

15 April 2018

Refugio and Goliad

Luck 24:36b-48

THEN HE OPENED THEIR MINDS

Jesus has been opening minds for over 2000 years now. I find it interesting that at this critical juncture in His ministry, at his first post crucifixion revelation to his Apostles, while they were “startled and terrified”, He quoted Scripture and “opened their minds to understand the scriptures.”

Jesus did not chastise the Apostles for lack of faith or for lack of loving belief. Instead He simply opened their minds to understand the scriptures. The risen Christ is also giving us a message for this present age: Understand the Bible by opening our minds. Christians are often described as being a people “of the Book.” Certainly “The Book” occupies a central place in the theology and belief system of Episcopalians. Our famous three-legged stool of belief: The Bible, right reason and tradition, undergird all that we believe. We also acknowledge that the Bible contains all that is necessary for salvation. So, we take it pretty seriously. But we also take seriously the application of reason or rationality, and tradition to the study and understanding of the Scriptures.

One most important example of the application of right reason to the Bible is the Episcopal rejection of the doctrine of inerrancy: The view that the Bible is without error. Of course, the Bible contains errors – it was written by dozens of different people in several different languages over the course of hundreds of years. It was translated, debated, revised, edited by hundreds of additional people. The fact that we believe that the Bible is inspired by God, that is that the breath of the Holy Spirit permeates the whole, does not mean that the parts are without error. We need to remember that while there was general agreement about which books should make-up the Bible by about the 4th century, it was not until April of 1546, at the Council of Trent, that the Bible, as we know it, was finally made official. (472 years ago, this month!)

The Old Testament: The part of the Bible that gave us, as children, delightfully entertaining stories, that gave us, as young adults, all kinds of reasons for skepticism and disbelief, and gave us as older adults, beautiful poetry and wise insights into the business of living, is the Old Testament. You may spend your time with the Old Testament wondering at its brutality and God’s alleged support of war and even genocide or one might cherry pick passages to buttress what we choose to believe and profess. To me, there is a much more satisfying way of swallowing the Old Testament. I tend to swallow it whole, warts, wars, odd stories, beautiful passages all together. I see the Old Testament as the history of a primitive people trying to develop an understanding of their place in the universe and what their relation to God is and should be. The stories are deeply and completely human with all of the flaws and wonders that hate and love, lust and power give to free will humans. It is not a work of professional historians nor is it a book of science or a contemporary real estate deed. It is simply, but fantastically, the story of humankind’s search for Godly meaning.

The New Testament: The New Testament is quite a different story. It is a story of inclusive love, of the universality of the human condition, of how to live and love in a brotherhood of faith and action. It is a story that culminates in a sacrifice for humankind and a demonstration of the resurrected spirit giving

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infinite life to all. Here is a new covenant between humankind and God that is both individual and communal: Individual salvation through the forgiveness of our sinful ways and communal action in communities of faith. The New Testament is a Book of Good News!

The Scriptures Speak: How do the Scriptures speak to us? I suspect that all of us have our own list of ways; here are four of the ways on my list.

Awe: At the head of my list is awe, that overwhelming feeling of reverence that one gets from reading the first words of Genesis: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." Here is the spiritual "big bang." That very moment of creation. How can one read those words and NOT feel awe?

Beauty: Second on my list is beauty. The Word contains much beauty and I find especially appealing to me Psalm 100: "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the lands! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!" Or John 12:35-36 "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light that you may become sons of light." Anyone who loves words, must love that language. Anyone who loves the Lord must see how beauty and awe work together to create wisdom which is third on my list of ways that the Scripture speaks.

Wisdom: The Scriptures abound in wise theological insights and I will leave it to the theologians to expound upon them. I like the simple wisdom of Proverbs 10, verses 4 and 6: "A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich. Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence." This is wisdom for living and it is a delight to read.

Action: Last on my list is action. The Letter of James always moves, and frequently shames, me. Hear James 1:22-25 "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing." What a wonderful call of action! Let us all go out and DO the Lord's work!

Finally: Awe, beauty, wisdom and action. Good ways to experience the glory and power of Scripture. We are people of the Word. Let us read and reflect on the Bible for the Word Is Near Us! Amen.