

Psalm 19

New Revised Standard Version

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them God has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and runs its course with joy like a strong man. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and there is nothing hid from its heat. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. But who can understand one's own errors? Clear me from hidden faults. Also keep your servant from the insolent; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

In seminary I learned about the lectionary. Have you ever heard of it? The lectionary, now known as the Revised Common Lectionary, or RCL, is a collection of scripture readings that are supposed to be read on a given Sunday. Each Sunday there is a scripture passage from the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, a Psalm, one from the Letters or Epistles in the New Testament, and a Gospel reading. There are three years: A, B, and C, and they cycle. We are currently in year B. The lectionary has its origin in 1969 with a three-year lectionary produced by the Catholic Church after the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. Our current Revised Common Lectionary is from 1994 and is shared with Catholics, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Methodists.

The scriptures in the lectionary build on one another. The Gospel readings in Year A are from Matthew's Gospel, Year B is Mark's, and Year C is Luke's Gospel. In any given year, the writer of one of the first three gospels will be heard from beginning to end. The major idea behind the lectionary is that on a Sunday mornings members of all these different churches hear the same scripture.

The lectionary also forces a preacher like me to look at scriptures that you might avoid normally. I have my favorite scriptures, and without the lectionary I would preach from the same ten scriptures. It is okay to have favorite scripture and that's what the point of today's worship is. This Lent we have forty days to focus on our spiritual practices to help center ourselves in God. Forty days to ground ourselves in God and experience and practice prayer, scripture reading, fasting, confession, worship and silence in our daily lives. When we don't know what to do, we go back to the basics of spiritual disciplines. When we don't know what to do, spiritual practices help connect us with God and can help us to experience God in new ways.

Each of the weeks during Lent, we have suggested Lenten activities that you can find on our website. I want to encourage you this week to spend five minutes a day reading and reflecting on scripture. There are some suggested scriptures in your Lenten activities for week two. You might want to memorize a favorite scripture or read the suggested scripture for the day and talk about it or journal about it. Reading and meditating on Scripture lays the foundation for the Christian life.

There is a difference between reading, studying and meditating on scripture. What feeds you spiritually? What helps keep you rooted in your faith? We often turn to the Bible expecting that it will fill us up spiritually, but we don't know where to start. I have found that reading

books about the Bible help me to then read the Bible. Books like Rob Bell's *What is the Bible* or Adam Hamilton's *Making Sense of the Bible*. Reading Rachel Held Evans' book *Inspired* helped me to fall more in love with the Bible. I love reading the teachings of Jesus because Jesus challenges me to look at the world differently and to look at all people with love.

The words of the Bible tell the stories of God's people over time, and they give us the clearest picture of Jesus. As Methodists we believe that the scriptures were written by human beings who were inspired by God. They wrote in light of their own experiences, the scientific knowledge that they had access to, and the historical circumstances in which they lived. They were trying to address the needs of the communities to which they wrote. They were shaped by their own understanding of God and by their assumptions and knowledge about what's right and what's wrong in the world.

God speaks to each one of us through the words of scripture. So, before you read the Bible, pray for God to speak to you. "God, open my ears that I might hear what word you have for me as I read today." Then read a few verses or a chapter, maybe the passage that we read together on Sunday. You might write some things down. Then, ask four questions. What did this mean to the people who first heard these words? You might want to study the people to whom the author was writing. For example, in the New Testament book of Philippians, it is a letter that Paul wrote to a church that he helped start in a town called Philippi. While Paul is writing he's in prison, and he's waiting to hear whether he's going to be put to death or not. When you know that, it makes his message of joy and rejoicing even more meaningful.

Question two: what does what you read say about God? Question three: what does what you read say about people; who we are as human beings? Question four: what is a message for me today in this passage? Another way to engage scripture is to see yourself in the story. If you were in the story, who would you be? How would you feel, what would you be thinking? Or try using an acronym like SOAP. S stands for slowly. Read the passage slowly. You might try reading out loud. O stands for observation. What do you observe about the passage? What was different or new for you? Was anything strange or unusual? What was surprising as you read these words? A stands for Application. How do the words that you read apply to your life? Is there a lesson for you in what you read? P is for pray. You might write down your prayer.

I want to encourage you this week to read the Bible. Start with the suggested scripture for this week in your Lent activity bag. You can find those scriptures on our website. Or start with one of the Gospels. As you're reading the Bible, ask God to speak to you. Allow yourself to be shaped by what is in the Bible. This morning we sang Psalm 19 together. C.S. Lewis said Psalm 19 was the greatest poem in the entire Psalter. I love the end of Psalm 19 so much that I pray it every Sunday before I preach. Psalm 19 affirms that love is the basic reality. The love that motivated God to create humanity is the same love seen in the story of Israel, in the life of the writer of Psalm 19, and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The heavens are telling the glory of God. That same God has a word for each one of us in the scriptures.

There is an ancient method of reading the Bible known as *lectio divina*. You read a piece of scripture out loud multiple times. Then you think about the words or phrases that jumped out at you from the passage. When I read Psalm 19 I hear that God is love, and love is the force that drives the universe.

This week may we grow closer to God through the practice of meditating on scripture. When we meditate on scripture, we can learn to find *our* story within it. This Lent I want to encourage us to think about our habits and routines so that we can get in a routine of reading, studying, and meditating on scripture. Thanks be to God, Amen.