

Word of God. Word of Life.

Reformation Day John 8:31-36

Slide 1: Bible in light

Do we worship the Bible, a questioning confirmation student recently asked me. They had observed that some people seem to hold up the Bible like the book itself is a holy, sacred object, something we worship, and if that's where God is, does that mean that God's word is something that we worship? Some of us might be thinking, well of course we worship the God of the Bible, not the Bible as a book itself. But, think about this. It's a good question to ask in today's world, especially when people use the Bible to justify all sorts of unjustifiable acts.

That being said, the Bible does contain the *inspired* Word of God. The very word "inspire" means to breathe into. We acknowledge that throughout millennia, God has breathed into people, flawed as they may be, the gift of the Holy Spirit, so that the words that are come to be in the Bible may be written

down. We do hold up scriptures as inspired, 'breathed into' by God and we look to the Bible as our grounding and source for living a faithful life secure and rooted in Jesus Christ.

But, I have also seen firsthand how the Bible can be treated as if the book is revered in such a way that it displaces their worship from God to the words therein, For instance when you hear someone say "I swear on a stack of Bibles!" What does that mean anyway? Do we really know the difference between idolatry of the Bible and our worship of God, who is holy and triune?

Slide 2: Optical Illusion

Most of us probably remember the 1990's. Do you remember that big rage of 3D art, where if you looked at a picture long enough, you could see other figures or pictures in them: like one picture may depict a young woman, but if you looked hard enough, you could see an old woman?

Some of these pictures still get thrown around the internet and Facebook. I used to kind of hate those because I couldn't always see the second picture like other people could, and sometimes I had to get instruction: "look past the dots and you will see it"...or "stare at the eyes and the other picture will come through." So, do you see both women here?

Slide 3: Jesus optical illusion

How about this one? What do you see in this picture? Can you see the name Jesus?

Slide 4: Glowing Bible

But then I think that sometimes that's how we treat the Bible. Some people look at the Bible like it's a secret code and if you just look hard enough, you will figure out when the end of the world will come. Or, looking at the Bible as if there is some mystery in it about salvation that when we solve it, we will be saved.

And then there are those who look at the Bible as solely like it is a moral code and if it says something in there about how we ought to live, well then, there is the rule book to tell us. It's as if God put all those things we needed to know in the Bible and there was no need for further spiritual revelation for today, the end.

Neither is true. Yes, you will find prophecy in the Bible and yes, you will find morality in the Bible, but the moment you hold those things up more primary than God, we no longer worship God, we then DO worship the Bible. And yet, if the Bible reveals the Word of the living God, what does that mean? What do we mean when after hearing God's word, the reader announces: Word of God. Word of Life?

Slide 5: Martin Luther

Today is Reformation Day, the day we remember the founding of our Lutheran heritage. It is also a day where we celebrate Holy Baptism at the 10:45AM

service. Holy Baptism is that moment in time when Owen Thomas becomes a beloved child of God, a member of Christ's body, the church, and of all the priesthood we all share. All those words I just used: child of God, Christ's Body and priesthood, they all come from the Bible.

And, without the Bible, we would have very little to say about Baptism, let alone those big ideas of being justified by faith through grace - the great idea of the Reformation 500 years ago. Therefore, today is a perfect day to look at the Bible as the Word of God. And, if it is the word of God, do we worship that?

Slide 6: Bible the cradle

Without being too simplistic, here it is: It turns out the Word of God is not just about a book, it is about a person. Martin Luther put it very succinctly when he said that "the Bible is the cradle wherein Christ is laid." So, at least when it comes Lutherans and their heritage, Lutherans do not worship the book, nor

do we worship the written words in the book, we worship the person, and when we read the Bible, we are to see all the words therein through the lens of a person, Jesus Christ and his Good News, the Gospel. It is Jesus Christ who is the Word of God.

Slide 7: blank

In today's Gospel reading from John, Jesus says it quite succinctly: "If you continue in my *word*, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." If you continue in my **word**, Jesus says.

Slide 8: The word became flesh

In the first chapter of this same Gospel of John the author introduces us to this Word of God and what the word is when it was written: "The Word was made flesh and dwelled among us and we have seen his glory..." The Word of God *is* Jesus Christ. So, when we read from the Bible, that Word becomes a

living word for us, a living person.

And, when we live according to that person, we will know the truth about God. This also means that if it is a living word, that word can be interpreted newly and freshly with every generation that comes to hear it. It then isn't an old fashioned, stodgy history book about a lot of ancient people that have nothing to do with us. It's ALIVE!

Now, I wish all of you had been there when my 5th grade confirmation students came to this realization without my helping them. They are memorizing Bible verses every week and the second week, we memorized together the 1st verse of John's Gospel Chapter One:

Slide 9: In the beginning

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Macie, Hayden, Delaney, Gracelyn, and Samuel love the Bible. They

are having a blast opening up scripture and they want to talk about what the words mean. This is not always the case, but this time it is. And, when they were looking at this verse, they really wanted to know what it meant. Here is the rough conversation as it happened:

"What does the Word was God mean? Does that mean the Bible?" asked one of the children.

"No," I said. "John's Gospel says there that the Word is a person. If you read a little further you will see that."
"So, is that person supposed to be Jesus?" he asked.

"Yes, that's exactly who it is," I said.

"Wait. That would mean that Jesus is God! That's the most amazing thing I have ever heard! Mind blown!"

And then, after talking about this for a while, I remember vaguely one of the girls saying, "That means God knows what it's like to have to

do homework.” I love these kids.

Slide 10: St. John’s in Fall

Following the Word, which is Jesus, is not a simple thing though. It means that we are to look to Christ for the purpose, the meaning, and the actions of our lives and the way we do that is to delve into his word by... reading the Bible. See, as it turns out, the Bible is this amazing place where we can see through the person of Christ the following:

- Who God is
- What God does
- Who we are
- What we are called to do

Therefore, in the Bible, the Word of God in the person of Jesus Christ, we receive comfort, faith, challenge, and joy. But, we see what scripture says through this lens of a person, the triune God. The Bible is a place where we can go to mourn, it is a place where we can look for guidance, and it is a place where we find we are never separated from God through Christ Jesus because when we

go to the Bible, we go to the person, Jesus Christ.

So, if you have not picked up the cradle of Christ, the Bible, to read in some time, pick it up. It is there where you will have God’s love for you revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. But, we should avoid confusion when it comes to the Bible. The Bible is the place we go to experience the living God for today, but we do not worship it. We worship Christ, who is revealed in the Bible as the 5th graders have found out.

And, you just might be surprised when you open the Bible for whatever reason it may be, to see that Jesus is revealing something meaningful, comforting, challenging, or helpful for you today. For, Christ isn’t just the God of the past who died for you 2,000 years ago. He is a living, breathing word, for now, who is inspired into you whenever you open the Bible. It is a word of God and a word of life.

Thanks be to God. Amen.