

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 13th Sunday after Pentecost, August 19, 2018.

My favorite subject in elementary school was art. And the art project I remember most was an illuminated Bible page. And this was in a public school in Pasadena, California, and, as far as I know, there were no parent complaints, certainly not from my mom and dad. They were delighted.

We took a piece of light brown butcher paper and treated it with something that made the paper look old. Then, using pencil and calligraphy letters, we entered a Bible verse with a huge first letter, which we decorated with flowers. Everything was done very carefully, because once you started to move from pencil to paint, there was no going back. Liquid paper, what we know as White Out, wasn't invented until the following decade. Never mind the correcting tools we use today.

I was very proud of my Bible page. Sadly, I don't know what happened to it, but I can see it. No wonder then that I was really intrigued with a gift that Kitsie Burnett gave recently to St. Christopher's. It is a reproduced leaf from the 1611 King James Bible. The content is the 10th chapter of the Old Testament Book Nehemiah. The ceremonial book that contains the 1611 page was published in San Francisco and purchased at auction. The leaf is not the actual page from the original King James Bible, but a fine and valuable reproduction. It is a lovely gift, which we have on display next door. Please be careful when you view it.

One of the takeaways when examining a document like this, even a copy, is the realization that our obsession with keeping up to date with technology is at odds with our appreciation of what has gone before. In our rush to stay current, we tend to overlook the value of slowing down to appreciate the past. Think of the patience and skill that went into the original page. Lots of people spent hours, days, months, maybe years completing a multi-page version of the Bible, a version that in turn went to a printing press, allowing others to read and appreciate Holy Scripture.

We take access to the Bible for granted. And that's a shame, because we forget that the Bible has always been under threat. The story of the Creation through the coming of the Holy Spirit has not always been welcome. Why? Because it

subjects secular power to Divine power, and this often doesn't sit well with secular power.

From today's Psalm (**Psalm 34:9-14**): "Fear the Lord, you that are his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing." Not fear the King or fear the President or fear the Governor, but fear the Lord.

From Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (**Ephesians 5:15-20**): "Be careful how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

And from the Gospel of John (**John 6:51-58**): "Jesus said, 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'" Again, not a secular authority, but God's Son.

Proverbs (**Proverbs 9:1-6**) is even more clear about whom to honor: "Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight."

For you and me, these are words of comfort. For others, these words are a threat. All the more reason to take seriously the words of Scripture. And how do we take these words seriously? We study them. We spend time with them. We think about the patience and skill and faith that have brought these words forward through the centuries.

And one of the ways we can do this is to take the time to look at the different ways these words have been presented on a page. That's what the reproduction of the 1611 page allows us to do. Of course, this would be true of presentations of Scripture from any era, including our own. The more the better.

And that's the point. No one human presentation can do justice to what the Lord has done, is doing, and will do. I have no idea what impact my third grade art project had on my life. And I don't know what impact the Burnett gift will have on our lives. But they have come together, and I suspect for a purpose. Remember this phrase from our opening hymn: "a lantern to our footsteps, shines on from age to age."

I am certain that you all have similar stories of the power of Scripture, including family Bibles that are on bookshelves or coffee tables or desks or in wooden chests. There is something sacred about these items, primarily because of the content, but also because of what they mean to us as individuals and families.

The Burnett gift is also a reminder of the power of giving. Philanthropy is the word. Philanthropy is the activity. The word and the activity mean love of humanity. Its ingredients include those being helped and those providing that help.

In this case, those being helped are all of us whose appreciation of Scripture is enhanced by this gift. And those doing the helping are passing along their appreciation of beauty, talent, hard work, and religious faith. This is a powerful combination, and accounts for so much that is great about our nation and its many communities and its humanitarian efforts.

Are we making too much of a reproduction bought at auction? Or of a bench overlooking the Chesapeake given in memory of a loved one. Or flowers offered for the altar. Or of a wing of a hospital? I don't think so. It all counts. It all puts us in touch with the past, present and future. It is all healthy. And it all makes a positive difference.

The 10th chapter of Nehemiah describes an agreement between a whole bunch of people, including Nehemiah the Governor, and their God. It's as if these people have signed a contract with God. It's their version of a Covenant. Here is the last verse of this chapter: "We will not neglect the house of our God."

This is the promise of philanthropy. It is also the basis of a great nation. And, more to the point, it is an expression of thanks to a loving God. So, to Kitsie, thank you. And to all who have shared time, talent and treasure in support of St. Christopher's and other humanitarian institutions, thank you. And to my third grade teacher, whose name I don't remember, except that it begins with an S, thank you. And especially to the Lord whom we would be wise to fear and to honor, thank you.

Amen.

