



Our Collect for this morning bears repeating and pondering our response in a world that seems pretty chaotic. We live in a world, where if you follow the national press or even talk to your neighbors, Christians are not always welcome – sometimes overtly and sometimes simply dismissed as being deluded or foolish. Sometimes Christians are “cancelled” by our culture.

Our Collect encourages us though to continue to in the study of Scripture as one way of learning how to live as people of faith:

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

The Collect reminds us of other occasions in our Scripture where Jesus or God tell us not to be worried about what we are to say. The prophet Ezekiel, he of the “dry bones” fame, eats Scripture as one way of demonstrating how the holy words live within him. In Ezekiel chapter 2, starting at verse 8, God says to the prophet:

<sup>8</sup> “Only take care, son of man, that you don’t rebel like these rebels. Open your mouth and eat what I give you.”

<sup>9-10</sup> When I looked he had his hand stretched out to me, and in the hand a book, a scroll. He unrolled the scroll. On both sides, front and back, were written lamentations and mourning and doom.

<sup>3</sup> He told me, “Son of man, eat what you see. Eat this book. Then go and speak to the family of Israel.”

<sup>2-3</sup> As I opened my mouth, he gave me the scroll to eat, saying, “Son of man, eat this book that I am giving you. Make a full meal of it!” So I ate it. It tasted so good—just like honey. (The Message)

We have another example in the Gospel of Matthew, in chapter 10, starting at verse 19, as Jesus warns his followers of persecutions to come simply as a result of following Jesus. Jesus says:

<sup>17-20</sup> “Don’t be naive. Some people will impugn your motives, others will smear your reputation—just because you believe in me. Don’t be upset when they haul you before the civil authorities.

Without knowing it, they’ve done you—and me—a favor, given you a platform for preaching the kingdom news! And don’t worry about what you’ll say or how you’ll say it. The right words will be there; the Spirit of your Father will supply the words. (The Message)

We read Scripture on Sunday mornings as one way to claim – or reclaim- our heritage. To remember the stories on which our faith is built and flourished. To hear again the values that God sets before us as the way to live that honor God and each other. Scripture helps us understand better what it means when we hold up the two great commandments: love God and love neighbor.

When we know Scripture deep within ourselves, then our actions and our decisions reflect our understanding of what God has called us to be and to do. To love our neighbor as ourselves by feeding the

Isaiah 65:17-25; Canticle 9; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Luke 21:5-19

hungry, by visiting the sick, by caring for the least and the lost, and by creating a community that welcomes everyone.

The Collect recognizes, perhaps unwittingly, that we learn differently. Hear. Read. Mark. Learn, Inwardly digest. Scripture study is not once and done. It is an ongoing, lifelong process. Where we are in our life, what has happened to us in our life impacts how and what we hear or read. And, this Collect gives us permission to use our pencils, pens and markers to mark up the text (really, I know that wasn't the actual meaning of "mark" when this text was written, but it's fun to take the word "mark" in that way).

Learning is a process- ask any teacher as he or she goes over concepts multiple times. Some of us do get it the first time but many of us need the repetition. Maybe we weren't really paying attention the first time. Or maybe we were paying attention but the concepts were new and so the meaning didn't sink in. And then there is the glorious moment when we "get it." Even then, though, it's good to revisit Scripture because our lives change and sometimes we can understand Scripture differently because of those experiences.

Inwardly digesting says to me that the hope is the Scripture becomes so deeply embedded in my being that all my decisions, all my actions, all my values reflect what Scripture says. I don't have to stop and consciously think about a decision – when love God and love neighbor is deeply embedded in my being, when it is simply part of who I am and how I live my life, then my decisions, actions and values will reflect that.

It's a fair question to ask "well, what about all the violence in the Bible" – the cases where God is reported to have told the Israelites to kill every man, woman, child and all the animals? What about the trickery and deceit practiced by Jacob upon Esau to get the birthright? Am I supposed to emulate those stories?

No. The question for those stories and situations might be, why were they included in our Holy Scripture? What can we learn from those stories that seem so antithetical to the God we proclaim as love incarnate. They seem so opposite of a God that seeks peace and promotes the health and well-being of all creation.

These kinds of questions about Scripture highlight why study is so important. Google makes research much easier, provided you use an inquiring mind and ask critical questions. It's one reason why the Jews and The Episcopal Church support group study. In a group, when we have trust among the members, we can raise those contradictory and troubling passages. At the end of the day, we may not have a black-and-white answer for all time, but hopefully we've had some good discussion and we've learned from each other. Finding out others also struggle with a text or an issue can make us feel less alone. Another reason for gathering as a group is that Jesus promised to be with us when two or more are gathered in his name (Matthew 18:20).

There was an interesting editorial by Nicole Ault in The Wall Street Journal on November 4, 2019 about Kanye West, who is not someone I have ever cared to follow or someone that I know much about beyond his name. The article was about Kanye's turn to Christianity in a "cancel culture" that "demands penance but doesn't forgive". First of all, I had to look up what "cancel culture" is. Here's the Wikipedia definition:

*Cancel culture* is a form of boycott in which someone, typically a celeb, has shared a questionable opinion, or again, has had problematic behavior called out on social media. That person is then "canceled," which essentially means they're boycotted by a large number of people, sometimes leading to massive declines in the person's fanbase and career.

(<https://www.insidehook.com/article/internet/youthsplaining-everything-you-need-to-know-about-cancel-culture-11/15/2019>)

Isaiah 65:17-25; Canticle 9; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Luke 21:5-19

No forgiveness. No redemption. No grace. No mercy. The opposite of what Jesus calls us to do and to be: love God, love neighbor.

Yes, it is fair and it is right to ask for an apology and contrition. And in response, Jesus asks us to extend to the other love and forgiveness, grace and mercy. We pray this each time we recite the Lord's Prayer: Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. We pray this with Jesus on the cross when he says: Forgive them for they know not what they are doing. We are reminded of this in the story of the woman caught in adultery: "let the one without sin cast the first stone" and then "go and sin no more."

Because we humans fail time and again, it's one reason the Confession is important to our service. Whether we say a corporate confession or an individual one, it is important to acknowledge where we have gone astray. Where we have failed to live into the way shown us by Jesus. But no confession is complete without Absolution. We need to know that God hears our repentance. God accepts our regrets and our hopes to do better – God stands ready to welcome us back, no matter the sin.

Over and over and over again, God and Jesus model for us how to hear, read, learn, mark and inwardly digest Scripture until it becomes so embedded in us that our actions, values and responses show that we love God and love neighbor. Hear. Read. Learn. Mark. Inwardly digest all that God has laid out for us so that we can be a light to the world. Love God, Love neighbor and all the rest is commentary. Amen.