

October 6, 2013

This year we are focusing on everyday scripture. We want people to not only read scripture as a daily part of their lives but for scripture to become a resource for you that guides your daily life and more importantly that develops your relationship with God. One of the challenges we have heard from you is how to know even how to work with and understand scripture. So throughout this year every once and a while, instead of a traditional sermon I am instead going to instead focus my teaching on how to work with scripture and how to begin to dive into its richness. Today I want to teach you a four step process that that seeks to hear the Good News in Scripture for our lives.

Before we hear our lesson, it is good to think about the context. There is an old saying that says scripture without knowing the context simply becomes pre-text. The lesson will be the story of the Giving of the Manna to the Hebrews. So if you were reading Exodus though and the introduction that you can find at the beginning of the books in most study bibles what you would know about this text is that it comes after the liberation of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. After Isaac and his children moved to Egypt during a great famine, they had children and their children had many children until they become a great multitude. And they were enslaved by the Egyptians to build their monuments and work in their fields. They were treated harshly and cried out to God. So God called Moses to lead his people into freedom, and after signs and plagues and finally after the death of his son, pharaoh let the Hebrews go. And they left, with great rejoicing, only to be pursued by pharaoh's army, right up to the red sea. Which God then parted allowing the Hebrews to pass, but then the sea came together drowning the Egyptian army and preventing the Hebrews from ever returning again. The problem is that now they are in the wilderness, a barren place where food and water is scarce, the sun is hot and they are wandering, without any one place to call home and this is a people who have only known the reality of slavery and for whom freedom is brand new.

That is the context. I will give that to you. What I want us to do next is I want us to use our imaginations to enter the story. We are going to read our story, beforehand chose a perspective to hear the story from. Are you a Hebrew, Moses, God? Then use all of your senses, to imaging the hunger, or the dryness or what things taste like. And I am going to read the text again.

16 The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. ²The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. ⁵On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.” ⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?” ⁸And Moses said, “When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD.”

⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, ‘Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.’ ” ¹⁰And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. ¹¹The LORD spoke to Moses and said, ¹²“I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’ ”

¹³In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.’ ” ¹⁷The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. ¹⁸But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little

had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.¹

Now I want to ask you a question and I invite you, if you are willing to talk with your neighbor about this. And as you do the rule is, if you don't want to talk to anyone and just think about this yourself you can but if you see any one left out at least ask them to be included in your conversation. So the question is. What is the Bad News of this story? This is the first step. Bad News in Scripture. Ultimately we want to know the Good news, or the Gospel of the story, but to hear the good news one must first know what part of human experience, what part of the challenge of being human, what is our sin in this, or where is our suffering, or fear happening for the people in the story? Basically what's the problem in this story? Try to find at least two or three.

Ok, so what did you find?

- Human need
- What happens when you lose the life you have known
- God leads us, but can we trust God
- Nostalgia
- Like Childhood – can we trust our parents?

Now as people of faith we don't just read scripture as an interesting historical document, rather we read it to hear how it speaks into our lives. So how does the bad news in this story speak about or help us see the struggles, the suffering, the fear, the sin, the bad-news of our lives. This is step 2 – The bad news in our life.

So what did you find?

- The fear of not having enough and how it can keep us from following God.
- The need for us to tangibly experience god's provision for us to trust God.
- Our own unequal distribution.
- Our tendency to look back at the good old days, instead of at where God is leading us.

¹ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Ex 16:1–18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

When we as Lutherans read scripture we are not just looking for the bad news. We read it always looking for the Good news. This has two sides one side is how is God's love being revealed to us in our humanity and what does this tell us about God? - Or how does speak or intact goodness into the bad news. So what is the good news to the Hebrews in this story? This is Step three – The Good news in Scripture

Ok, so what did you find?

- God provides
- God provides equally for everyone's needs
- God's extravagance (Meat everyday was extravagant)
- Building of Trust, just like a child (This is before the commandments)
- For those who follow God's call into freedom God provides.

Now the next step is then to ask, How is this good news for us today? What does this text reveal to us about God that is good news for us today? How does this text speak a word of hope, of guidance or love into our lives? This is step four – The good news in our lives.

- That God will provide for us as well
- That we need to make sure that everyone had enough.
- That God can be trusted.
- That God is extravagant.

Now finally there is the most important step of them all. And for this I want you to do this on your own. My question for you is this. Out of all of this, how is God speaking into your life today? What is God's Word for you in all of this? And how will you carry this and live this in your week. For we come to scripture, every day and every week so that we can hear God's Word of Love, of truth and of guidance in our lives. And it is to listen for this that we have a time of silence after the sermon. First though we had looked for the bad news in scripture and our lives, then we looked to see the good news in scripture and then our lives. Finally we pull out the one thing that can guide our life and our faith this week. So I now turn this over to you, on your own to listen for God's word and we will sit briefly together in silence, and I will simply say Amen.