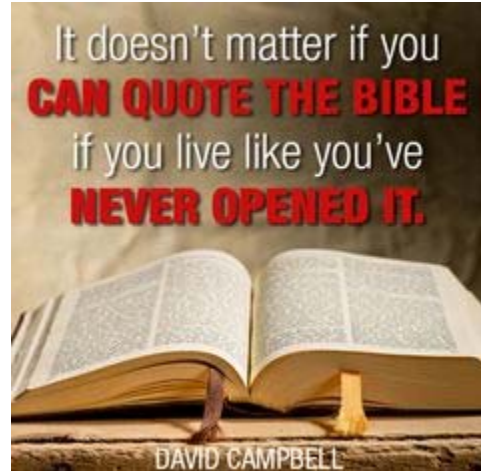


One of the great strengths of the Episcopal Church is our understanding that questions are extremely important if faith is to become belief which is then lived out every day in every circumstance we face. There are no stupid questions. What is important is that we engage with our faith, with the scripture, with what we see every day in our ordinary work, to determine what it means and how we are to respond. To quote David Campbell: “It doesn’t matter if you can quote the Bible if you live like you’ve never opened it.”



To read scripture is only part of the goal. Reading is the first, and not the last, step. Now, not every scripture or meditation demands that we immediately get up out of our chair and take some specific action. Indeed, some scripture needs to sit with us awhile – maybe even a long time. We may need time and reflection to understand what Jesus or the prophets were saying 2000 years ago in a context very different from our own – to enable us to see where and how it might be relevant to us today. To understand how our gifts and talents might be best used to help bring the realm of God closer to reality on earth. And, over our lifetime, we may come to understand a particular scripture in different ways and as calling forth different reactions from us and our community.

Drew Downs, Rector at St. Stephen’s, Terre Haute, shared this story:

Thursday at our Bible Study, we talked about sharing the Good News with others.

Now, this is a good group of Episcopalians, so instantly, the conversation went to the good things we could do for others.

After entertaining the conversation for more than a few minutes, I asked:

"I know we are good at proclaiming the Good News with our lives, but can any of us speak to a time when we did so with our lips?"

[Drew continues] I have the good fortune of preaching weekly, which has to be one of my favorite things. But something I actually like better is talking about what GOD is doing in the world.

It was never the case before. Especially when people used those churchy words and I would sigh and zone out. But I hear it differently now. Not because I'm older or wiser. It isn't because of who I am.

It's because of what I chose to do: which is to value the Good News enough to wrestle with it with other people. And it's years of preaching and teaching and learning and reading and conversing and wrestling.

...It isn't going up to random people and asking "Can I tell you about Jesus?" or quoting Bible verses at people like some kind of cryptic puzzle keeper. I just got used to talking

with people about who they think GOD is to them. Sharing some of the stories and how they might connect with their story. It's practice. Living a life of faith takes practice.

Drew's blog post is particularly relevant to today's Gospel message. Intellectual knowledge is necessary and it isn't the end all and be all. We need to incorporate emotional understanding and physical action to live a life of faith. It takes practice and it takes willingness to be vulnerable as not everyone is going to welcome us with open arms and open minds or hearts.

Jesus reminds us today of how blessed we are. Most of us are like the rich man – we live behind a gate (perhaps real or perhaps metaphorical) that insulates us, to a large degree, from the beggars of this world. But poor, sick, hungry, lame, beggars are here, even here, in Crawfordsville. Even here in Crawfordsville we need to practice our faith in how we live our lives.

There are many reasons that people seek assistance – and for most of us, supporting these ministries is primarily writing a check – a gate, if you will, that keeps us from close up and personal contact with those in need.

But our community has a Lazarus – that poor, hungry, sick, lame person – that we pass by and probably don't even see. You see what you expect to see – and if we are not used to looking for those in need among us, we may literally pass right by someone in need without consciously recognizing that person as someone in need. According to Johann Metz, "Faith gives Christians hope; however, it is faith that does justice that brings forth solutions to our problems since God works through human beings in creating the kingdom."¹

Metz calls the church a moral institution but even more than that, the bearer of hope. The hope that our community may one day be a more just place where we don't walk by the beggar at the gate without stopping to see how we might respond to his needs. Where we offer salve for open wounds rather than letting the dogs lick the sores.

The rich man now sitting in Hades, or Hell, depending upon your translation, needs hope. He seems finally to have recognized that while he was oblivious to the suffering and needs of Lazarus during their respective lifetimes. There is the possibility of a different outcome for his brothers. What will it take for the five brothers – and for us – to hear Moses and the prophets? Are we really better than the five brothers – we ignore even one raised from the dead who calls us to repent.

Is coming to church enough? Probably not. That's a scary thought, isn't it? But coming to church without changing your heart – without changing how you live your life, can be like the Pharisees praying in public so that others might see them and be impressed.

Ron Allen, one of my seminary professors, says that "In revealing God, Jesus reveals love, life, truth, sight, fullness and abundance. In making known these things, Jesus makes God known. ...

¹ <http://web02.gonzaga.edu/metz/hope.html> (September 23, 2010).

Life, for instance, is not simply a matter of biology, but is the quality of existence that embodies the characteristics of heaven.”²

What would Moses and the prophets have told the rich man and his five brothers if they were astute enough to listen? From Moses in Deuteronomy, chapter 15: “[do] not [to] be hard hearted or tight-fisted toward your neighbor... Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so ... and open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.” From the prophets, particularly Micah in chapter 6: And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.

If these were the only two pronouncements from Moses and the prophets that the rich man and his five brothers heard – and understood – and lived, I think Jesus, through Father Abraham, is telling the rich man that he would not be sitting in Hades begging for a drop of water from the outstretched finger of Lazarus.

Jesus calls us to remain connected through listening to Moses and the prophets and Jesus. To the message that life at its best exemplifies what it is like in heaven – where all are cared for, where none are hungry, lame, poor or in need of dogs to lick their wounds. Where there is no gate separating us from others. And we do not need a gate because we finally understand that each of us is created from love of God and are loved by God.

Elie Weisel said that the opposite of love is not hate but indifference. In responding to questions about what this means, a blogger stated that indifference means we are unconnected to those around us –and when we are unconnected we permit life to be wasted and destroyed.³ The rich man does not appear to be an evil man, in the sense of affirmatively and intentionally ignoring Lazarus lying at the gate of his house. His sin is the sin of indifference. An indifference that enabled the rich man to “look past” Lazarus, whose sores were licked by the dogs because no other medical care was offered.

The question Jesus offers up for us today is: where are we blind to what lies in front of us? Where are we indifferent to the needs of others? Yes, donor fatigue exists. Yes, the poor will always be with us. Even so, we are called to do what we can, when we can and how we can. We can show, by our actions, that faith overcomes indifference. When we live our faith, we live a life which exhibits the quality of existence that embodies the characteristics of heaven. Or, as Arianna Huffington wrote and David Brooks reminds us: live your eulogy not your resume.⁴ Don’t let your eulogy be the first time people learn where you gave your heart and how you connected to family, friends and those in need. A life which integrates love of and for God in how we actually live day to day is life that really is life. And this kind of life, then, when it is time for the eulogy to be given, will have heads nodding and smiles coming as those hearing the eulogy will say, “yes, how true!” *Amen.*

² Ronald J. Allen. The Life of Jesus for Today (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 86.

³ <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20100821232243AA54HZn> (Sept. 23, 2010).

⁴ September 23, 2013. www.huffingtonpost.com/arianna-huffington/are-you-living-your-eulogy-or-your-resume_b_3936937.html.