

In Light of the Scriptures

Psalm 119:105-112
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First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson

Erik Weihenmayer has been blind since age 13. Since age 16, he's been an avid rock climber. At 27, he reached the top of Alaska's Mount Denali, and he's been climbing higher and higher ever since, summiting Mount Everest in 2001. But it is his descent off the face of El Capitan that I'm interested in this morning. Erik was with several other climbers and they had already spent the night sleeping in a sling hanging off the face of the mountain. They were now trying to climb down before nightfall. They failed. Night came before they were able to finish their descent, leaving them all in the dark. So they turned to the one man who had the most experience climbing in the dark: Erik, who was able to lead them down their final steep descent to safety. The blind leading the sighted.

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path," says the Psalmist, referring to the word of God. When it comes to finding our way through life, we are all blind and in need of the word of God to light our way. Looking at the verse of scripture from today that begins, "Your word is..." how would you finish that sentence? "Your word, O God, is" – fill in the blank. A light to my path? Really?

We'd like to think so, but maybe not so much in actuality – actually looking to God's word to light your way forward each day. I suspect that for many people the more honest answer might be, "Your word, O God, is ... kind of boring," for those who haven't opened the Bible since they were a kid in Sunday school, those who only remember how hard it was at a young age to read and understand the Bible.

Or for those who dip into the Bible only during Adult Sunday School, when Cyndi has us looking at a particularly challenging verse, the honest answer might be, "Your word, O God, ... is very confusing."

Others might find it outdated, sexist, discriminatory, even graphic and violent. Or conversely, some focus only on the most positive scripture – that which offers reassurance, comfort and words of blessing – while steering clear of anything from God that is directive and corrective, anything that might call into question bad habits, misguided behaviors, and unfortunate life choices.

How much or how little you rely on the word of God to light your path has to do with what path you're on, what type of path you're following in life. Let's play another game of fill-in-the-blank. Whether your answer to the first one was, "Your word, O God, is for me a light to see by, or too boring to bother with, or too confusing to deal with, or all nice and happy but never challenging – the answer you give to that first fill-in-the-blank depends on how you finish this next fill-in-the-blank, the one that says: "My path in life is" – fill in the blank. My path is ... faithful, ... uncertain, ... blessed, ... cursed, ... tragic, ... willful, ... self-serving, ... controlling, or ... none of your business, Dear God.

Think about it. Do you really feel that God has a place alongside you on your path through life? Do you invite him in each day, or push him away? Do you look to him for guidance, or do you try to ignore his presence in your life? The answer to that may have something to do with how you fill in a third and final blank, this one based on the second verse in today's Old Testament lesson, where it says, "I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to observe your righteous ordinances," O God. "I have sworn an oath and confirmed it to" – fill in the blank. Does your life reflect a commitment – an oath – to ... making money, ... being a success, ... having the last word, ... being right while making others wrong, ... manipulating things so you always come out on top, ... chasing after outer beauty, ... clinging to superficial friendships, or ... struggling in a toxic relationship.

These are just a few of the things that can trip us up along life's journey, leading us into a dead-end alley. God's word is given as a light to our path, a path of righteousness, as we seek to discern and follow the will of God, in fulfillment of our calling – our oath – as children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ.

There's not one of us in worship today who doesn't struggle to see and follow the light of God as we make our way through life. Not to mention all those who don't come to worship, all those who could use a little light and direction in their lives, as reflected through your relationship with them, if we would just share a little more of what we see and believe about God and Jesus and the Spirit of God.

It's like when I asked my friend if he was planning to attend church. He just shook his head and said, "I haven't gone in a long time. Besides, it's too late for me. I've probably already broken all seven commandments." There's not one of us in worship today who doesn't struggle to see and follow the light of God, not to mention those who don't come to worship.

And yet, the Psalmist basks in the light of God, because he sees God's word as a lamp to his feet and a light to his path. And you know, it wasn't only the actual words of the scriptures that he turned to. The Psalmist turned to God, pouring out his heart before God Almighty, saying, "I am severely afflicted.... Teach me your ordinances. ... The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts. Your decrees are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end."

The Psalmist has a relationship with God and God's word, and that is what illuminates his every step, forms the pathway he travels, and becomes his goal in life, the oath that he swears to uphold, come what may.

A relationship with God and God's word – do you have that? Are you in a relationship with God – and God's word – on a daily basis, as you make your plans each day, encounter unexpected troubles and sidetracks, struggle with sudden difficulties, seek to bless others, and to receive blessing for yourself?

Now is the time to develop and enhance that type of relationship with God, to go deeper with God's word, draw closer to God on a daily basis, whether that's through the Bible itself or some other source of scripture.

There's a great source of scripture that does a wonderful job of bringing people into relationship with God. It's a book called "Jesus Calling," by Sarah Young. Actually, it's a daily devotional for all 365 days of the year. Now that makes it easy, doesn't it? Every day that you are blessed to wake up, you can open the book and read a passage. And every day you draw breath, you can grow closer to God, see more and more of his light, guiding your way, lighting your path. I know that many of you have a copy of this book in your household. That's great.

This is the time to open it and begin – or resume – the practice of reading the daily passages. Let's do that now. Today's passage in "Jesus Calling" reads: "I am nearer than you think, richly present in all your moments. You are connected to me by love-bonds that nothing can sever. However, you may sometimes feel alone, because your union with me is invisible. Ask me to open your eyes, so that you can find me everywhere. The more aware you are of my presence, the safer you feel. This is not some sort of escape from reality; it is tuning in to ultimate reality. I am far more real than the world you can see, hear, and touch."

And then it ends with this bit of scripture from Hebrews 11. “Faith is the confirmation of things we do not see and the conviction of their reality, perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses.” Wow. Doesn’t that provide a lamp unto your feet and a light to your path? Doesn’t that bring you into a deeper relationship with God, with Jesus? It does for me.

This book is full of short, daily passages just like that one, passages that – when read each day – will bring you into a closer relationship with God and God’s word.

As I said, I’m sure many of you have a copy of this book in your household, and now you’re eager to open it each day and drink deeply from its life-giving words. For those of you who don’t have a copy – and who would commit to using it each day – we want to give you a copy today. We don’t know how many households already have it, so we brought just 15 copies today. But if we run out, we’ll take your name down and get you a copy by next Sunday.

So, if you are ready to make a commitment to use this little devotional book each day, please see Bill & Jill Esry in the Parlour after worship and they’ll give you a copy for your household, or be sure there’s one here for you next week. And I should mention that Bill’s late father Carroll Esry, had a ministry of giving these books which inspired me to have the church do so today through this sermon.

Oh, and as for this sermon, I’ll leave the Amens to you, when later today or first thing tomorrow or – for some – first thing a week from now, you read the next passage from “Jesus Calling”, and hear the living word of God speaking directly to you and your life. I hope you’re looking forward to that Amen as much as I am.

PASTORAL PRAYER

We offer to you our words, O God – those tiny bits of meaning we breathe out so easily – and, often, so thoughtlessly.

Keep us ever attentive to the impact of our words, particularly the ways they can cause pain or foster fear and needless drama.

Make of our speech a force that does not destroy, but rather builds up, so even our voices of protest may serve the greater cause of reconciling us and others to you.

For it is through you and your word that we have anything to say that's worthy of praise, anything of true power and inspiration, blessing and comfort.

We pray your comfort on those who grieve, those who struggle with disease, those with needs and hurts known only to you.

We pray all this in the Spirit of the Living Word, who is Jesus, the Christ, who walked among us teaching by word and deed, and even teaching us to pray, as we now, saying together:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.