

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, October 16, 2016, Year C

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: 2Timothy 3:14-4:5

“God Breathed”

I will be honest with you - I struggled in preparing for today's sermon. All of the readings that we have from the Lectionary that are in today's bulletin and then the Holy Gospel – I struggled; which do I use as the source of our sermon today? You know I almost always preach from the Gospel – you cannot get a better source than that! So I will begin with some words from today's Holy Gospel: *“when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”* Wow! You just have to watch the news; and that is a big question – that is a huge question! And then there is the Old Testament lesson from Genesis in which we find our hero, Jacob struggling with his brother Esau, but here we find Jacob struggling with an adversary – who is not really an adversary – it is God! God gives him a new name; one that a lot of people forget. They think it is a country that is situated in the Middle East, but no – it is the name of a man and his son's – and the the tribes that came from him. When we talk about the tribes of Israel – we are talking about the twelve sons of Jacob – not of a country. The country got its name from the people. And so I prayed – am I supposed to preach on this? And then 2 Timothy spoke to me – because I believe we are living in that time.

Some people who open the Bible at random have an experience that is somewhat bewildering. It might look like what they see is a jumble of old bits and pieces of writing, a little bit of poetry, history, folk tales, ethical instruction, and even some strange stories (like the wrestling match in Genesis today) and we might find some even stranger people! Reading the Gospel, the Epistles, the Old Testament can seem, at least to begin with, like wandering through old courtyards where somebody once lived a long time ago. If you have ever gone over to Europe, or even to the Middle East and you walk through ruins, or old castles – we are so used to having remarkable re-creations in our country – like theme parks that are made to look like castles – but seeing the real thing, going to Israel, going to the Holy Land and walking through places that are written about in the Scripture – jumps to life. Yesterday in our discussion during the Confirmation class – someone told us that a family member of theirs went to Israel several times, and how the Bible has just come to life. Sometimes people are tempted to put the whole thing aside – saying “that's not real.” When most people; most believers open the Scriptures - something stirs inside - there's a vitality that seems to have a life all of its own – almost as if it is breathing. The early Christians believed that the reason the scriptures were alive was because God had *'breathed'* them in the first place, and the warmth and life of that creative breath was still present and powerful. The Hebrew word for 'breath' is the same word for 'spirit' or 'wind' – it is 'Ruach.' The Holy Spirit is the 'Ruach ha Kadesh.' Is this starting to make sense here about how the Scriptures came about? It is amazing!

Please turn to page 1853 in your Pew Bibles to 2 Timothy 3:16 *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”* The word *'breathed'* is quite often translated as 'inspired'. There are some difficulties with the word 'inspired' the way people use it today, and we need to set them aside before seeing what Paul is actually saying.

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People often speak of artists, poets, composers and musicians, and maybe even sports stars make a catch in a baseball game or football game, or a three-point shot” at the buzzer. They might say *‘It was an inspired performance,’* meaning that it was something out of the ordinary or something special just happened. The trouble with this meaning of ‘inspired’ is that it doesn’t even get close to what Paul and other Christian writers mean when they talk about scripture being ‘inspired’. What Paul literally says in verse 16: this thing, this book, has living breath in it, and it’s the breath of God himself! It is not a ‘made-up story’, it is not something that someone pulled out of thin air and said ‘let’s see if we can fool the world.’ It is living and breathing.

I believe, and I think you will agree with me, otherwise we wouldn’t be here today in this building if you didn’t agree with that, the Bible is indeed inspired. The Holy Spirit - speaking through Holy Scripture can make us wise, seeing things in new ways that we hadn’t seen before – understanding ourselves and others, rescued, from the downward spiraling pull of sin and death, and being transformed by God’s forgiving grace so that we become part of His new creation. Scripture not only unveils the living God who we know in Jesus Christ, but, through our reading and praying, we are given a deeper knowledge of God by the wonderful accounts and stories, poetry, symbols, types, history, theology and encouragement that can be found in these pages. Scripture not only gives us the truth about how our lives can be transformed; it will be part of that process. Paul tells us in verse 16 that Scripture is useful for teaching; for rebuking (scolding) – or correcting us. It means, that when we read Scripture it will tell us in no uncertain terms when something we’ve been doing is out of line with God’s will. Sometimes it is very clearly right in the text in front of us; other times, reading the passage, we will hear God gently speaking to us, or maybe not so gently, telling us that this applies to our own lives. When that happens, we need to pay attention!

Reading the Bible will transform you, and will ‘improve’ you. No look at 2 Timothy 3:17 on that same page “*so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*” The aim is to help people who belong to God to become complete people, rich human beings, reflecting God’s image in the way He created us. This is not just some group of stories!

2 Timothy 4:2 a little further down on page 1853 “*Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.*” ‘*The Word*’ refers to the true Christian message, the announcement of ‘Jesus as Lord,’ the Old Testament! We cannot throw it away – for our faith is rooted in the scriptures of Israel – the only ‘Bible’ the earliest Christians had – Genesis right on through Malachi, telling us and preparing us for what happened to Jesus, emphasizing that through His resurrection, He is now enthroned as King and Lord. Paul is saying that Timothy, and in fact all preachers, must keep staying the course as a teacher and preacher.

The end of verse 2 is very important. The preacher has to make things clear ‘*with great patience and careful instruction.*’ The point of this passage is that we are not to simply ‘rebuke’ people, warning them about the dangers of wayward beliefs or behavior, or to encourage people to continue staying on a particular course. We need to back up what we are saying with

clear teaching, going down to the roots of the subject – using Scripture as the proof. I told the class yesterday that if I ever stand up in this pulpit and preach a sermon where I don't refer to the Holy Scripture and unpack what is in it –tell me to leave! No I will leave, because then my ministry is over! I believe it is the responsibility of every Christian, of every pastor, every preacher – to get into the Word! It is God's Holy Word – God breathed. There will come a time, if it hasn't come already, when there will be people within the Christian community who won't want that kind of teaching which will make and keep them healthy and strong in the faith handed down from the Apostles.

Can you imagine people being instructed by their doctors to follow a particular diet, and they discover that half of their favorite foods aren't on that diet. I can tell you that a lot of those people will look for different doctors who will advise them to eat and drink what they like. In the world there are people who go from church to church to church - trying to find preachers who will tell them what their ears are longing to hear –

- that they are all right just as they are, (how many times have you heard me say “God loves you just the way you are – BUT – He loves you too much to leave you that way!”) There are people who are looking to be told ‘it's ok.’
- that they don't need to learn anything more – the don't want to have to open the Bible,
- that they don't have to change their behavior or obey all those rules
- and, maybe, that they don't need to believe all that old stuff about Jesus,
 - all the stories you find in the gospels,
 - because there are different stories,
 - there are different gospels – like the gnostic gospels of Thomas or Mary Magdalene,
 - there are other ways of looking at Jesus and the world.

This is what people often want to hear, and believe me; they'll keep looking till they find it. Let's look at 2 Timothy 4:4 - “*They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.*” Then they think they have got it all the way they want. There is no need to hear about sin, or any consequences for behavior that is ‘unbiblical.’ The church that they have found drifts towards the day of Jesus' Royal Return, and they are unaware that they have accounts that will need to be presented.

You have often heard me speak of preachers in our former church world like the heretical Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong who teaches:

- that Jesus was not born of a virgin; (this is a bishop! – How can you pray the Nicene Creed which says ‘born of the Virgin Mary’? A lot of priest and bishops cross their fingers or hold their breath!)
- Jesus did not die on the cross – but He swooned and was taken to a cool cave to be revived and go out in three days.
- Oh there is more – but I just don't think we need to go on.

You might have heard about the former Episcopal Bishop of Pennsylvania Charles Bennison, from 1998-2012. Bennison who said “the church wrote the bible and can therefore rewrite it” and he also said “that Jesus is "a Christ" but not the Christ.” I don't know about you – but I

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believe what Paul said that “*All Scripture is God-breathed*” and not some sort of ecclesiastical “Etch a Sketch!” If you don’t like it – just erase it and start over!

Paul has an important warning for all preachers in verse 5: (2 Timothy 4:5) “*But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*” Jesus warned in Matthew 18:6 “*But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.*” Jesus also said: (Matthew 7:15 NIV) “*Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.*” Preachers need to remember that they have received a calling; and need to follow that calling and preach nothing but the Truth, teaching God’s people to recognize and know the difference when they hear it.

The Apostles never stopped “*proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.*” (Acts 5:42-1) Jesus is the Christ – Jesus is the Messiah – Jesus is Lord! What is required of preachers and believers is not success, as the world regards success, but loyalty, perseverance and grateful obedience – to our Lord Jesus.

And so I ask you the words of Jesus from today’s Holy Gospel - “*when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?*”