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 Second Sunday of Lent
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Walking with Jesus: Studying God
2 Timothy 3:14-17

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All scripture is inspired by God and is^[b] useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

In his book, *The Walk*, Adam Hamilton talks about five essential practices for Christian life, as we walk with Jesus: ***worship, study, serve, give, and share.***

Today I want us to talk ***about STUDY.***
 Studying God.
 How do we study God?
 Well, we ***PAY ATTENTION***
And, we LISTEN.

And it's not just paying attention to God's Word.
 That is incredibly important,
 but we also listen to ways that God speaks to us through
NATURE, ART, PEOPLE, OR OUR OWN HEART OR CONSCIENCE.
 Adam Hamilton, *The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life*, Abingdon: Nashville, 2019.
 Pg. 43-46.

Think about that for a minute—
 When have ***YOU HAD an experience of God in NATURE?...***
 What did ***YOU LEARN about God?.....***
 I remember the first time I slept under a starry sky as a teenager---
 and was just blown away by how big God is, and how small we are.

What about ***IN ART?***
 When ***have YOU EXPERIENCED God by looking at a piece of art?...***
 What did you learn about God in that moment?

There's this painting in the Philbrook, called *The Deposition of Christ*.
 And it's of Jesus' body after the crucifixion,
 And it looks just like someone is putting the body of Jesus into your arms,
 instead of just into the cave for burial.
 It's powerful—it helped me understand just how close Jesus is to us,
 how Jesus really was ONE of us.

What about learning from God *through OTHER PEOPLE?*

I feel like this happens all the time!

I learn so much from and about God from all of you, and people I meet, really
 everywhere and anywhere.

When have *YOU ENCOUNTERED GOD in another person?*

Who were they, and what did you learn?.....

Sometimes, we hear from God
 in our hearts, minds, our intuition or our conscience.
Can YOU THINK of a time when that happened?....

Hamilton talks about the power of these *INDIRECT revelations* of God,
 And I think if we were to talk all day,
 we'd see just how powerful these moments have been in our lives.
 We truly do learn from and about God
 in nature, art, people, and our own hearts and minds.

Then there are the more *DIRECT REVELATIONS* from God---
 from the *Holy Spirit, the Bible, and Jesus himself.*

Think about when we ask for your *God-sightings* in this church—
 we are often talking about seeing or experiencing God.
 And sometimes this is something that *the HOLY SPIRIT DID in our lives---*
 a movement of the Spirit.
 And sometimes it's in combination
 with a revelation in nature, or art, music, or people.
 There are often times when we feel *A NUDGE from God.*

I am always amazed at what happens when I *listen to little 'nudges'* from God.
 Just imagine if we all listened to these!

What if you just sense that you should reach out to someone?
 Because there are no coincidences, only God-incidences,
 I would say that's *a sign from God that you should reach out!*

When have ***YOU FOLLOWED A NUDGE*** from God,
and it changed the course OF YOUR DAY?
Or maybe even YOUR LIFE?.....
 That can be the Holy Spirit at work in your life!
 We can and should listen to that!

So listening to the *Holy Spirit is one of the DIRECT WAYS* we receive revelation and knowledge from God.

Another way is through ***THE BIBLE***.
 We all know how important God's word is to us.
 Jesus read it, memorized it, studied it, and prayed it.
 He *interpreted* God's Word.
 He looked at the *context* of it, and the original *meaning* of it,
 and he determined the *spirit* of the law, not just the letter of it.

We too *have to interpret* the meaning of the Bible for us today,
 And it's more complicated than 'the Bible says so'?

In fact, Jews in ancient times, and today,
 have a long history of *debating and interpreting* scripture,
 much like Jesus did when he was alive.

It's known as *midrash*, or debate,
 and it describes the process of *interpreting*
 the *Mishnah*, which is the Oral Law.
 Jews don't just follow the Hebrew Bible,
 or what we would call the Old Testament,
 they also have what is called the *Talmud*,
 which is a commentary on the Mishnah, the Law.

In many ways *we do midrash* today, when we study scripture.
 We do what is called *hermeneutics*,
 which is looking at the *context* of the verses—
 their historical and literary context, and it's context in the whole scripture.
 And we do what is called *exegesis*, pulling out the meaning for us today.

As Christians, we *don't just* open up the Bible, find a verse, and *voila!*
 We know instantly what it says and means today.
 We look to commentaries ancient and new,
 we listen to scholars
 we listen to sermons, we read books,
 and most of all we pray and study the Bible together,
asking for the Holy Spirit to guide us.

For Presbyterians, the Bible is the bedrock of our faith.
 The *Reformation* was based on the idea that everyone
 should have access to the Bible for themselves,
 not just through a priest.
Sola scriptura was a theme of the Reformation
 From the time Martin Luther broke with the Catholic church in 1517.

Presbyterians also have a *long history of debate and interpretation*
 of scripture—not because we like to fight about the Bible,
 but because we believe in the power of the Holy Spirit,
 to *keep showing us* the meaning and application of scripture today.

We believe in the *inspiration* of the Bible,
 not just a *literal* translation of it.

In *2 Timothy 3:14-17* we heard Paul say, ...
16 All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,
17 so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

Do you know what that word *inspired* means in *Greek*?
 Well, we don't know exactly, because the Greek word in 2 Timothy
 is found only in this one verse of the whole Bible!

The word is theopneustos,
 theo means God, and pneustos means breath. *God-breathed.*
 Because it's the only time that word is used,
 we don't have the ability to compare different contexts.

So how do we know what *inspired means*?
 Well, we do know that that Paul didn't use a word meaning "*dictated*".

Paul doesn't claim that the Bible was dictated
 In fact, he doesn't even claim that with his own writings and letters.
 He says that HE is writing them,
 to share the faith that he has received through Christ.

So what is meant when we say the Bible is ***inspired?***
 Well, first of all I think the Bible has the ***power of the Holy Spirit*** in it.
 And it is used, as Paul says, for ***teaching, correction, training,***
To guide our lives as Christians.

I also think it means that ***human beings*** wrote out of their faith,
 With ***different perspectives*** on the same events, even the same words of Jesus.

Just look at the ***four Gospels***, and how different they are—
 different people were writing about the same events—
 but with different perspectives,
 even though they were recording the same person's life.

Does this mean the words aren't as powerful, or true?
 Not at all, in fact, I believe there's ***great power in four different*** Gospels.
 They help us ***understand Jesus*** from four different points of view.
 They all contain the truth about Jesus, but from a different angle.

Don't we find this to be true today?
That the truth is multi-faceted? We need multiple sides of the same story?

Saying that the Bible is inspired by God,
 is especially true of our ***English versions***.
 We know that many words in our language,
 just like the original Hebrew and Greek, have various meanings,
 and the choice of words depends upon the author.

Even the earliest Bible manuscripts have ***variants***,
 differences from one scribe to another.
 There's nothing wrong with this, it's the way Scripture works for us.
And the Holy Spirit moves in our hearts and minds through all of it!

Think about this—have you ever read a Bible passage for the 100th time,
 or studied it with a group for the 12th time,
and learned something new and different from it?....

I know I have!
 What if that's *evidence of the Holy Spirit* at work,
 in all our reading and study of scripture?

Hamilton talks about the *importance of being in God's word*—
 and because he has a special love for the number 5—
 he suggests reading at least 5 verses of the Bible per day,
 especially in a version that is easy for you to read and understand.

Adam Hamilton, *The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life*, Abingdon: Nashville, 2019. Pg. 52.

He suggests starting with the Gospels if you are newer to reading scripture.
 I remember getting my Grandma Morene a Bible,
 and her trying to read it for the first time front to back,
 and I got this panicked phone call one day saying she was stuck—
 What? Where are you stuck Grandma?

In Leviticus.

I quickly suggested she start with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John!

If you are newer to regular Bible reading—
 start with the Gospels, maybe also the Psalms.
 And find a Bible version that you can easily understand—
 a study Bible is a great choice to help you in both personal and group study.

We use NRSV in most Presbyterian churches because of its strong reliance upon
 the original Hebrew and Greek languages,
 but I think the most important thing is a well-known translation
 that YOU can understand.

Some people love the down-to-earth language of Presbyterian Pastor
 Eugene Peterson's *The Message* translation.

***Find one that speaks to you,
 and makes it easy for you to read daily.***

Then find a way to read—DAILY.

For me, I combine my cup of coffee in the morning with reading the Bible,
 and a good devotional reading.

I read the verses put out daily by *The Bible* app,
 and the day's reading from *Streams in the Desert*.

I often add *Our Daily Bread* devotional, which you can find in print or on an app on your phone. There are other great ones like *Jesus Calling*. Find what works for you. Go to Mardel's Christian bookstore in Tulsa, or shop online, and find something easy for you to fit into your daily schedule, whether that be the morning or at night.

Another practice that means a lot to me is an *NIV One Year Bible*—which has readings from Old and New Testament in chronological order, for every day of the year. It's really powerful see the larger story of God, in order.

Hamilton talks about the power of using the Bible in five ways: For ***UNDERSTANDING, FORMATION, PRAYER, MEDITATION, AND STUDY with others.***

One thing we've been doing in worship lately is ***Lectio Divina, divine reading***, which is really listening meditatively to the Scripture.

But it's also powerful to ***just PRAY BIBLE VERSES as your own prayers***, think of doing this with the Psalms or other favorite verses. I try to do this as I pray with each of you individually.

And there really is nothing like ***STUDYING THE BIBLE*** with others, in a group, where you can learn from what others are hearing and seeing in God's Word. I know that's a stretch for busy people, but it really is transformative.

One way that we are trying to help you do this is through Sunday school, and Wednesday nights, but also through the daily readings and scriptures in the bulletin each week of this Lenten season, as well as the March newsletter prayer calendar. These are also on our Facebook page each day of Lent.

Talk to your friends at church about what you are reading and hearing and learning as you do this—think of that as a small way to study together.

Finally, the most amazing ***DIRECT REVELATION we have from God is JESUS.*** Jesus himself was known as the Word of God,

as we read in the beginning of John's Gospel.
 Why is Jesus the Word?
 Because God didn't just give us a Book to understand,
 God also gave us a Person.

And Words---words are incredibly important to our living God.

God SPOKE creation into existence!
 And John reminds us that God's Word, AKA Jesus,
 was there at the beginning of creation,
 well before that Word became flesh and lived among us!

The Greek word for 'word' is LOGOS—
 and it means something more than just a word.
 It means knowledge, reason, understanding.

So God uses Words for us to have knowledge and understanding,
 about who God is and what God is doing---
 and ***Jesus was all that, wrapped up in human form!***

When we doubt what we are learning about God,
 We have not only the ***Bible to hold it up against,***
 We also have the ***Person of Jesus*** Christ!
 When in doubt—go to the whole of Scripture, because the Bible interprets the
 Bible, and go to Jesus, what did Jesus do and say about this?

Friends, hear the ***Good News of the Gospel for you today.***
 There are so many ways we learn about God.
 We learn through
NATURE, ART, PEOPLE, AND OUR HEARTS AND MINDS.
 And, we learn from
the HOLY SPIRIT, HOLY BIBLE, AND OUR SAVIOR JESUS

If we are open to all these places, if we will ***PAY ATTENTION AND LISTEN,***
 we can and will grow in our faith, day by day, year by year.
 May we all keep our hearts and minds open to God's revelation,
 and these gifts, all God's people say, Amen!