

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Itching Ears

What does your Bible look like? Is the cover worn and tattered? Are the pages dirty from you touching and turning them? Maybe like me you have several Bibles that have served you over the years...one from your childhood, another in your adulthood, or you have picked up a new version and so, rather than reading from the New King James Version, you now read as we do in church the New International Version, The New Revised Standard Version or some modern English translation, meaning also that the pages have not had a chance to become worn and soiled.

It could also be that you wouldn't have a clue where to find a Bible in your house or that you don't own one. Maybe today will encourage you to either continue in your regular practice of reading scripture or encourage you to begin.

In the letter to Timothy the writer has been sharing about his lived experience of scripture, of studying it and living by the truths of God that were to be learned through the stories contained within its pages. What we must remember is that the scriptures that the writer was referring to were the Hebrew scriptures or what we call the Old Testament. This letter and many like it, along with the four Gospel accounts now form the New Testament, but at the time of writing Paul and Timothy had the Hebrew scriptures and possibly a few other writings that were considered God breathed.

Let me get to that for just a moment. In verse 16 we hear, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for ever good work." So often the word "inspired" becomes a mantra for saying that the words we find in the scripture were literally written as if by the hand of God, without error. But the Greek word for inspired more accurately is understood as "God breathed". Just as God breathed life into human beings in the Genesis creation account, God put the breath into the writing of all of scripture through humans. Peter Holmes writes, "...God breathes life into his word. We must not smother it. We have to let it breathe. It is the word of God, and it is not only inspired but inspiring - it can breathe new life into us."¹

So, holding that thought we continue looking at the writing. This was a letter written by Timothy's mentor. We have already learned in an earlier part of the letter to Timothy that Paul was a teacher and a father figure for Timothy, that Timothy's mother and

¹ Holmes, J. Peter. *Feasting on the Word: Year C Volume 4 Season After Pentecost 2*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2010. P185.

grandmother had also been strong teachers and examples of living faith for Timothy. Timothy himself, though a younger leader than some may have expected, had been learning throughout the years about God and living that out in his work of ministry, in teaching, preaching, and leading others in faith to an understanding of God and God's work with human beings and in the world. And things had become difficult for Timothy. There were people sharing false narratives, impostors as the writer calls them, wicked people who "will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived." (v12).

Sounds like words for a time like ours. The voices of those who would deceive are strong whether in our families or on social media. For those of us of certain generations that grew up with the evening news and feeling that we could trust the new anchors, even that seems to have disappeared with many news outlets claiming that they have the corner on the truth. And it doesn't help that our ears are itching for news, for the latest thing to attract our attention. We are bored with traditions, with the world not changing fast enough or changing too much to suit our individual preferences. We are targets for gossip and misinformation.

We cannot trust all that clamours for our attention in our world. It is hard to know, to discern, what is truth even when it comes from trusted sources. The one source of truth that has not changed though is the word of God that has come to us through the scriptures and what we have witness from those people in our lives whose motives and love were pure. This is where we are to go for guidance in how to live.

If you were to read the few verses that came just before verse 14 in the reading today you would see and hear that living in the truth of God, being inspired by scripture and taught by scripture does not mean that you will not suffer. In fact, we are to expect suffering. Paul writes, "Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, and my suffering the things that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured!" (v10-11).

What so many who have gone before us have learned, and what Paul was saying to Timothy was, suffering is a part of living. Yet, when we are living in the understanding of God's love, hope, and grace, we will be strengthened in our living, in our understanding of human suffering, and our faith will be emboldened. Scripture, read and studied alone will not grow us into mature adults. Suffering alone is just suffering. But God's word, read and studied, spoken about and pondered, along with the challenges of suffering that bring us into God's presence and hopefully into the presence of compassionate people will mold us, strengthen us, and give us peace, even when circumstance would suggest that we should throw our hands up in despair, anger, or indifference to suffering, our own and that of others.

When we don't go to scripture for our help in times of trouble or seek the counsel of wise, compassionate people, then our itching ears will look for that which will satisfy our passions, our desires. It will be difficult to discern what is truth. And to be sure even

Christians disagree on how the Bible is to be understood and interpreted. It is then that to go back to God's grace, love, and forgiveness for everyone, you and me included, can be an anchor when the world feels like it will overwhelm us with its false messages.

The only way you can know the story of God's grace and love is to know what the Bible says. Yes, there is war and factions, stories of anger, of turning from God and God seemingly turning from God's people, but when read, knowing that the story finds its fulfilment in Christ, seeing the overarching theme of God desiring that people live lives full of love, grace, joy and peace, then you can find that all along we haven't needed another something new. The story of God is ours now, we are called to live it and share it with others. To do this we need to spend time in the scriptures, talking about it with those who have wisdom, not being afraid to question, and even to have times of not being able to understand.

And yet, when we read scripture, it is like it reads us back. How many stories have been heard of someone picking up the Bible and it was as if the words spoke to their very circumstances. The scriptures read over time, brought into our lives regularly have the ability to lead us into understanding, into a life that is filled with hope and promise regardless of what we are facing. It is like the words breathe new life into us.

Timothy in Chapter 4 was urged to "proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching." (v1) Did you catch that, "with the utmost patience in teaching." For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths." (v-4)

We are living in such a time as this. Don't let the teachers of, the sharers of misinformation and myths be the ones who dictate the way of your life or the way of our world. God's peace is for everyone. God's love is for everyone. God's hope is for a world where all have life and life abundant. We are the bearers of that news. If we don't proclaim it, who will?!

Let your words be a balm to itching ears. As the old hymns says,

Sing them over again to me, wonderful words of life;

Let me more of their beauty see, wonderful words of life.²

² Sing them over again to me. Words and Music: Philip Bliss. Words Public domain.