings others into our lives to help us when we are in need.

“Sometimes we are the blind horse being guided by the little ringing bell of those whom God places in our lives. Other times, we are the guide horse, helping others to find their way.

“Good friends are like that. You may not always see them,, but you know they are always there. Please listen for my bell and I’ll listen for your, and remember . . . we walk by faith and not by sight.”

Faith. What is faith? According to Webster, by definition “faith” is “allegiance to duty or a person; fidelity to one’s promises; sincerity of intentions; belief and trust in, and loyalty to , God, traditional doctrines of a religion; firm belief in something for which there is no proof; complete trust.”

The author of Hebrews tells us in Chapter 11, verse 1: “Now FAITH is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

To me, it seems these definitions are exactly what faith is. Complete trust in God.

How are we to learn this faith so we are able to reach the point of complete trust and obedience? I feel that we come to this point by reading scripture. In Romans 10:17, (KJ) we find, "So then faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

As a youth, I was baptized. As a youth, I also went to Sunday School. As a young adult, I was confirmed. As an adult I wandered aimlessly through most of my life. I went to church, but faith hadn't gotten deep into me.

That is, until a point in my life where things changed. That point was brought to me as a challenge. A challenge from a pastor to read the scripture lesson in his church service. As I read and reread the Bible verses, I began to feel the spirit behind the words and to understand deeper meaning for me in the verses. From that point, I have continued to find blessing in reading my Bible. I try to read from the scriptures at least once a day. For me, reading scripture has opened my eyes and deepened my faith. I may not understand everything I read, but with God's help, I learn more each time I open the Bible.

That brings to mind something I recently read:

"There was this father who was approached by his small son, who told him proudly, "I know what the Bible means?"

His father smiled and replied, "What do you mean, you KNOW what the Bible means?"

The son replied, "I DO know."

"Okay," the father said indulgently, "What does the Bible mean?"

"That's easy, Daddy," the young boy replied excitedly. "B.I.B.L.E. stands for 'Basic Information Before Leaving Earth.'"

Isn't that what we get when we read the inspired word of God? Basic information so essential to our spiritual life here on earth and in the hereafter.

We read 2 Timothy, 3:16 earlier. My Good News Bible says: "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults and giving instructions." The King James Bible states: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

Like the tape measure I used in the Children's Moments, the Holy Bible gives us the correct measure in our spiritual walk. If we want to get the pieces of our lives together without error, we must go to the Bible to find what God has to say.

I am forever thankful for our teachers and pastors who have been the "bells" leading me, as a spiritual blind newcomer to greater and greater faith.

But at some point, each of us needs to read the Word of God and learn, individually, what God expects of us. In other words, we go from being blind and following, to seeing clearly enough to test what we hear.

Do you know your Bible? I have a little test for you this morning, and I will tell you in advance that this is a tough test and you may not pass. I didn't! It is only one question long.

Probably every one in this church has heard the story of Noah, the Flood, and his Ark many times.

Here is the question: How many pairs (one male and one female) of EACH animal did God command Noah to take onto the ark?

Do you have the answer? If you answered, as I did, one pair of each kind of animal, you would be WRONG. Genesis 6: verses 19 & 20: reads, "Take into the boat with you a male and a female of every kind of animal and of every kind of bird, in order to keep them alive."

BUT, if you continue to read, you will find God's command in Genesis 7, verses 2 & 3; "Take with you SEVEN pairs of each kind of ritually clean animal, but only ONE pair of each kind of unclean animal. Take also seven pairs of each kind of bird. Do this so that every kind of animal and bird will be kept alive to reproduce again on the earth." Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 list clean and unclean animals, if you want to do more research.

So, do you think you know your Bible?

I don't believe that there will be any serious consequences in NOT knowing that SEVEN pairs of clean animals went into the ark versus ONE pair of unclean. But there are serious things that are deal breakers. If we don't read our Bibles, how can we know what God calls sin? The world has gone crazy in attempting to be politically correct, in attempting to have an "anything goes" attitude of 'God loves me as I am, but He loves me enough not to leave me as I am.'

I think that says it well. God loves us and calls us to salvation through his son Jesus Christ. Keep in mind Jesus' many encounters with sinners. With those willing to accept him, Jesus assured them, "Your sins are forgiven, GO AND SIN NO MORE." I think the devil wants us to forget the last part of Jesus' words. When we accept Christ into our hearts, we will change, and the change will be a blessing. Psalm 37, verse 27 states: "Turn away from evil and do good, and your descendants will always live in the land."

2 Timothy 3:16 tells us to read the Bible for finding truth, for changing what is wrong in our lives, for giving us a pattern for godly living.

The Bible is filled with hope and encouragement for us. Not one of us is immune to bad, even terrible, things happening to us or those we love. How many of you, perhaps long ago in Sunday School memorized the 23rd Psalm:

"The Lord is my shepherd: I have everything I need. He lets me rest in fields of green grass and leads me to quiet pools of fresh water.

He gives me new strength. He guides me in the right paths, as he has promised. Even though I go through the deepest darkness, I will not be afraid, Lord, for you are with me. Your shepherd's rod and staff protect me.

You prepare a banquet for me, where all my enemies can see me; you welcome me as an honored guest and fill my cup to the brim. I know that your goodness and love will be with me all my life; and your house will be my home as long as I live."

The Bible encourages us. It is filled with words of love and power to strengthen us. The Family Link our church is encouraging gets us back, as a family, to our Bibles, to God's inspired letters to us. If you haven't yet started this program, I encourage you to begin with today's family time and Bible reading and prayer. It will change your lives.

Finally, my friends, to emphasize one last time the importance of reading scripture, I would like to read one more passage from Philippians 4, verses 8 and 9: "In conclusion, my brothers, fill your minds with those things that are good and deserve praise; things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely and honorable. Put into practice what you learned and received from me, both from my words and actions. And the God who gives us peace will be with you."

PRAYER:

Would you pray with me? Father, thank you for being able to read your Holy Word. Help us find time in our busy lives to share the Word with our families. Thank you for giving us these scriptures to live by so that we may come to better know you and live in a way that pleases you. Amen.