

“Myth Buster”

First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
February 23, 2020

New Testament Lesson: 2 Peter 1:16-21

Old Testament Lesson: 2 Samuel 23:2-4

How many people here have heard of the five-second rule? Most everybody. When you drop a piece of food and grab it back up real quick, it's safe to eat. Not true! As soon as food hits a contaminated surface, it can make you sick. It's proven, by everyone from the *Journal of Applied and Environmental Microbiology* to MythBusters, the Discovery Channel TV show.¹

Let's look at some others. True or false: People Can Slip On A Banana Peel? Raise your hand if you think that's true. Some do, some don't. Dropping a penny off the Empire State Building can kill someone – true or false? Show of hands. OK. How about: yodeling can cause an avalanche? A person can drown in quicksand? OK, here's one I love: It's as easy as taking candy from a baby? Is taking candy from a baby easy? No! It's actually easier to steal candy from a grocery store than to take candy from a baby. Scientifically proven, by MythBusters.

In fact, each of the commonly held beliefs – about banana peels, deadly pennies dropping from tall buildings, yodeling your way into an avalanche, and sinking to your death in quicksand – all false, according to MythBusters.

And still, there are people in this sanctuary who don't believe a word I just said. The sanctuary is full of dirty-food eating, banana-peel slipping, penny dropping, avalanche yodeling, quicksand sinking people who are convinced all these myths are true. And that's OK. Whether or not such myths are true, false or somewhere in between, it's still fun to believe them.

But, what's not fun – or safe – is to believe “cleverly devised myths” that subvert the truth of Jesus Christ and his impact on our lives – your life. And yet, that's what was happening to Christians the world over when Peter wrote his second letter to the wavering faithful of his time, and that's what's happening today. Far too many people are believing cleverly devised myths that undermine what Jesus teaches and embodies, and how that is playing out in our world.

Peter, in today's New Testament lesson, is writing to Christians who had their doubts about Jesus. More than 30 years have passed since Jesus' death and resurrection, and people are wondering if

¹ Retrieved Feb. 19, 2020 from <https://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/science/is-the-5-second-rule-true> and <https://www.ranker.com/list/mythbusters-busted-myths/jacob-shelton>.

they backed the right person, believed the right story, pinned their hopes and dreams on the real Messiah. And Peter calls them on it, saying, "... We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty."

That's a pretty powerful statement. I saw it with my own eyes; believe me; you know me; you can trust me – Peter, who you know was a friend and follower of Jesus, who received the Holy Spirit, who did miracles in the name of Christ, Peter, who Jesus called the "rock on which he would – and did – build his church; this church, our faith community of servant leaders.

Peter is giving his word directly to us about what Jesus calls us to do and be, and still, people would rather believe what society tells them, things like legalism which is believing we have to earn salvation through good works.

Another popular myth was and is Antinomianism, which rejects the laws of God and society, brazenly defying moral, religious and social norms. And then there was and is Gnosticism, which says that salvation comes through special knowledge that only a few can attain. Those were the myths of Peter's day and they are still feeding the myths of our day.

One prevailing myth that trips us up is known as the "In Crowd." According to the "In Crowd" myth, certain people are more worthy than others. This myth can lead to prejudice and oppression against those at the lower levels of society, that they're not worthy of a chance to get ahead.

The truth is, there are unworthy people at all levels of society and there are lots of underserved people who just need to be given a break to get ahead. Another myth is: "If it Feels Good, Do It." This myth says you don't have to worry about living according to God's will.

The truth is, we all sin and we all need God's guidance to recognize the sin within ourselves and repent, turn away from it, relying on God for a better way forward. Finally, there's what I call the "Whatever" myth. This myth says that truth can be dismissed with a simple, "Whatever." You think I was speeding officer? Whatever; just give me the ticket and let me go." "You saw me cheating on the test? Whatever; it's a stupid test anyway."

No! Not whatever. It matters. It matters whether we have a sense of right and wrong. It matters whether we can recognize the truth when we see it. It matters whether you stop to listen to another person and really consider his or her feelings, his or her insights.

Or as Peter says, "You will do well to be (as) attentive to (the truth of Jesus Christ) as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." In other

words, truth matters and our faith in Jesus Christ is sure – he will overcome the darkness of this and any age, as we let Jesus-not society-guide our hearts.

So, if truth matters and our faith is sure, how do we do our part in keeping the faith and discerning the truth in a time when religion is dismissed as not necessary and the truth is “whatever” – whatever works for you and your position on things?

Well, Peter points to the source of divine truth and the one who actively shapes our lives today according to God’s will – that one being the Holy Spirit. “First of all,” says Peter, “you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation” This means that we are not free to put our own spin on the words and teachings of Jesus.

Everything we do and say and believe has to be scrutinized by the Spirit of divine truth, which we do by studying the Bible, listening to one another in good faith and with a godly purpose, and praying to God that the Lord would show us the way.

“... No prophecy,” says Peter – no divine truth – “ever came by human will, but (rather by) men and women moved by the Holy Spirit”

J.V. Taylor, in his book “The Go-Between God,” put it this way: “The Holy Spirit is that power which opens eyes that are closed, hearts that are unaware and minds that shrink from too much reality....”²

The Holy Spirit “guides our feet that are so prone to walking off the path. It convicts our hearts that are so easily clouded by sin. It fills our minds with peace in the face of pain and death. *These* are the gifts that Christ’s enduring, divine and prophetic word gives,”³ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

How does the Holy Spirit speak to you, today? What is the Holy Spirit saying that could positively impact your life? Think about it. What can you do to more clearly hear the Spirit of God direct you in your daily living?

If you would like the answer to these questions, make the commitment right now to attend Dr. Stancil’s adult Sunday school class teaching on the Holy spirit, next Sunday at Westminster Hall, at 9:15 a.m..

² J.V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 19.

³ **Bob Kaylor, our Senior Writer, and Senior Minister of the Park City United Methodist Church in Park City, Utah.**

And in the meantime, begin to ask yourself as you go through the days ahead, how is the Holy Spirit speaking to me, what am I hearing, and what blessings are being extended to you, your family, this country and our world if only we would more faithfully attend to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

O Lord our God and Savior, you sent the disciples and apostles to the very ends of the earth to teach and proclaim your message, to heal all illnesses, and to reveal the mysteries of the faith, hidden from humankind since the creation of the earth.

We pray that you would enlighten and bless our understanding, our sense of what's what. Give us the gift of perseverance to find our way safely and faithfully through this misguided and lost world.

By your Spirit, enable us to do and to act in accordance with your commands as set out in the gospel, and may the fruit of the gospel be increased in us many times over.

We pray, too, for those in need of an extra special measure of your healing and comfort. Give them the sure hope of your saving grace, and bring them the peace of Christ, which passes all understanding.

In Jesus' name we pray, as he taught us, saying:

**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.**