

Lyons Muir Church
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The Problem of Scripture

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”

John 16: 12-13

Dear Friends in Christ,

One time, probably about 3 years ago now, the former lay leader of Lyons-Muir Church and longtime member, Charlie West, said to me after church one Sunday, “You know, if you want to know what’s true, just open the Bible up and put your finger down.” I thought to myself at the time – *I’m not sure that passes muster on every verse*. But I didn’t say that out loud, because I had a feeling Charlie wanted me to react. But I’m writing now -- not in anger, you see, but in love -- because I think if the Church wants to welcome new people into our community, we have to come clean about the problem of scripture. For instance:

Then God said, “Let us make ׀ אָדָם *adam*, etymologically “earthling”, literally “man”, grammatically “humankind”] in our image, according to our likeness; and let **THEM** have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created the human creature in his image, in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them. (Genesis 1: 26-27)

For a man ought not to have his head veiled [when he prays], since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. (I Corinthians 11: 7-9)

Attendance:

The average attendance for the month of May was 30

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

SUNDAYS	Worship on the Lord’s Day, 11
MONDAYS	No regular events
TUESDAYS	Office Hours, 9-2
WEDNESDAYS	Bible Study, 6:30-7:30 Ionia First UMC, Fellowship Hall
THURSDAYS	Office Hours, 9-2 Bible Study, 12-1
FRIDAYS	No regular events

UPCOMING EVENTS

4TH OF JULY COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

Saturday, June 26

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

August 8-12, 6-8 PM

Pay close attention to what Paul *does*. Genesis 1 narrates a theology in which every person participates coequally in the Image of the Divine by virtue of his or her or their humanity. Paul smushes this together with the story about Adam's rib (Genesis 2: 22) in order to create a hierarchy between genders that doesn't exist in the Hebrew text, not even in Genesis 2 (which, by the way, makes no mention at all of the image of God). That's the problem of scripture. It is not entirely coherent at face value. This problem happens all over the place. If you put your finger down in one text, and then in another, sometimes you find what seem to be disagreements and mistakes. Examples abound: compare Mark 2: 23-26 with I Samuel 21: 1-6, for instance.

So, while I held my tongue all those years ago with Charlie, let me write this in plain English:

The Bible has to be interpreted.

Even more specifically, the Christian Bible (as opposed to the Jewish Bible, for instance) must be interpreted by a community of people who are trying to lead lives of discipleship in obedience to the love of Jesus. The Bible contains "all things necessary for salvation" – so say the Articles of Religion in the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church. We affirm this and hold this to be true. However, the Bible does not contain all things, as we see from the text above from John's gospel. During the Last Supper Jesus basically says to his disciples, *We've barely scratched the surface, but to contemplate the full breadth of God's power and grace would blow your mind, so the Spirit will show you as much as you need to know at the right time.* Then we find Peter in Acts chapter 10, prompted by the Spirit to realize that people don't have to be Jewish to follow Jesus. *Kaboom! Mind blown...* It seems that for Peter, the revelation that the Messiah of Israel was Christ for the World was an interruption to his worldview radical enough that he spent the rest of his life trying to figure things out. And the same question occupies much of Paul's thought – all of Galatians is about that issue, not to mention chapters 2-3, and 9-11 of Romans in particular. We think that question is silly, but we've got our own questions and problems. And in great humility we need to beg of Christ what he has not revealed to us!

The point is: The people who composed the literature that we call scripture didn't know everything. Paul didn't know the planet was round, let alone that Chimpanzees and Humans have 98% the same DNA, and that Humans share more than 50% of their genome with both Chickens and Bananas! What good would it have done for Jesus to tell that to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9)?!

The authors of scripture bore witness to their experience of the Living God as faithfully as they could with the knowledge and grace that they had. AND their ability to understand God's self-revelation was confined to their vocational callings, their cultural assumptions, and their technology. Moreover, it is not a set of individuals who we have to thank for the gift

of our sacred texts. Each and every part of the Bible was composed as a means of grace for a community working at obedience to the God who had met them in their circumstances. Just because Paul wants to reassure Timothy that "all scripture is God breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16) doesn't mean all of it was literally whispered into the ears of the authors by the Holy Spirit. That's not what inspiration is. Rather: God acts, humans perceive and enter into relationship with God, their lives are changed, and a new kingdom community is "born from above."

If God was not at work in the creation, there would be no scripture at all. But if God was not *still* at work in the creation, scripture would have no meaning at all! So the stories of the Bible are historical because they point us to the revelation of God at work in creation. But they are not history, in the sense that everything therein described happened just that way. In my very first semester at seminary, my professor of Old Testament, Jack Sasson – one of the world's leading biblical scholars and linguists – raised a simple question concerning the Exodus as described in the Bible (imagine a thick Jewish accent): "If 2.4 million people wandered around in an enclosed geographic area for 40 years, you think we'd have something to show for it. But there's nothing! Nothing from Egypt to Israel that would cause an archeologist to say, 'Aha! here they are!'" To which a student responded, "Are you saying the Exodus didn't happen?!" "No!" replied prof. Sasson. "I'm saying the Bible cannot simply be read as a history textbook."

If we're going to welcome a new generation of individuals and families into the life of the church, we're going to have to wrestle with the problem of scripture. Woman was not created for man, for instance, as Paul suggests (I Cor. 11:8), forgetting Christ in his misappropriation of Genesis 1 & 2. God created humankind – all of humankind – in the Divine Image: male and female he created them. Simply put: Paul is wrong on this point, and the life of Jesus makes that abundantly clear. People who have never gone to church or who have left in disgust will never understand why the scriptures are so important if all we do is insist on a blind acceptance with no thoughtful application of our reason and collective experience. Neither the Presbyterian nor Wesleyan traditions are fundamentalist. Both undertake an evaluation of the scriptures with Christ as the principle of interpretation. It's not enough to put your finger down in a book and imagine that there's nothing left to do. Our interpretations must be applied to the life of the community in order to find out if, in faithfulness to Jesus, they point every person – *every person* – to the reconciling love of God. As we enter the period in the liturgical year known as "Kingdomtide" let us make or renew a commitment to grow in our knowledge, even as we grow in grace. And may God bless us in our desire to be faithful.

Jonathan



Zion Food Pantry
June 20, 2021
Noisy Sunday Offering

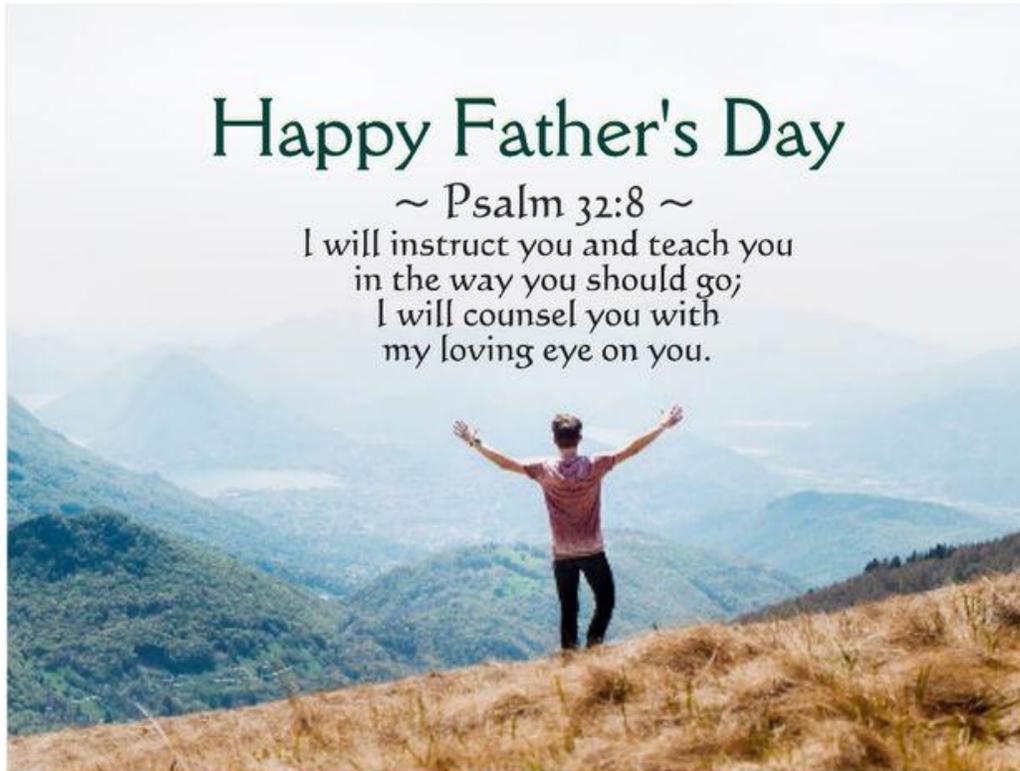
Together, we can help end hunger in our community!!

Double Match Day
June 19th

Purchase \$10 donation cards now through 7/3/21 to provide food to your local food pantries for families in need. On double match days, Meijer will match Simply Give card purchases up to a maximum Meijer donation of \$10,000 per store.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The Zion Food Pantry is open every Wednesday, from 2-4:30.
- You must be a resident of Ionia County and you MUST bring ID with your current address.
- You may come ONCE per calendar month.
- They hold AA meetings at 7am on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Sundays meetings are held at 7pm.
- Mobile Food Truck is the 2nd Tuesday of each month, 3:30-4:30. July will be at Zion. June, August-November will be at the Merchants Building at the Ionia Fair Grounds. Bring a container for your food. One family per address.
- Zion Soup Kitchen and Al-Anon meetings have been put on hold, due to Covid.



THE ORIGIN OF FATHER'S DAY

One Sunday in 1909, Sonora Smart Dodd listened to a sermon honoring mothers. Her mother had died some years before, so her father had raised her by himself. Dodd wondered why there wasn't a day to honor fathers, so she arranged a tribute to her father at a church in Spokane, Washington. The date was June 19, 1910. Many people believe this was the beginning of Father's Day.

Another account holds that a West Virginia church held a tribute service for fathers in 1908, following a mine explosion that killed 360 men. Regardless of which story is correct, President Calvin Coolidge was the first president to designate a special day to honor fathers. In 1924, he proclaimed the third Sunday in June as Father's Day.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Lyons-Muir Church is called to be God's healing and hope-filled congregation, and to make followers of Jesus Christ for the positive transformation of our community through lives of prayer, love, forgiveness, honesty, acceptance, and trust.



This year we'll have an "slimmed down" version of VBS with a mix of crafts, science, story-telling, music, and –of course–snacks! We're excited to welcome the children of this community to our church once more.

Questions?

Call Barb Davarn:
989-225-3849.

May Finance Report

Thank you for your ongoing support!!

Income \$5,2268.44

Expenses \$4,685.06

Surplus \$583.38

Year to Date Surplus (Defecit)

(-\$220.63)

2021 Adopt-A-Highway

This year the Adopt-A-Highway dates are July 17-25 and September 25-October 3.

Our Adopt-A-Highway area runs down M-21 from the Maple River, through Muir, past our church, to Westbrook Road which is three miles. Volunteers are needed to help with the trash pickup, as the volunteers able to help are dwindling. Last year, there were four people to pick up the three miles and having more volunteers will help. If you would like to volunteer for this community service, please contact Barb Davarn at 989-224-3849.