

The Bible is the word of God, which is to say that it does not belong to you or to me. The Bible is God's word spoken to accomplish God's purpose. As such, the Bible is a living document. Jesus summarizes the Bible in just 3 verses: *Luke 24:44–47 (NRSV)* ⁴⁴ *Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.”* ⁴⁵ *Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,* ⁴⁶ *and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day,* ⁴⁷ *and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*

Reading the Bible is unlike reading any other book. On the one hand, we cannot simply open the book, flip to a page, and say, “This is the word of God.” We do not reduce the word of God to what is written on the page. This is the Muslim view, which is why Muslims learn Arabic as they believe the word of God was spoken in Arabic. If we were to adapt that point of view, we would need to learn Arabic, Greek, and Hebrew.

The book that we hold in our hands is a translation from those ancient languages into our language. We can do that because the word of God is not language dependent; the word of God is Jesus dependent, “*These are my words...*” he says, ⁴⁵ *Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.*

Reading the Bible may seem like a rather mundane topic, but many of the deep controversies in our society feature one group or another misquoting holy Scripture and wielding the text like a club, because “the Bible says.” *Ephesians 5:22 (NRSV)* ²² *Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.* The opposing group may then pick some text out of the Bible which in and of itself is absurd, *Deuteronomy 22:11 (NRSV)* ¹¹ *You shall not wear clothes made of wool and linen woven together.* Their point is that we shouldn't take the Bible seriously.

Our lesson from Luke suggests a third way; a way to read the Bible in a way that is meaningful and avoids the snare that comes when a verse is lifted out of its context. Before we open the Bible, we open our mind. We ask Jesus to speak his word to us through holy Scripture, and we interpret every verse of the Bible in light of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

It's like reading a really good book. We're so anxious to see how the story ends that we read the end before we finish, then we read every page in light of that sure and certain ending. For us, the ending of the Bible is sure and certain; we read every verse in light of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

We Presbyterians cherish the Bible; the authority of Scripture is one of our core values; it is part of the foundation of the Reformation, and my goal this morning is to help us understand this core value because all too often it is misunderstood; we read the text without being mindful of the context of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus which Jesus teaches us is essential for properly reading the Bible.

So how do we know when we're on the right track (and when we're on the wrong track)?

Jesus has opened the apostles' minds. He has sent them (and us) to be his witnesses in the world. And as his last act before he ascends to the right hand of God, he raises his hands and he blesses them.

So when we are reading the Bible, first, ask Jesus to open your mind. Ask Jesus to bless you through his word. Then open the Bible and ask, does this reading of the Bible bless my neighbor, my Savior, and me? Does this reading bless or does it curse?

Read the Bible with prayer. It is God's word, not your word, not my word, God's word; and God's word is Jesus, our crucified and risen Lord. Bless God and bless God's world with the way you read the Bible. Don't be the one who wields Scripture like a club and declares, "The Bible says." Be the one who blesses because you open mind, then open Bible. Amen.