

In recent years, I’ve noticed a disturbing trend. It was hard for me to miss since this trend was taking place on top of my head. My hair was changing color. Wondering if the Scriptures contained words of comfort that would ease my anxiety, I turned to the Scriptures, but sadly I didn’t find much solace, at first. There’s the verse Jesus spoke in Matthew 10: “*And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered*” (v.30). That was somewhat helpful, but frankly, my hair in general is getting a little less impressive every day. So finally, I stumbled upon something that made me feel a little better. A verse tucked away in the book of Proverbs chapter 16, verse 31, says: “*Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained in the way of righteousness.*” Now we’re talking! I’m clearly not walking in the way of righteousness often enough—but I do love that verse. It doesn’t shy away from the reality of our hair changing color when we become men and women of a certain age. Proverbs 20, v. 29 has become a favorite too: “*The glory of young men is their strength, gray hair the splendor of the old.*” OK Lord, give me even more *splendor* and bring on the gray!

We Christians have been known to turn to the Scriptures with all kinds of strange situations and odd questions. I know I’ve said it before, but please do not open the book to a random page and place your finger on the page, thinking that God will provide the answer to your dilemma with a magic Scripture verse. The Bible is no Ouija board, nor did God intend it to be. What do we Presbyterians believe about the Scriptures anyway? Well, to put it simply, we believe that the road map to life in Christ is found in the Bible, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. For a very long time, Presbyterians have professed that the Bible is the authority for life and practice. Since the days of the Westminster Confession of Faith we have said that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. To quote a line from Westminster: “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man or Church but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof, and, therefore, it is to be received because it is the Word of God” (WCOF, Ch. 1, Sect. 4).

The Bible as the written Word of God witnesses to the living Word, Jesus Christ—the Word become flesh. We also affirm that the Bible is meant to be carefully studied, devotionally read and used in the worship of God by individuals and by the church. It informs everything we know about our faith.

That’s not a comprehensive historical presentation of what Presbyterians believe about the Scriptures, but it’s a start. Over the years we Presbyterians have said quite a lot about the Scriptures, for sure. Therefore, as we once again recount the story of the Risen Jesus joining two disciples on the Road to Emmaus, let us add to the scene the word “Scripture.”

Last week I said that Luke’s narrative in chapter 24 reminds us that we do not travel through our life experiences alone. We have a number of very helpful companions on the way. *First*, the two disciples listen to the Word and allow it to inform their thoughts. *Second*, as the events of the past three days are placed in the context of sacred history, the historical and spiritual significance of them begins to emerge. *Third*, the two do not travel alone as isolated or solitary individuals; they walk together in relational and conversational community. *And most importantly*, the two travelers are joined by Jesus.

Most of us have had the experience of being lost in a strange city. The two Emmaus disciples were in that sort of place spiritually, but a guide comes to their rescue in the person of the yet-unrecognized Jesus. The

two spiritually searching men begin to find their bearings as the Word of God is opened to them. Luke uses the same root word (δυναίω) for the “opening” of the Scriptures in verse 32 as he does much later in the story when in verse 44 Jesus says to them, *“This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”* And Luke adds in verse 45, *“Then he **opened** their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.”* Light begins to dawn gradually on their despairing darkness. Later in the story the disciples will also relate that their hearts were burning as Jesus opened the truths of Scripture to them. Intellectual comprehension changed to experiential excitement when the earthshaking significance of the words began to permeate their hearts.

But what Scriptures did their guide reveal? Luke tells us very little, but enough to know the essence. The stranger traced the words of Moses and the Prophets, explaining how the suffering of the Messiah and his glory were something God had planned all along—all part of God’s salvation path. John Calvin, in one of his more familiar metaphors, likened the Bible to a pair of spectacles through which we can view the past, the world, and our experiences. The Bible sheds light that helps us to interpret the successes, challenges, privileges, responsibilities, and relationships we experience in daily life before the face of a sovereign and benevolent God.

Wrought and written through the hearts and hands of those who lived in a world carrying the burden of spiritual struggles, economic challenges, political turmoil, and personal trauma, the Bible speaks with inspiring hope and powerful comfort to every possible situation we followers of Christ might face today. Look at the life of Job in Job 10; David in Psalms 22, 88, 90, 102; Jeremiah in Lamentations 3; the persecuted church in Acts 8; Paul the Apostle in 2 Corinthians 11; Timothy in 1 Timothy 1 and 6; and all the “ancients” commended for their faith in Hebrews 11. As St. Francis of Assisi observed, all the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of one candle. No matter the moral darkness or human despair we may encounter in this world, it is no match for the brilliant light of the Word of God.

James Sawyer writes, “When we examine the life and ministry of our Lord, we are immediately impressed with the fact that he lived and breathed Scripture. For Him Scripture was the final authority in matters of history, doctrine and ethics. Our Lord’s acceptance of the authority of Scripture is seen in the warp and woof of His teachings. He makes references to Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Sodom & Gommorah, Lot, Isaac, Jacob, and David, to mention a few. Jesus Christ accepted the fabric of Old Testament history without reservation. We should note however, for Him this history was not merely academic, for him it held special relevance for each contemporary situation.

Jesus Christ made it plain that his teachings were not opposed to Scripture, but based upon it. *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them”* (Matt 5:17) he states at the outset of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus did not nullify the OT Scriptures, rather he rescued them from their misapplications... In summary, says Sawyer, “We find that our Lord’s attitude toward the authority [of Scripture] was that of Judaism in general. He saw it as the totally trustworthy Word of God” (<https://bible.org/article/history-doctrine-inspiration-ancient-church-through-reformation>).

Upon hearing the story these two disciples told about their friends who went to the tomb of Jesus to confirm what the women had said about him rising from the dead, Jesus gives a stinging rebuke and then

a clarifying statement based on the Scriptures to these Emmaus road travelers: *He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself (vv. 25-27).*

Although not found in the biblical text, I could imagine Jesus also saying something like this to the two confused disciples: Did you not understand what you were doing each time you brought a sin offering or a guilt offering, in accord with what Moses commanded you? Did you not realize that your offerings pointed to the great sacrifice that the Messiah would make once for all? And remember how Moses raised a bronze snake in the wilderness and the people were saved. That was another sign of what was to happen to the Christ. And remember what Isaiah said of the Messiah, *“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”*

It’s as though Jesus was telling the disciples they had a map in their pocket the whole time they walked the Emmaus road, but they never bothered to look at it—a map even better than the navigation app on your smart phone. Better yet, the two perplexed disciples did not have to rely solely on the map of the Scriptures to find their way, because they were blessed to have the Messiah himself with them as a personal tour guide on this journey. Imagine that!

There is another familiar place in the Scriptures where Jesus has harsh words for his disciples—in this case the twelve. You probably know the story from Luke 8: 22-25: Jesus and his disciples get into a boat and set out for the other side of the lake. *As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger. The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!” He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. “Where is your faith?” he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.”*

Many people are navigating rough waters right now. They’re in painful and difficult situations. When calamity strikes, it’s easy to feel overwhelmed by the odds. Even hopeless. It’s at this point that we generally sink under the waters or we learn to rely on Jesus. Can we sing **“Calm me, Lord, as you calmed the storm; still me, Lord, keep me from harm. Let all the tumult within me cease; enfold me, Lord, in your peace?”** If only that simple Celtic tune would speak to us whenever the storm rages around us.

“Where is your faith?” Jesus asks. Perhaps he seems a little harsh with his disciples, yet these guys had already left everything to follow him. In a similar fashion, Jesus says to the two on the Road to Emmaus, *“How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!”* We’re no different. Many times we can’t *locate* our faith and we are *slow* to believe.

The disciples who were fishermen knew the lake extremely well and should have understood. It was the last place they ever dreamed of needing God. On the road, however, these two were in a strange new world and they couldn’t open their eyes to see the light of Christ for the darkness that surrounded them.

Where are you? Where are you heading? The living Word will lead our way, as the written Word becomes a *lamp to our feet and a light to our path*. Amen.