

Order of Worship for July 14, 2024

Prelude:

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Opening Hymn: “*Thy Strong Word*” - Hymn #578

1st lesson: 2 Kings

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Prayer:

P: Lord God, as You revealed Your will to Josiah and the people of Judah through the discovery of the scroll which contained Your Word, reveal Yourself to us now as we hear Your Word and receive it as we did through the waters of Baptism, and continue to receive it through the Lord’s Supper as we partake of Your Word, Christ Jesus, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and rules with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Psalm 119:33-40

P: Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes;

C: and I will keep it to the end.

P: Give me understanding, that I may keep Your law

C: and observe it with my whole heart.

P: Lead me in the path of Your commandments,

C: for I delight in it.

P: Incline my heart to Your testimonies,

C: and not to selfish gain!

P: Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things;

C: and give me life in Your ways.

P: Confirm to Your servant your promise,

C: that You may be feared.

P: Turn away the reproach that I dread,

C: for Your rules are good.

P: Behold, I long for Your precepts;

C: in Your righteousness give me life!

Hymn of Praise: “*A Mighty Fortress*”- Hymn #657

2nd lesson: Matthew 5:17-20

P: Jesus said, “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. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be

called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

P: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: **Thanks be to God.**

Children's Message:

Sermon Hymn: *"God Has Spoken by His Prophets"* - **Hymn #583**

Sermon: *"Josiah Discovers the Scroll"*- **2 Kings**

Frederick Douglass said, "Once you learn to read, you will be forever free." Last year, the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), "the nation's report card," showed that not even half (43%) of fourth graders in the U.S. scored at or above a proficient level in reading. Some of this can be attributed to the pandemic, but literacy rates were going down before then. But even more is the concentration that is involved in reading. Psychologist and professor Gloria Mark has been studying attention spans for a couple decades. In 2004, she started her research, tracking how long people could focus on a screen before looking away. The average amount of time participants spent focusing on a screen, in 2004, was around 120 seconds. But by around 2012, this had dropped to seventy-five seconds. In the last few years, Mark has reported that this number has dropped to around forty-seven seconds. As research continues to confirm, digital distractions can significantly hinder our productivity and ability to focus for sustained periods of time. Where people used to get news from reading a paper, we now see in videos. Playing video games has taken the place of books for youth.

This also affects Biblical literacy. The Scriptures are not filled with catchy sound-bites. They are filled with stories, poetry, sermons, and lists. They are to be, as the old prayer says, "inwardly digested." Food doesn't go through our system in a few seconds. It takes time for the body to digest it. God's Word is something to be "churned over," not uploaded instantly into our brains. In a world with briefs, videos and instant answers, why would anyone want to sit down and take the time to read a collection of books that are centuries old?

The people of Israel neglected God's Word. You would think that there was nothing more basic to their faith than Passover. Today it is still the high point of the Jewish year. But by the time of King Josiah, it had been forgotten. It would be like the United States without the 4th of July. On the other hand, there were images to pagan gods in places all around Jerusalem, some of which had been there at the time of King Solomon over 300 years before Josiah's life. How did it get to that point?

We can trace the idolatry of the people of Israel back to the time when they first came to be with their father Abraham. His family was pagan, as Joshua tells us in chapter 24: “Long ago your ancestors, including Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods.” Even though Abraham was faithful to God, many of his relatives were not. The Moabites and Ammonites were descendants of Abraham’s nephew Lot. The Edomites were the descendants of Abraham’s grandson Esau. For 400 years the people of Israel were exposed to Egyptian gods. As they entered into the Promised Land under Joshua they were heavily influenced by the local Canaanite people. The idea was not to totally abandon God, but to add the other gods to their faith. It is kind of like investments—you want to diversify. It is like having extra insurance. You want to cover all the bases. It also resulted from wanting to get along with other people. Treaties were done by embracing the gods of both sides and by marriages between the royal families of the nations, which included letting the wives who came from foreign dynasties bring their gods along, as it happened with so many of Solomon’s marriages. The result is that God and His Word slowly, but surely got pushed to the side.

So we see that happening in our own culture. Most people in our culture say they believe in God. Most say they pray. But to what? The typical thought in our culture is that church is a place to enforce morality. Bible stories, like the ones we are looking at this summer, have been primarily used to give people examples of how they should act—to be brave like David, upstanding like Joshua, and faithful to God like Daniel in the lion’s den. We add to that the emphasis in our culture on the individual. It is why you would come up with a statement like “God helps those who help themselves,” which is as anti-Christian as you can get. Also the Bible was something that most people first heard, not read in days before the printing press. The poetry and repetition were great for memorizing, but today we want information like on Google—short and to the point. And after being lied to by the United States of America, our politicians, our schools, individual churches and church leaders; people don’t trust what is true, but what works. No wonder people see no need to come to church.

But Josiah’s reforms resulted in the recovery of some part of the Old Testament. Some believe it was Deuteronomy. The important thing is that it directed people back to the true God. Pagan worship sites were destroyed, the Passover was celebrated, and true worship returned to the temple. But then what happened? Joshua rashly got involved in the war between Egypt and Babylon. He was defeated and killed in battle by the Egyptians at Megiddo in 609 BC. After that

the Kingdom of Judah declined until it was destroyed by Babylonians in 586 BC. So what with the reforms of Josiah?

So what with the reforms we might make today? If people go with what works, they will trust science over God. If people want what feels right with them, it isn't going to be God. The problem isn't just the influence of pagans around us. It is the very sin in us. That sin makes us desire, like Adam and Eve, to eat the forbidden fruit to be like God—to replace Him.

But God doesn't let that go on. The reforms Josiah made may not seem to have made a difference, but they became important to what happened to God's people after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. The temple would be destroyed. Despite all the pagan influence, sacrifices were still made to God in the temple. But with its destruction, that ended. Even when the temple was rebuilt when people came back from exile in Babylon, it wasn't like the original temple. God's Ark was not there. His presence, in the form of a cloud, did not enter it like it did for Solomon when he built the original temple or with the temple's forerunner, the tabernacle. Instead the people of God had to depend on the Scriptures, like what Josiah discovered, and their observance of things like Passover, which centered on the family, not the temple. Through this God paved the way for the former Israelite, the Jews, and the spread of God's Word in many places through the teaching of Scriptures in synagogues. When the Gospel of Jesus, who is above God's Word, came to those places many came to faith. God's Word triumphed.

And it can and does in our world today. The decline of church in our culture is matched by its spread in others. People from the Middle East from Islamic countries go to Europe to do the kind of work that Mexican immigrants do here. They have been drawn to churches in Europe because that is where they hear the Word of God, the story of Jesus. One of the most rapidly growing Christian churches is in Iran. In France and Belgium, where church and religion has been looked down in society, record numbers of people have been recently baptized as adults. A reason for this is that people accustomed to the secularism in their culture have lost meaning in life and are turning back to the faith of their ancestors as they hear the message of Jesus. And we have the special gift of hearing about how God's Word works in peoples' lives through what we learn from our friend Kebede in Ethiopia, the Clausings, the Grulkes, and Tiffany Smith in Africa, and the Hansons in Korea.

God works through His Word in our lives. He used the dying of the first followers of Jesus to have early Christians write down the story of Jesus in

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. He preserved the writings of apostles like Paul and Peter to give us the Epistles. His Word gives us new life in the water of Baptism, forgiveness in the bread and wine of Holy Communion which by that Word is Jesus' true body and blood. He gathers us together around that Word so that, as His people, we are the new temple—the way He makes His presence known to others in our world.

Creed: Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Article IV:

ALL: All Scripture ought to be distributed into these two principal topics, the Law and the promises (Gospel). For in some places it presents the Law, and in others the promise concerning Christ, namely, either when [in the Old Testament] it promises that Christ will come, and offers, for His sake, the remission of sins justification, and life eternal, or when, in the Gospel [in the New Testament], Christ Himself, since He has appeared, promises the remission of sins, justification, and life eternal.

Confession and Forgiveness:

P: Herein is the precious task of Scripture that makes of it God's holy, precious Word of life to us: "Sacred Scriptures . . . are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:15-17) We confess to You, Lord, that we too often are led by the wisdom of this world instead of by Your Word. We read Your Word too little. We deny the power of the Scripture by not using it and living it.

C: O Lord, have mercy on us!

P: God's Word proclaims to us that God forgives us because of the sacrifice of His Son, Christ Jesus, for us. As a called minister of God's Word, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

ALL: Help us to listen with ears wide open; Help us to read with eyes wide open with wonder; help us to meditate with hearts wide open to Your Word which "Is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Psalm 119:105)

Responsive Prayer on God's Word:

P: Lord God, we thank You for Your Word. By that Word you made us.

C: "Through the Word all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In that Word was life, and that life was the light of men." (John 1:3-4)

P: We above all thank You that Your Word is Your Son, Christ Jesus.

C: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world." (Hebrews 1:1-2)

P: In Your Word we see our lives anchored on Christ as we are "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone." (Ephesians 2:20)

C: “These are the scriptures that testify about Me.” (John 5:39) “But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31)

P: Help us to be in that Word confident that “no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:21)

C: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16–17)

P: Show us the power of Your Word to work in our lives.

C: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12) “Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Ephesians 6:17)

P: Help us to daily be in Your Word.

C: “And how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 3:15)

P: Lead us to use Your Word as law and Gospel to work in peoples’ lives.

C: “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (John 1:17) “God has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” (2 Corinthians 3:6)

P: O Lord, “You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word.” (Psalm 119:114)

C: “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by Your name, O LORD, God of hosts.” (Jeremiah 15:16)

(other petitions)

P: All this we pray for Jesus’ sake.

C: Amen.

Hymn: “We Praise You and Acknowledge You, O God” - Hymn #941

Lord’s Prayer:

Closing Prayer:

P: Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, and inwardly digest them that, by the patience and comfort of Your Holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord.

C: Amen

Blessing: (pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: “God’s Word Is Our Great Heritage” - Hymn #582