

TRINITARIAN BIBLE STUDY
Sermon for Pentecost 2A-Mt 9:35-10:8
LPC, 6/18/17

Today we baptize a tiny child: Isabella Marie Wheeler. Her parents and godparents and the rest of us will promise to do all in our power to uphold her in her life in Christ. At one point someone may give her a children's Bible. Children's Bibles have brightly colored illustrations and simplified versions of Bible stories that appeal to youngsters, like Noah's Ark and Jesus and the children.

We hope that this will be the beginning of a lifetime of Bible reading. But we know that not all parts of the Bible are as easy to read and understand as Noah's Ark and Jesus and the children. Sometimes we have a Bible passage like today's Gospel lesson: one that cannot easily be illustrated or reduced to simple language.

In the interest of encouraging Bible reading into adulthood, I'd like to offer one method of reading the Bible that may be helpful to the adults in this congregation. This method involves asking three questions after one reads a passage:

1. What is the underlying truth this passage carries?
2. How can I respond authentically to this passage?
3. Which way does love lie?

If the passage is particularly obscure, uncovering the underlying truth may require some help, such as consulting a commentary, or even consulting a friendly priest like me! I'm always happy to help. If the literal meaning seems counter to the teachings of Jesus, you may have to probe a little. Take the context into account – what comes before and after? Try and figure out how the original hearers might have heard this passage. It is perfectly all right to try to do a little interpretation.

Then you look for what is authentic for you in the passage. This is where the Bible can really speak to you. We Christians believe that the Bible is a living document. What that means is that God still uses the Bible to communicate to God's people.

This may mean that the same passage may not say the same thing to you as it does to your neighbor. Or it may mean that what this passage says to you today may not be the same as what it said to you last time you read it. This is one reason to read the Bible again and again. In church we hear the same passage every three years, and each time it is new.

Finally the question about love is a call for action. This is how the Bible and your response to it translate into the Living Word of God living through you. Which way does love lie for me? How can God's Holy Word, perfectly incarnate in Jesus Christ, be incarnate in me?

Let's try this three-step process with today's Gospel reading. First, what is the underlying truth here? "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few." The truth here seems to be that there is a lot of work to be done in God's kingdom... enough work for everyone to have something to do.

Jesus says to his disciples, “Proclaim the good news that the kingdom of God has come near. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and cast out demons...” The truth here is that Christ’s gospel is to be shared, and this gospel is about health, life and liberation. Jesus does not direct the disciples, at this point anyway, to teach anything. Christ’s gospel is not, at least in the first analysis about creeds, correct dogma, or having had a particular kind of spiritual experience. It is definitely not about threatening people with hell. Christ’s gospel is first and foremost about love and healing.

Incidentally, this is one way we Episcopalians defend the baptism of infants like Isabella. Rational acceptance if not necessary for inclusion in God’s family. This adoption is pure gift from God, not dependent upon the virtues or actions of the recipient. The gospel is first and foremost about love, which is something, even an infant, understands and can receive.

So what is authentic in this passage for me? It’s authentic in that, however improbable it seems, God has a role, for me, Cynthia, in God’s work. When this thought first occurred to me it blew my socks off. God has a role for me? As imperfect as I am? Well, yes. God has a role for me. God has a role for you. God has a role for little Isabella. How awesome is that?

Now, which way does love lie? Well, I might call to mind a situation I know that needs healing, or a life-giving presence, or a liberating word to be spoken. An example of a healing action might be to forgive someone, or to accept forgiveness for myself. A life-giving action might be anything from donating blood to doing something I need to do to take care of myself. An act of liberation might be to call someone who is lonely and free them, at least for a time, from solitude and pain. Or it just might be to pray wholeheartedly for the healing of the world, beginning with a prayer for my own healing.

When you read the Bible, ask what the universal truth might be in your passage. Ask how it is authentic for you personally, and then ask, what way does love lie?

It’s very Trinitarian.