

April 15th, 2018

Scripture:

Acts 8:26-40

Luke 24:13-35

Colossians 1:15-23

“Connecting the dots.”

If you had to describe the Gospel in just a sentence or two ---- what would you say?

How would you describe the Gospel in just a few words?

“Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.”

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not die but shall have life eternal.”

“Jesus loves you.”

“Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins.”

“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.”

“God knows all there is to know about us and He still loves us --- God came in Christ to save us from death and the forces of evil ---- and one day He will take us back to Himself forever.”

How would you describe the Gospel --- how would you summarize the Gospel in just a few words --- say one sentence?

I think it's safe to say the Gospel is greater than just any one sentence --- as good as some one sentence summaries are.

And not only this but it's safe to say that the Gospel is also greater than just one paragraph ---- one dialogue --- any one person's understanding or articulation.

The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is beyond words --- it's beyond description --- it cannot be contained at all --- except for in the life death

ministry and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ --- which of course goes beyond mere words and description.

In Luke's gospel today Jesus comes along side 2 travelers headed for the town of Emmaus --- as verse 13 says --- about 7 miles --- or 11 kilometers from Jerusalem.

And as they walk Jesus --- "...beginning with Moses and all the prophets explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself."

That's from verse 27 in Luke's Gospel today --- "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he --- Jesus ----- explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself."

That is a conversation --- or better put --- a time of great eye opening and teaching and learning that I cannot wait to be a part of --- Jesus explaining -- - opening my eyes --- connecting the dots ---- beginning with Moses and all the prophets explaining what is said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

And as Emmaus was 7 miles or 11 kilometers and the average walking speed is approximately 5 kilometers and hour or 3 miles per hour --- that is a 2 ½ hour conversation --- a 2/12 hour time of listening and teaching that these 2 disciples were blessed with.

And then in the book of Acts today we see Philip doing the same thing that Jesus did in Luke --- explaining the scriptures --- connecting the dots between the scriptures and Jesus Christ.

In verse 30 from Acts we learn that Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet.

"Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

"How can I," ---- he said --- "unless someone explains it to me?"

So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him."

And then skipping along to verse 34 --- "The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?"

Then Philip began with that very passage of scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

“Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.
 “How can I,” ---- he said --- “unless someone explains it to me?”
 “Then Philip began and told him the good news about Jesus.”

We have in the scriptures --- in God’s Word ----- the most beautiful and powerful --- and glorious ----- life giving --- and life saving thing.

We have in God’s living Word ---- Jesus Christ --- the most beautiful and powerful --- and glorious and life giving ---- and life saving of things.

Regardless of what may happen in life --- ever before us we have the radiant beauty --- goodness --- and saving truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Nothing can take it away --- nothing can corrupt it --- nothing can stop it ---- derail it ---- or change it in nay way --- it is ever before us ---- beyond reproach ----- ever radiant --- true ----- good ---- saving --- beautiful in a way all its own.

The thing is ---- sometimes we need a little help understanding it all.

Sometimes we need a little help connecting the dots.

And we need help whether we are hearing it for the first time like the Ethiopian eunuch in the book of Acts today.

And we need help even if we are well aware --- and intimately familiar with scripture ---- like the 2 on the road to Emmaus.

And best of all God always provides the teachers we need ---- the explainers we need.

Perhaps some of us are familiar with the expression --- “When the student is ready the teacher arrives.”

“When the student is ready the teacher arrives.”

Well in some ways --- “When the student is ready the teacher arrives.” ---- is the story of my life.

Over and over and over again I ---- like others here no doubt --- many times in my life God has blessed me with great and timely teachers and mentors.

My dad ----- clan MacDonald ---- Sydney McDonald --- Sandy McDonald --
- George Macdonald --- and so many more as well --- people who have opened my eyes and explained things to me that I otherwise may never have come to understand ---- people that helped me grow even in times I maybe didn't even know that I had to grow.

The Ethiopian eunuch and the 2 travelers on the road to Emmaus clearly had growth mindsets ---- or dispositions that embrace change challenge and therefore also growth.

And thankfully for the Ethiopian and the 2 travelers headed for Emmaus ----
----- the right teacher arrived at the right time.

And in truth the Luke narrative reveals to us clearly and point blankly that the self –revelation of the Risen Messiah comes through the interpretation of the scriptures and the breaking of bread.

And this is worth repeating as it describes how Jesus so often reveals Himself to us.

“the self –revelation of the Risen Messiah comes through the interpretation of the scriptures and the breaking of bread.”

In other words --- at least according to Luke's Gospel today ---- Jesus reveals Himself to us in the Bible and in the breaking of bread --- sharing of a meal in His name.

That's why we do what we do here.

Read the scriptures and break bread together.

Precisely because that is how Jesus reveals Himself to us --- precisely because that is how God reveals Himself to us.

Jesus is the critical interpreter who teaches the church --- us ----- how to read the scriptures and how to discern God's intentions.

Too often we want the easy road.

We want someone to simply tell us the will of God without having to be personally engaged and challenged by it --- changed by it.

We want someone to tell us the will of God for our individual lives without also doing the hard work of it ourselves.

What the will of God means for you in your life at this time in this stage of your life --- in this season of your life --- will differ from what it means for the person next to you --- and the person next to them --- and the person next to them.

This is part of what Paul means when He says in Philippians 2 starting at verse 12 ----

“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed --- not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence ----- continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

Do everything without grumbling or arguing,”

“Therefore, my dear friends ----- continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling...”

And working out your salvation here doesn't mean work out how we are saved --- that's a done deal ---- by and through Christ we are saved --- working out your salvation here means working out how your salvation changes who you are how you act --- your identity and your conduct.

When we honestly seek growth ---- have a growth mindset and not a fixed mindset ----- God will always provide the teacher --- the teaching --- the guidance we need.

Just as He did for the Ethiopian eunuch and just as he did for the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus.

As Paul rightly points out --- we are to ----- ...”continue to work out our salvation with fear and trembling...”

It is an on going process how we are to interact with the Word and the will of God and we have to work this out with God ----- and it is not something that someone else can do for us.

Yes we need help --- teachers --- leaders --- but they cannot do it for us.

Has anyone ever learned how to ride a bike by someone else doing it for them?

Has anyone ever learned how to read by someone else doing it for them?

Has anyone ever learned to speak a language --- a first --- a second --- a third --- and so on --- language by someone else doing it for them?

Never.

Jesus secures our salvation yes --- but we are to work out what this means for our lives ----- we are to work out just how God can use us for His purposes once we ascent and accept our salvation and believe in the goodness --- beauty ---- and truth of God's saving love for us in Jesus Christ.

And we do this --- we work out --- we figure out God's plan for our lives by engaging in God's word --- the scriptures.

When people come to me and ask about something or share a frustration the first thing I want to say is what scriptures have you been reading --- what parts of God's Word have you been in engaged in over the past 2 --- 4 --- 6 weeks --- 2 --- 4 ---- 6 months --- 2 --- 4 --- 6 years?

What people have been reading in the Bible --- or what they haven't been reading in the Bible ----- very often reveals more about their life situation that the circumstances of their lives.

What we read in the Bible or what we don't read in the Bible ----- whether we are reading the Bible or not reading the Bible ----- often dictates what is happening in our lives far more than the actual circumstances of our lives.

Think about that for a minute ---- what we are reading in the Bible --- whether or not we are actually reading the Bible often dictates more what is happening in our lives than the actual circumstances of our lives.

The Ethiopian eunuch in the book of Acts today --- His life is changed by reading the Bible --- the prophet Isaiah.

The 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus are changed by the Word of God --- in their case it couldn't be made any clearer --- their lives are changed ---- by the living Word --- Jesus --- explaining the written Word ---- the scriptures.

Reading the Bible ---- having the Bible explained ---- exposing ourselves to the teaching and the teachers of the Bible changes our lives.

That's' what our passages hold up before us today.

That's the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for today.

The disciples are changed by the Word of God --- by the living Word of God ---- Jesus Christ ---- explaining Himself --- through what --- the Word of God --- the written word --- the scriptures.

The Ethiopian eunuch is changed by hearing God's Word --- and then hearing God's Word explained.

And then in Colossians.

Colossians reminds us --- from verse 23 from the passage we heard read earlier.

Colossians reminds us to ----- "... continue on in your faith..."

"Continue on in our faith..."

Too often we don't do this though do we?

Too often we don't continue on in our faith.

Instead we stop in our faith --- remaining stagnant.

We get the basic tenants --- we've got the basics and that is good enough.

We know things like -----

“Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.”

“For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not die but shall have life eternal.”

“Jesus loves you.”

“Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins.”

“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.”

“God knows all there is to know about me and He still loves me.” --- and so on --- good enough --- I’ve got it.

No --- it’s not good enough ----- if we truly believe in eternity than we might as well get on with learning and growing now.

We use the terms Lord and Saviour --- all the time.

Our Lord and our Saviour when referring to Jesus Christ.

But what does it mean to call Him Lord and Saviour?

What does it mean to you --- now --- here today --- to call Jesus Lord and Saviour? ----- think about it for a minute ---- what does it mean to call Him Lord and Saviour?

For me --- among other things it includes the reality that my identity and my conduct are defined by my relationship with Him.

For me among other things it means that my understanding and my journey are on going --- ever unfolding and opening up as God so directs.

For me it’s not He is my Lord and my Saviour ---- so it’s all over now and I can sit back and drink cocktails in the sun all day --- all life.

For me --- understanding His Lordship over me --- understanding the implications of He being my Saviour is ongoing --- for me it is a growth mindset ---- seeing growth as more important than anything else including

just resting easy in the comfort of knowing the salvation story a bit and that the salvation story includes me because I believe it to be true.

Unfortunately too often we stop continuing and growing in our faith ----- because we rest on past realizations and articulations of the Gospel that while absolutely true --- are never the whole story.

We grasp a piece --- we ascent to a piece --- we have a profound belief moment but often fail to push on through to greater depth of understanding and growth --- and truth.

No one sentence captures the Gospel in its entirety.

The Gospel is greater and more beautiful and powerful ---- and larger and grander than any one articulation of it --- save for Jesus Christ Himself.

“Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.”

“For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not die but shall have life eternal.”

“Jesus loves you.”

“Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins.”

“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.”

All true --- but isn't there also more.

What about ----

“...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling...”

and what about ----

“... continue on in your faith...” ---- as Paul counsels us.

The 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus knew the scriptures inside and out --- but there was more ----- there was Jesus who came along side of them for a

couple of hours one day and opened up their eyes --- and connected dots they had previously never even thought could be connected.

The Ethiopian eunuch's eyes were suddenly opened that day when Philip came along and explained the prophecy of Isaiah to him.

Jesus is the critical interpreter who teaches the church --- us ----- how to read the scriptures and how to discern God's intentions --- God's will.

And ...

The self-revelation of the risen Messiah comes through the interpretation of the scriptures --- and the breaking of bread.

And all of this happens at the hands of God.

Revelation ---- God showing us something we would never ever come to on our own.

Faith --- us being able to trust in God --- comes as a gift from God.

Notice in Luke it's ----- "their eyes were opened" --- "their eyes were opened"

It's not they opened their eyes.

It's not something they did ----- it's something that was done for them

"Their eyes were opened" --- someone else did the opening --- the action comes from outside of themselves.

God opened their eyes ---- God blessed them with new sight --- it's not something they did themselves --- it was a gift from God.

We think we know what we need to grow spiritually but we don't.

We think we can open our eyes to see the things that we need to see but we can't.

We need someone to come along and explain things to us ----- and most importantly we need God to do something with us --- for us --- in us.

And we need to have what has become popularly referred to as a growth mindset --- a willingness to learn and be challenged ---- as opposed to a fixed mindset.

And everything --- absolutely everything must be viewed through the lens of scripture.

What we are reading in the Bible ----- whether or not we are actually reading the Bible ----- will have a greater influence on what is happening in our lives than the actual circumstances of our lives.

Until we realize this we will never truly appreciate the power of God's Word --- or God's love.

What we are reading in the Bible ----- whether or not we are actually reading the Bible ----- will have a greater influence on what is happening in our lives than the actual circumstances of our lives.

The circumstances --- the lives of the 2 travelers on the road to Emmaus was one of lost hope.

Verse 21 includes – “but we had hoped that he --- and they are talking about Jesus here --- but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”

The circumstances of their lives are somewhat hopeless ----- but then when Jesus shares the Word of God with them like they have never heard it before ---- when Jesus connects the dots in scripture like never before their hopelessness turns to great joy and fulfillment.

Sometimes in the midst of our lives we can simply engage in the Word of God and find ourselves filled with joy --- fulfillment --- understanding ---- comfort ----- and the circumstances of our lives cease to dictate things ---- how we fell ----- what we think we ought to do.

Over and over and over again I have heard this from the people of God as they read His Word --- that His Word changes everything in their lives.

When we take the circumstances of our lives place them into the greater story of God's will for His people ---- what can seems at times hopeless --- our lives ---- turns into something beautiful and true and life giving.

You know how when you've only connected the first few dots in a dot to dot it can be hard --- impossible even to determine what the end result will be --- - but as more and more dots are connected it becomes clear and eventually obvious what the end picture will be.

Embracing the Word of God is exactly the same --- the more we immerse ourselves in it ----- the clearer the picture becomes for us.

I'm not sure.

I'm not convinced.

I can't see it yet.

If you're ever saying any of these things --- and we all have --- and we all will.

And we all will over and over and over again.

Thankfully God does not leave us alone to figure it out by ourselves instead ----- He gives us the full picture of His great and saving love and will for His creation.

If you ever find yourselves saying things like ----

I'm not sure.

I'm not convinced.

I can't see it yet.

All we have to do is take our lives and place them into the greater story --- the greater narrative ----- that is God's story ----- and all will be revealed --- and all will be well.

And it can start like dipping your toe into the shallow end of the pool --- just a bit at a time.

But I promise you if like the Ethiopian eunuch and the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus you are open and you listen and you have a growth mindset ---- and actually let things you hadn't thought of before take root ---- God will bless you immensely.

God is forever connecting the dots of His great and saving plan ---- and we are so so blessed that He cares so deeply for little old us.

He is good.

We are His.

And it all ends well.

It all ends how ----- with Jesus breaking bread in our midst and opening our eyes in ways we never even thought possible.

What joy --- what blessing.

We just have to keep walking ---- because He always comes along and joins us ----- opening us up to a far greater and true and beautiful reality and horizon than we can ever come to or even imagine on our own.

We get so caught up in all the other stuff in life that we miss the radiant beauty of the Gospel ----- it's saving truth ever before us.

Praise be to God for blessing us so immensely with the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ --- His will is ever before us in His Word all we have to do is open it up and discover it for ourselves.

Praise be to God for His goodness beauty and truth --- now and forever.

Amen