



Liturgical Day: The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Date: September 13, 2009

Sermon Title: The Power of God's Word

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

A good number of us have been waiting for today to come for quite some time now. I find myself feeling nervous, excited and hopeful all at the same time. But now our hats have been thrown over the fence. We have started our ninety-day march from the front cover to the back cover of our Bibles. All that is left is for us to read, and to enjoy, and to be stirred by this ancient and modern story of God's people.

Let me offer one more invitation to those of you who have not taken the bait yet. It's not too late to sign up and join us for "The Bible in 90 Days." Think of it: you've already started anyway. You have read the first 19 verses. Why stop now, while you're on a roll? Stop and see Bruce or Sharon after worship; let me know you're interested; visit the office in the next day or two – we'd love to have you join us. If you're interested, though, don't delay much longer, because we're beginning tonight.

And we're beginning, today, with the very beginning: the first 19 verses of the Bible. That makes sense, of course. If you are going to do something, you ought to begin at the beginning. So starting our reading project at the first verse of the first chapter of the first book in the Bible is the obvious way to get started.

But these 19 verses are important to us in another way – a more important way. These 19 verses provide the reason why we are embarking on this Bible reading project in the first place. They make up the first half of the creation story of Genesis 1. If we read these verse thoughtfully, they remind us that the creation accounts of our Bible are not designed to inform us about the "hows" and the "whens" of creation. They are intended, instead, to communicate to us about the power of God's word. As we read these opening verses together, a couple of minutes ago, I was struck by three key words, repeated over and over again. "And God said..." Every section of this account begins in the same way. "And God said..." This is true for the second half of chapter one as well.

At the very beginning of the story, we are told that the earth is a formless void in darkness (Genesis 1:2). Into this void comes the word of God, and out of nothing, our world – our universe – is created.

It reminds me of a story I once heard, about a group of scientists who came to believe that God hadn't done anything especially remarkable in creating life. They had studied molecular biology, and had taken stock of the resources on this planet, and concluded that given the right materials, anyone could create life. God, knowing their thoughts, challenged them to a duel of sorts – they would each create life on their own. So the scientists agreed, and invited God to go first. Much like the first time around, God took some dirt, and formed it into the shape of a man. He breathed into its nostrils, and immediately the man sprung up and began to walk around.

Undeterred, the scientists prepared to follow suit. They gathered together, got down on their knees, and started making a mound of dirt on the ground. At that, God interrupted them and said, "Oh no. Wait a minute. You've got to use your own dirt."

What the first chapter of Genesis describes is absolutely remarkable. Out of nothing, an entire universe is created. And how is it done? By the power of God's word. God simply says, "Let there be..." and there is.

It is to this powerful word of God that we turn

FIRST LESSON

ISAIAH 50:4-9A

PSALM

PSALM 116:1-9

SECOND LESSON

JAMES 3:1-12

GOSPEL LESSON

ST. MARK 8:27-38

SEMICONTINUOUS SERIES:

2 SAMUEL 6:1-5, 12B-19

PSALM 19

OR

WISDOM 7:26-8:1

"90 DAYS" READING

GENESIS 1:1-19

PRAYER OF THE DAY

**O GOD, THROUGH
SUFFERING AND REJECTION
YOU BRING FORTH OUR
SALVATION, AND BY THE
GLORY OF THE CROSS YOU
TRANSFORM OUR LIVES.
GRANT THAT FOR THE SAKE
OF THE GOSPEL WE MAY
TURN FROM THE LURE OF
EVIL, TAKE UP OUR CROSS,
AND FOLLOW YOUR SON,
JESUS CHRIST, OUR SAVIOR
AND LORD. AMEN.**

9300 E. BELLEVIEW AVE.
GREENWOOD VILLAGE,
COLORADO 80111

VOICE

(303) 770-9300

FAX

(303) 770-9301

WEB

WWW.STPLC.ORG



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

today, as we embark on the journey of reading the Bible cover-to-cover this fall. Think about that for a moment. We are planning to immerse ourselves in God's word during the coming three months. We are planning to read twelve pages a day. If God's word is powerful enough to create the universe out of nothing, imagine the impact this kind of a venture might have on:

- Our lives
- Our families
- Our church
- Our community
- Our world

I've said it a number of times recently, and I'll say it again: I am very hopeful about the impact this program is going to have on those who undertake this reading, and on our congregation, and I am excited to see what God will be able to do with the time we dedicate to our reading.

"The Bible in 90 Days" is the creation of Ted Cooper Jr. Ted spent nearly 20 years working in the computer industry. A self-described agnostic, he found himself curious about the Bible and the Christian faith, so he decided to go to the source. He decided to read the entire Bible, cover-to-cover. It was a life-changing experience for him. The power of God's word took hold of his heart, and half way through his first time through the Bible he became a believer. He is now a member of First Presbyterian Church of Houston, and serves as an elected leader in that congregation.

Ted never expected to become a believer. He just wanted to learn more – to understand Christians and Christianity a bit better. But that's the way God's word works. It has a power all of its own. And when a person spends time immersed in the word, God's power can make a difference.

I'll have to tell you: I'm honestly expecting a miracle to happen this fall. 75 people have now committed to read twelve pages of the Bible a day for 90 days. That's 75 times 90 times, oh about 30 minutes or so a day. Do you realize that means this congregation alone will spend somewhere in the vicinity of 3,400 hours reading the Bible between now and December 13? We are giving the most powerful force in the world that kind of access to our lives. Do you not expect that miracles will happen? I do.

The founder of our movement, Martin Luther, was famous for his belief in the power of God's word. In the city of Worms, Germany, where the Emperor had called him to account for his writings, the authorities demanded that Luther renounce everything he had written. He refused to do so, and is famous for having said,

Unless I am convicted [convinced] of error by the testimony of Scripture or (since I put no trust in the unsupported authority of Pope or councils, since it is plain that they have often erred and often contradicted themselves) by manifest reasoning, I stand convicted [convinced] by the Scriptures to which I have appealed, and my conscience is taken captive by God's word, I cannot and will not recant anything, for to act against our conscience is neither safe for us, nor open to us.
On this I take my stand. I can do no other. God help me.

Not everybody in Luther's day was as moved by the Word as he was. There were some, even leaders in the church, who ignored it altogether. There were others who were so convinced about their own assumptions and their own conclusions, that the word had no ability to move them into a new understanding. But Luther staked his ministry (and his life!) on the power of God's word, and one of the strengths of our Lutheran heritage is a healthy respect for the power of the word, and the belief that those who read it and study it and contemplate it will be touched in remarkable ways.

Sadly, in survey after survey, we find that contemporary Christians (like me!) may own numerous copies of the Bible, but this most widely sold book in the world is often the most rarely-read volume in a typical family's library. Some family Bibles never even get opened during the course of a year. Other people read their Bibles, but it doesn't seem to change them in any significant way. And that's the danger, you see. We can read the Bible cover-to-cover, but if we are only reading to find proof of what we have already concluded, we've closed off our hearts to the power it can have for us. On the other hand, if in our reading we are open to the possibility that God's word can lead us into an entirely new world – an entirely new understanding – an

entirely new faith, then it can work remarkable transformation in our lives.

That's what we are hoping for all of you here at Saint Peter. For the past few years, we've promoted discipleship habits that begin with a daily time in prayer and in reading the Bible. You'll get a taste of that during Adult Education this fall – our Adult Sunday School class will be exploring the habits of discipleship over the course of the next two months. And with "The Bible in 90 Days" we hope to help people both to read the Bible cover-to-cover, but also to establish a regular daily commitment to reading God's word. So whether you join us in the attempt to read all the way through the Bible this Fall, or whether you commit yourselves to reading every day on your own schedule, we're convinced that, as we do so, the word will shape us and form us in significant ways.

At the beginning of the Biblical narrative, in the beginning of time, it was the word of God that cause all that is to be created. Throughout the centuries, faithful believers have professed their belief in the power of God's word. We pray that those who read with us this fall might experience that power. We pray that God will draw us more deeply into the experience of grace. We pray that God will help us more clearly see who we are called to be in this world. We pray that God will inspire us for lives of service in Jesus' name. I hope you'll join us.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (September 13, 2009)

Gospel Lesson; English Text: ⁱ

8:27 Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" ²⁸ And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." ³⁰ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. ³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." ³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." ⁱⁱ

Gospel Lesson; Greek Text:

8:27 Καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὰς κώμας Καισαρείας τῆς Φιλίππου· καὶ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἐπηρώτα τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ λέγων αὐτοῖς· τίνα με λέγουσιν οἱ νῦν ἄνθρωποι εἶναι; ²⁸ οἱ δὲ εἶπαν αὐτῷ λέγοντες [ὅτι] Ἰωάννην τὸν βαπτιστὴν, καὶ ἄλλοι Ἰλίου, ἄλλοι δὲ τι εἰς τῶν προφητῶν. ²⁹ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐπηρώτα αὐτούς· ὑμεῖς δὲ τίνα με λέγετε εἶναι; ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ Πέτρος λέγει αὐτῷ· σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστός. ³⁰ καὶ ἐπετίμησεν αὐτοῖς ἵνα μηδενὶ λέγωσιν περὶ αὐτοῦ. ³¹ Καὶ ῥηξάτο διδάσκειν αὐτούς τι δεῖ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου πολλὰ παθεῖν καὶ ἀποδοκιμασθῆναι ὑπὸ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καὶ τῶν ἀρχιερέων καὶ τῶν γραμματέων καὶ ἀποκτανθῆναι καὶ μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀναστῆναι· ³²

ⁱ A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Lectionary.aspx>

ⁱⁱ St. Mark 8:27-38, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

καὶ παρρησίᾳ τὸν λόγον ἐλάλει. καὶ προσλαβόμενος ὁ Πέτρος αὐτὸν ῥξατο ἐπιτιμᾶν αὐτῷ. ³³ ὁ δὲ ἐπιστραφεὶς καὶ ἰδὼν τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ ἐπετίμησεν Πέτρῳ καὶ λέγει· ὕπαγε ὀπίσω μου, σατανᾶ, ὅτι οὐ φρονεῖς τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. ³⁴ Καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος τὸν χλον σὺν τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· εἴ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἀκολουθεῖν, ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκολουθείτω μοι. ³⁵ ὅς γὰρ ἐὰν θέλη τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ σῶσαι ἀπολέσει αὐτήν· ὅς δ' ἂν ἀπολέσει τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ νεκεν ἐμοῦ καὶ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου σώσει αὐτήν. ³⁶ τί γὰρ ὠφελεῖ νθρωπον κερδήσαι τὸν κόσμον λον καὶ ζημιωθῆναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ; ³⁷ τί γὰρ δοῖ νθρωπος ἀντάλλαγμα τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ; ³⁸ ὅς γὰρ ἐὰν ἐπαισχυνθῆ με καὶ τοὺς ἐμοὺς λόγους ἐν τῇ γενεᾷ ταύτῃ τῇ μοιχαλίδι καὶ ἀμαρτωλῷ, καὶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐπαισχυνθήσεται αὐτόν, ὅταν λθῆ ἐν τῇ δόξῃ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἀγγέλων τῶν ἁγίων. ⁱⁱⁱ

“The Bible in 90 Days” Lesson:

^{1:1} In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶ And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷ So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. ⁸ God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹ And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹ Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day. ^{iv}

ⁱⁱⁱ St. Mark 8:27-38, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).

^{iv} Genesis 1:1-19, New Revised Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

**Scheduled Readings for
"The Bible in 90 Days"
9/13/2009 - 12/12/2009**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Begin Reading At</u>	<u>Sermon Based On</u>
9/13	Genesis 1:1	Genesis 1:1-19
9/20	Leviticus 1:1	Exodus 16:2-15
9/27	Deuteronomy 23:12	Deuteronomy 6:1-9
10/4	1 Samuel 28:20	Joshua 24:1-3, 14-18
10/11	1 Chronicles 1:1	1 Kings 3:5-12
10/18	Nehemiah 13:15	Nehemiah 1:4-11a
10/25	Psalms 89:14	Job 38:1-11
11/1	Isaiah 14:1	Psalms 104:24-34, 35b
11/8	Jeremiah 33:23	Isaiah 25:6-9
11/15	Daniel 9:1	Ezekiel 2:1-5
11/22	Matthew 26:57	Micah 6:1-8
11/29	Acts 6:8	John 20:19-31
12/6	Hebrews 1:1	Romans 5:1-11