

The Breath of God
2 Timothy 3:14-17

October 16, 2016

22nd Sunday After Pentecost

He was a fine young man. He looked good. He looked both handsome - having bright blonde hair and jet blue eyes - as well as healthy – tall, thin, and muscular. He was dressed sharply – blue blazer, gray slacks, powder blue shirt, and red tie. He was free to go wherever he wanted to go. But he didn't. He couldn't. He was laid out in a casket in a mortuary. The young man was dead.

Now contrast this with the first young man we read about in the Bible, Adam. The Scriptures say, "And the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground." (Gen. 2:6) He was basically a lump of clay (not too appealing). He was not free to go anywhere for he was not alive. And then everything changed. The Scriptures say, "And [the Lord God] breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living soul." (Gen. 2:7) Now, Adam is much different than the first young man I described. Regardless of how he looked (and the first young man likely looked MUCH better), Adam had the advantage because he possessed the breath of life from God Himself.

There are many different and fine sounding religions, philosophies, and ways of life which exist in our world today. They all have their spokesmen and their sacred texts to back them up. How does one figure out which one (if any) is right? Comparing and contrasting religions, philosophies, and their accompanying texts may be like comparing and contrasting the two young men at the beginning of the sermon. Some would say they are ALL like the first young man. They may look nice, sound nice, and are freely spread throughout the world, but they just don't have any life in them. No power. They are just dead words.

Many today would like to lump in Christianity and the Bible in with all those other religions, philosophies, and life styles. The Bible may *look* nice. It may have a sharp cover, tabs in it to help you find the books, study helps to guide you through it, and all the words of Jesus printed in red. The Bible may *sound* nice. Who doesn't like to read Psalm 23, the stories of Noah and the Ark, Jonah and the Whale, the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son and so on. Lots of life lessons there. The Bible may be unbound as I said last week and free to be spread throughout the world. The Bible consistently ranks as one of the best-selling books every year.

Yet none of this seems to matter to many people in our world. To them, the Bible is just a collection of old dusty religious records belonging to an ancient people who lived far away from us. There is no current value to the Bible, no accuracy, and no power. Like the first man, it looks good but its dead. This worries Christians and creates doubt. But should it? Not at all.

The Bible is more like Adam than the young man in the mortuary. The Bible may look nice, sound nice, and be free to be spread throughout the world. But there are other religions and philosophies which are like that. What differentiates the Bible from other religions and philosophies is the same thing that differentiates Adam from the young man in the mortuary: life. St. Paul tells us, "All Scripture is breathed out by God." To paraphrase Genesis 2, the Lord breathed into the Scriptures the breath of life and the Scriptures became alive.

Just as a living man can do what a dead man cannot do, so the living Word of God can do th at which other religions and philosophies cannot do. "For the word of God is living and active." (Hebrews 4:12). The Word of God is more than information. It does things because it is alive and has power.

What kind of things? First of all, the living Word of God raises the dead, bringing life where there was none before. You, I, and every person in this world born into this world dead – spiritually dead because of our trespasses and sin. Yet, St. Peter says, "you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God." (1 Peter 1:23) We are alive with the new life that Holy Baptism gives.

But there's more! The living Word of God does more than simply bring us back from spiritual death to new spiritual life. The living Word of God carries us through to eternal life. St. Paul says, "sacred writings...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." The Holy Scriptures do more than inform you about salvation or show you the way to salvation. They make you wise for salvation.

In our ever-changing world of relative rules and floating morality, the living Word of God has made you wise to see the clear and unchanging will of God revealed in His Law and believe it. You are not

fooled by or accepting of the relativistic ethics and changing standards of right and wrong in this world. Furthermore, the living Word of God fights against your sinful nature and allows you to see when you have violated the Word of God and acknowledge it as sin. The living Word of God creates repentance in your heart which causes you to feel sorrow over sin and to turn from sin.

Then comes an even greater miracle. The living Word of God makes you wise by revealing to you that Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God lived a perfect life to gain holiness for a sinful world; died a sacrificial death on a cross to earn forgiveness for sinners; and rose from the grave to life again to win eternal life for a dead humanity AND by creating faith in you to believe and trust that He did all of this for each of you personally and individually. YOU have His holiness. YOU have His forgiveness. YOU have His eternal life.

The God-breathed Word is certainly a great blessing for all of the good things it gives us and does for us. But it is also a great tool to be used by us to accomplish many good things as well. Our text says it is “profitable”. Other translations say it is “useful”. We might ask, “Useful for what?”

The living Word of God is useful for teaching the truth – the truth about God, the truth about us, the truth about right and wrong, the truth about salvation, and the truth about the future. In a world desperately seeking truth, on the one hand, and diligently denying the existence of truth on the other hand, this is a great gift which brings great blessing. Jesus Himself promised, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32)

The living Word of God is useful for reproof. “Reproof” is an old fashioned word that we don’t use often, if ever. It simply means to point out error. This is not too popular or politically correct these days in a world where everyone has their own truth and where it is arrogant or insensitive to claim to point out error.

But we don’t point out error arrogantly, as if it were our opinions or our feelings that determined truth. We merely point out what *God* has determined to be error and has revealed to us in His living word.

We also don’t point out error insensitively for the purpose of bashing someone or building ourselves up. We humbly and lovingly use the living Word of God to point out error for the good of the person holding to the error, not for their humiliation. After all, if your goal is to drive to Colorado, isn’t it a good thing to have a directional error pointed out before you start seeing “Welcome to Canada” signs?

The living Word of God is useful for correction. This follows on the previous use. It’s not enough to simply point out people’s errors (although there seems to be a good number of people who enjoy doing just that). To be loving and helpful, we must also point out the correct way. In the previous example, it’s not enough to point out that someone who wants to go to Colorado is on the way to Canada. Love compels us to show them the correct way to Colorado. So, we humbly and lovingly use the living Word of God to point out errors in belief, doctrine, morality, and life for the safety of those who hold them and, by that same living Word of God and, with that same humble and loving attitude, point out correct ways in belief, doctrine, morality, and life for the benefit of those same people.

Finally, the living Word of God is useful for training (or education) in righteousness (that is, how to be right with God. That involves knowing and believing the truth which the Word of God teaches; rejecting and repenting of any errors in doctrine and life; belief and trust in Jesus Christ and His holy life, sacrificial death, and triumphant resurrection for you and all your errors in faith and action; and accepting and implementing any and all Biblically-based correction. The living Word of God can do all of that.

What is the result of all these uses of the living Word of God with others and for ourselves? It is not to win religious arguments or establish spiritual superiority. We thoroughly use the living Word of God so that the man and the woman of God may be fully competent (i.e. trained) and completely equipped (i.e. able) to do every good work which God places before us. And that is what we desire, is it not?

Our current presidential campaign has showed us just how foolishly and how hurtfully words can be used. Candidates seem more intent on using their words to attack each other than plotting a future course for America. But words can have a very positive and powerful effect. However, not just any words. Some words are weak. Others are lifeless. But not this (*Bible*). This is the very breath of God – the words He breathed out. Receive it accordingly. Use it accordingly. Amen.