


“Smothered Steak”

Sunday, October 16, 2016

21st Sunday after Pentecost

 **(2 Timothy 3:14-4:5, NRSV)**

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.

For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.

As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

[2nd Service: *Affirmation of Faith*]

[MESSAGE]

[GRAPHIC: beautiful filet mignon]

I was born and raised in the Kansas City area.

Kansas City is home to the American Royal, one of the largest stockyards in the country, and some of the best steakhouses you will ever visit.

We lived for a time in the Fort Worth area, also home to a well-known stockyard and some really great steakhouses.

I've also had the pleasure of eating at the Cattleman's Steakhouse located in the Oklahoma City stockyard.

I have to confess that I am a snob – a steak snob.

I enjoy a quality cut of beef, cooked perfectly, and served with little or no frills – just the steak and some salt and pepper.

[GRAPHIC: “Smothered Steak”]

I have never understood the concept of smothering a steak in thick sauces and other stuff that hide the essential deliciousness of the steak; unless the cook is ashamed of what they are serving and is trying to hide it.

Scripture is like a carefully aged filet mignon.

It is rich and flavorful when it is presented well.

Sometimes, however, it gets smothered by people who don't appreciate how wonderful it is all by itself.

Let us pray...Lord, help us to appreciate your Word and teach us to understand how sacred tradition

informs our lives as Christians in the world today.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The first thing we need to understand about Paul's letter to Timothy is what "*sacred writings*" he is referring to that are useful and inspired by God.

I think that most Christians today would point to the entire Bible – the Old and the New Testaments – as the object of Paul's reference.

That would not be accurate.

The New Testament was still in the process of being written when Paul wrote this letter.

It would be more than two hundred years before the writings were gathered into any kind of cohesive collection and more than four hundred years before the official canon of the New Testament was complete.

The "*sacred writings*" in this story are the books we have called The Old Testament; they simply knew them as "*The Law and the Prophets*".

The earliest Christians were discovering how Jesus was revealed from within their traditions.

Contemporary Christianity seems to view the Jewish religion as the negative religious *obstruction* to Jesus and his followers.

Most scholars agree, however, that Jesus is the **fulfillment** of Judaism.

Paul tells Timothy that the knowledge of salvation is arrived at *through* the Old Testament as it is illuminated by and viewed through the lens of Jesus Christ.

The sacred writings about the old covenant between God and God's people reveal the new covenant of salvation when they are illuminated by the word *about* Jesus, the words *of* Jesus, and the **Word** of God that **is** Jesus.

Theologian John Frederick suggests:

“Through Jesus Christ the gracious work of God amongst the Jews throughout the history of the Hebrew people is expanded and multiplied exponentially in its scope and power. The recipients of redemption evolve from a preliminary epoch in which one faithful people are blessed in

order to bring blessing and life to the world, to an everlasting epoch in which salvation of the whole world is achieved and made available to all through the work of the one faithful Israelite, namely Jesus Christ. ”

I think that Timothy may have encountered what many believers have found through the years – The message of Jesus Christ is simple and maybe it is just too simple for some people.

It has always been tempting for humanity to add things to God’s word; to embellish God’s laws; and to make it more difficult for “outsiders” to “join the club.”

Paul writes to remind Timothy that the truth is enough. Then he predicts that the time will come when people are no longer satisfied with the simple truth and their “*itching ears*” will send them hunting for teachers “*to suit their own desires.*”

You see, the “*simple truth*” of Jesus is not easy and some folks choose “*easy*” over “*simple.*”

A couple weeks ago I mentioned a guy who wrote a book about living for a year according to the rules, regulations, and teachings of the Bible.

His name is A.J. Jacobs and he calls himself a “*secular Jew*”.

To live according to Deuteronomy 22, he hired a man to test his clothing to be sure he did not mix linen and wool together in the same garment.

As told in Exodus 23, he removed all references to false gods from his vocabulary; this meant he could no longer say the words “*Wednesday*” and “*Thursday*” because they honor the false gods *Thor* and *Woden*.

He didn’t cut the sides of his hair to obey Leviticus 19 and wore only white clothing to satisfy Ecclesiastes 9:8.

The list goes on and Mr. Jacob’s story has a sense of humor about it. The idea that he would try this is odd, but the results seem to show that the Bible is really not a very good guide for living.

A few years ago, the brilliant Shakespearean actor Ian McKellen told an interviewer, “*I have often thought the Bible should have a disclaimer in the front saying this is fiction.*”

Jacob’s attempt to live the Bible literally and McKellen’s dismissal of it as pure fiction point to a broader issue for the contemporary church: the Bible is *out of season*.

A lot of people know little or nothing about it.

Many people don’t even think it matters; it is irrelevant to our culture and lifestyle.

The temptation of the Christian community is to look for another book; to seek more relevant writers and themes that bring meaning to our twenty-first century lives.

Paul tells Timothy: “*proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable.*” – preach the Word in season and out of season!

The point is that the word of God is **always relevant**.

No matter the time period or generation; no matter the cultural conventions; no matter the language or nation – the Scriptures will always speak to the heart and soul of who we are as human beings.

When we relegate Bible stories to ancient literature, we ignore the potential of ongoing truth.

When we try to link acceptance to absolute literalism, we encourage skepticism.

When we put our own “*spin*” on Scripture to force it to matter today, we smother the finest filet mignon with ketchup.

God breathed life into his word.

That’s what it means to say that, “*all scripture is inspired by God...*”

We must not smother this living, breathing document that is God’s gift to us.

We need to let it breathe and continue to bring life to every generation.

The word of God is not only **inspired**, it is *inspiring* – it breathes new life into each person

who embraces it; it breathes new life into the world whenever it is proclaimed.

I think that is what Paul means when he tells Timothy that scripture is “*useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.*”

That is just as true today as it was 2,000 years ago –
Of course the Bible remains relevant!

If we place our faith in the latest best-selling spiritual guide or self-help book, we will always be waiting for the next new thing that is more relevant than the one we’ve just finished.

We can never find timeless truth in the pages of the latest book club award winner; only the word of God brings us timeless truth.

Does this mean there is no value in reading the interpretive essays and thoughtful ruminations of human authors with something to share?

NO, that’s not what I’m saying.

We should not, however, test our moral sense of right and wrong against these finite sources.

There is good news in this letter for all of us.

Even though we may wander off from time to time and look for relevance, the simple truth remains: **our salvation has been accomplished in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.**

In Jesus we learn the most important of God's laws: love God, love others AND we see how we are called to change the world.

That's a pretty simple message.

The Old Testament – the “*sacred writings*” – reveals countless examples of how God grace and mercy has redeemed God's people.


- Think of Jacob who stole his brother's inheritance and later struggled with God and won – He became “Israel,” father of the twelve tribes.
- Think of David, when Nathan confronts him with his adultery David acknowledges his sin and God forgives him.
- Think of Moses leading the Israelites to freedom.

Then notice how God's mercy flows through the stories of Jesus:

- Think of the prodigal son who is welcomed home after squandering his inheritance.
- Think of Zacchaeus, condemned by his community for being a tax collector, but welcomed by Jesus when he learns generosity.
- What about the woman at the well, ridiculed for having five husbands; and Peter who acts brave and then denies Jesus at the cross.

Jesus is able to see potential in all of these people, even when we don't recognize it.

We smother God's message when we fail to act with grace as Jesus did.

 The Bible does not need a disclaimer to say it is fiction; likewise, it does not need our help to make it relevant.

It may need a warning, however, to all those who read it, the Bible is so true it will change you.

“As we read it, we discover that above all we are outmatched by the love and grace of God who has given us his word and given us his Son, that we might know life eternal here and now and forevermore.”ⁱ

Don't smother the steak; let its full flavor be savored by a world hungry for authentic truth.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

ⁱ Holmes, J. Peter, *“Feasting on the Word”* YC-V4-P-187