

King of Glory Lutheran Church
Lent Midweek Service – Word
March 30, 2022
Rev. Debra Abbott

Psalm 119:105

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

Throughout this season of Lent we have been focusing on spiritual disciplines. We explored the spiritual discipline of prayer and prayer practices. We reflected on the spiritual discipline of rest and sabbath. Last week we dove deep into the spiritual discipline of lament.

Today we turn to the spiritual discipline of the word. As Christians we understand the word to be God's word to us found in the Bible. And the Word made flesh that is Jesus. And for many Christians, the spiritual discipline of reading the Bible and listening to God's word is a discipline and devotional practice that is very familiar.

Perhaps this discipline is well known to us because we long to know God better and it is through the Bible that we find God's story and our story woven together and shared in a variety of forms and styles. The Bible speaks to each one of us in different ways. It is filled with all kinds of literature: poetry, songs, history, stories, parables, laws, letters and personal experiences. God's word is unique and varied and creative and diverse. It is not just one book, it is an entire library.

In God's word given to us we learn about God, we find guidance for our lives, we see ourselves in the stories of God's people. There are heroes and villains, sinners and saints, tragedy and comedy. And most importantly, there is the gospel message for us, the good news, that God loves us, forgives us and promises us eternal life.

Now as I said earlier, we know God's word in the form of the Bible. But we also know God's word in the form of Jesus. From the gospel of John 1:1-5, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."*

Martin Luther read the Bible to learn about Jesus. He gave us a beautiful image of the Bible that I'll share now. Luther writes, *"These are the Scriptures which make fools of all the wise and understanding, and are open only to the small and simple, as Christ says in Matthew 11:25. Therefore dismiss your own opinions and feelings, and think of the scriptures as the loftiest and noblest of holy things, as the richest of mines which can never be sufficiently explored, in order that you may find divine wisdom which God here lays before you in such simple guise as to quench all pride. Here you will find the swaddling clothes and the manger in which Christ lies."*ⁱ

Luther said that the Bible is the manger that hold Christ. Whenever I find myself confused or even frustrated by something I read in the Bible I remember this image. The Bible is not God. We do not worship the Bible. The Bible holds Jesus and reveals Jesus to us.

God's word is a gift to us that is meant to be lived with and wrestled with. We are invited to spend time in God's word. We listen, we are surprised and moved and changed by it. We hear and reflect on God's word for us individually and also together as God's people with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Many years ago, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America created the Book of Faith initiative in an effort to encourage all people, not just pastors and church leaders, but all people, to read the Bible. From this initiative have come Bible study resources and creative ways to engage people in God's word.

My favorite resource from the Book of Faith initiative that I use often is a basic set of questions to ask when reading the Bible called "Four Ways to Approach the Bible."ⁱⁱ

These questions are offered in four categories, four ways of reading the Bible. The first is Devotional Reading.

- What scares, confuses, or challenges me in this text?
- What delights me in this text?
- What stories or memories does this text stir in me?
- What is God up to in this text?

The next is Historical Reading.

- Who wrote this passage?
- What was this text written?

- Where was this text written, and what do we know about that part of the ancient world?
- How is this text similar to other ancient stories?
- When was this text written and what do we know about that time in history?

Next is:

Literary Reading

- What is the plot?
- Who are the characters?
- What is the theme of this passage?
- What is the setting for this passage?

And finally, Lutheran Theological Reading:

- In what ways does this text point to or lead us to Christ?
- Can other passage in the Bible help us understand or interpret this passage?
- What is the plain meaning of this text?
- Is the interpretation we are commending accessible to everyone?

Today I encourage you to open up the Bible. Read a verse or a whole book. Read it out loud or silently to yourself. Read it with friends and family. Ask questions, listen, meet God, experience Jesus, and be changed by the Holy Spirit.

All of the spiritual disciplines we have been given from God were practiced by Jesus. Jesus prayed and rested. He knew suffering and grief and lament. And Jesus knew God's word. He held those words close in his mind and his heart. They helped him daily and in his most difficult moments.

I hope that in this season of Lent we will find ourselves getting reacquainted with all of these spiritual disciplines. They are gifts given to us by God to guide us in our life of faith and give us strength for our journeys.

Amen.

ⁱ Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 35: Prefaces to the Old Testament, 236.

ⁱⁱ *Opening the Book of Faith*, 2008, Augsburg Fortress