

CONFIRMATION – MONTHLY MEETING

Sunday, November 15, 2009

Session 3 – Notes

Languages of the Bible

When the stories, laws, poetry, history, myth, customs, proverbs and inspiration of the Bible were written down years and years after they were transmitted by word of mouth they were done so in two primary languages:

- Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) – Hebrew
- Christian Testament (New Testament) – Greek

In later years a Latin translation was made available, followed by modern languages, including English.

Early Hebrew was a written language of consonants only. This meant that there were times when interpreters could come up with more than one meaning. As an English example, "Gd lvs" could mean "God loves" or "God lives," and the interpreter could not even be sure that "Gd" means "God" because one of the 12 Hebrew tribes was "Gad." Later in the history of the Hebrew language a group known as the Masoretes devised a system of vowels, but they could only work with the earlier Hebrew, vowel-less, texts so theirs is also an educated guess. All this means that what we currently know as our Bible has come through many centuries of human storytelling and writing.

The Bible as the inspired Word of God

Most Christians refer to the Bible as the inspired word of God but they mean radically different things in making that statement. There are at least 5 different meanings:

- God dictated the Bible – someone actually heard God's voice and wrote down what was heard.
- Each word is in the Bible because God wanted it there – each word is given by God but the writers didn't actually hear God's voice.
- God guided men and women to think and to write about the ideas in the Bible – God is the author of the ideas but not necessarily the words, and every idea is of God.

- God's Spirit worked through people, not words – God is not responsible for the words or ideas in the Bible, but the interaction of God's Spirit with people led to words and ideas.
- God worked through the community to get the message across – Although individuals appear throughout the Bible, the Bible is really a testament to the journeys, hopes and failures of communities of people, and is a response of their calling, acceptance of call, covenant with God, breaking of the covenant and being claimed by God all over again.

Christians have another way to define Word of God. For us Jesus' life is the embodiment of God's desire for our world. When we read something in the Bible that seems contradictory we measure that against the way Jesus loved people and showed compassion. Jesus' example becomes the true Word.

Canon

Canon is a process by which groups decide which writings are at the spiritual heart of the Hebrew journey or the Christian journey. The books of the Bible are canon because groups of people, entrusted with the authority of the community, decided they were. The books of the Bible were not unanimously agreed upon to be canon. The community of faith trusts God's Spirit to work through flawed, biased, incomplete people for canon to emerge.

The lectionary

The lectionary is a system by which all the major writings of the Bible can be read publicly in worship over a 3-year period. Typically, each Sunday there are four readings assigned for public worship:

- A reading from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)
- A Psalm (also in the Hebrew Bible)
- A reading from one of the Christian letters, also known as epistles
- A reading from one of the four gospels

At Walnut Hills our pastors usually read only one of those lessons each week.

Wesley's Quadrilateral

John Wesley, considered the founder of Methodism, taught a four-fold guide for belief that helped his followers put spiritual balance into their faith journeys. A common question in his day and in ours was and is how to determine what we

believe. His teaching was that there are four influences and that they have to be in balance. They are:

- Scripture (The Bible – Wesley set Scripture above the other three, but still with an eye to balance.)
- Tradition (How has God guided people throughout 2,000 years of Christian history and throughout the centuries preceding Christian history?)
- Experience (How is God touching our own individual life experiences?)
- Reason (What does our God-given and God-encouraged intellect teach us?)

The Bible – Earlier and Emerging Worldviews

Since 1950, “probably more Christians have left the church because of the Bible than for any other single reason.” – Marcus Borg. There are two major pathways in Christianity right now, and how you understand the Bible depends on which pathway is your pathway.

- Earlier worldview
 - The Bible is the unique revelation of God.
 - The Bible is to be believed literally.
 - The Christian life is based on believing now for the sake of salvation later.
 - Belief in God, the Bible and Jesus is the way to heaven.
 - Christianity is the only true religion.
- Emerging worldview
 - The Bible is the historical product of ancient Israel and the early Christian movement.
 - Followers of Jesus are not so much concerned with the factuality of the Bible’s stories but with their meanings.
 - The Christian life is intended to transform individuals and society in this present life.
 - Christianity is our faith journey because we follow Jesus and we make no negative judgment about other spiritual pathways.

While welcoming all spiritual expressions Walnut Hills and its leadership follow the emerging worldview of Christianity.