

**Sunday, January 22, 2017 – Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Preacher: Rev. Douglas J. Brouwer**

**Sermon Title: “The Bible: God’s Word to Us” (part three)**

**Scripture Readings: 2 Timothy 3:14-17 and John 1:1-14**

Note: Last week I asked the question, “How do we know?”, and the answer over the centuries has been General Revelation and Special Revelation. In General Revelation we say that God reveals himself in history, nature, and human life. In Special Revelation we say that God reveals himself in scripture – for Christians the books of the Old and New Testament. A comment to consider before we begin: God has gone to great lengths to communicate with us! In history, nature, human life, the words of scripture, and the person of Jesus Christ.

1. The first point to make here is that the content of revelation is a person. God reveals himself to us. Maybe this is most dramatically expressed in John’s gospel where Jesus says, “I am the truth.” In other words, the truth is a person, not a concept or an idea. God does not reveal to us an explanation of the world, a list of ethical laws and principles, or a liberal (or conservative) political ideology. God reveals himself as a personal, living God. Does this change (or challenge) your idea of revelation?
2. Next, the knowledge that results from revelation is not theoretical but personal. Put another way, this means that our knowledge is not about God, but of God. Knowing about God means believing intellectually (and grasping rationally) that there is a God. To know about God means having information about God. To know God, on the other hand, means to experience God, to have a personal relationship with God. This is a common theme in the Old Testament. God frequently states through the prophets that the people do not know God, despite their orthodox beliefs and proper religious rituals. You might want to ask how much of your devotional life is devoted to accumulating knowledge about God, instead of conforming yourself to the person he reveals to us.
3. The knowledge that is given in God’s revelation is knowledge about something (someone!) new and unexpected. The word “revelation” itself suggests that something previously unknown or hidden has now come to light. Our ways (and our thoughts) are not God’s ways. Therefore, when revelation happens, we are confronted with a new reality, something we had not considered before – “what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived” (1 Corinthians 2:9). Sometimes God’s revelation is so new and unexpected that it can be offensive to those who think they already know who God is and what God would say and do (if God is really God). In the first century, it seemed like “foolishness” that an all-powerful God would come to us in weakness and allow himself to be

crucified. What old ideas of yours have had to be challenged in light of the new revelation we have received in Jesus Christ?

4. Interestingly, God's self-revelation comes to us (often) as word-in-action. In other words, we are introduced to a God in the Old Testament who not only spoke, but who was moved with compassion, who felt anger, who hears, who responds, who judges, who saves, who creates, who loves what he has created, etc, etc. Even when God speaks, he often speaks about what he has done... "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." The God we meet in scripture is anything but a passive God who merely speaks now and then. Our God is ACTIVE, purposeful, in motion, etc.
5. Here's one last question to consider: Do you believe in the Bible? The proper answer – surprisingly – is that we do not. Our faith is not in a book but in the God we learn to know (and trust) in and through the book. We do not believe in Isaiah or Paul or John; we believe in Jesus Christ. The biblical writers are not themselves God's self-revelation; they are witnesses to it. One of my teachers along the way once said, "We believe the Bible just when we do not believe *in* the Bible but in the living, acting, speaking God to whom the biblical writers introduce us" Shirley C. Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*. You may want to reflect on the distinction between the Bible as the word of God and Jesus Christ as the Word of God.
6. Here's a bonus question: Did God's self-revelation end when the 66 books of the Protestant Bible were agreed upon? Or does God continue to reveal himself in our time? It's important for me to say that the orthodox answer is the latter, but you may want to reflect a bit further on this. If God continues to reveal himself, where does he do it? In what ways? And here's a good question: Do we learn anything that isn't already found in scripture?