

August 23 ~

This week, on August 24, we celebrate that in 1456 the first Gutenberg Bible was completed in Mainz, Germany. It was the first volume printed with moveable metal type, and the press produced 180 copies. Gutenberg's innovation was to streamline and synthesize already-existing techniques (assembling the type, folding the pages into folios, binding the volume) into an efficient printing process, the basic contours of which were subsequently used widely for hundreds of years. The publication of the Gutenberg Bible was therefore a breakthrough in the history of the dissemination of knowledge to ordinary people.

In honor of this event, I want to celebrate the Bible. I know that the Bible contains words that have been used in hurtful and harmful way (to support slavery, discrimination against LGBTQ, and sexism). I know there are moments of violence and descriptions of a vengeful God. Yet, there are also words that challenge us to break down the barriers we build and describing God's love as the animating force for all of life. There is profound, powerful wisdom in Scripture. This week, we will survey some of the truths in Scripture that are foundational and formational for faith.

We start with the beginning ~ Genesis 1 where God speaks with a Word of life into existence. All of the earth is an echo of God's creativity. ***The mystics have always said that the natural world was God's first testament or testimony.*** Of course, people feel closer to God outside among the trees, with their bare feet touching the earth as the grass tickles their toes and their souls stir connected to the soil.

Scripture says this is the case because you are formed in God's image (Genesis 1:27). God sunk God's fingertips into the earth/soil to form the human shape, breathing divine breath into you. (Genesis 2:7).

Take a deep breath and slowly exhale.

This holy act of breathing (which you do without consciously thinking about) is a prayer because each breath is back to your roots of who you are. Take time today to notice your breathing. Better yet, go outside to breathe in the sun or rain knowing that you share DNA with all that is around you. We know this is true both from Scripture and science. Researchers who tell us that we have stardust in us and that over half our body is water ~ so our life does flow and has a current.

Take a deep breath and slowly exhale.

Prayer: Thank you, O God, for words of Scripture that can ground us and guide us. Breathe on us, breath of God, every minute today.

August 24 ~

This week we are celebrating the Gutenberg Bible that made Scripture more accessible to ordinary people. Yesterday we explored how you are created in God's image. And if each of us could live this truth, the world would be a very different place. But we don't love ourselves ~ we all have things about ourselves that we would change if we could ~ so we don't believe that we are fully created in God's image. **Because we struggle to love ourselves fully, in turn we don't love**

others. So often it is our internal pain that is processed/passed along to others. We blame and shame others because we do not fully embrace (or believe that God fully embraces) the image that stares back in the mirror at us. This isn't psychology rather it is theology.

Genesis 3 says that humans were doing great – living their best lives. Only, there was this tree that they were not supposed to eat from. Pause. Why did God form a tree that was off-limits? I don't know. Why was forbidden fruit part of creation? I am not sure. I believe there is some truths that make sense to my rational mind, then there are truths that make sense to my experienced, lived life. There are temptations all around me ~ forbidden fruit I should not partake. Often the church points to drinking or dancing or playing card or pornography or addictions. We have focused so much on individual blaming and shaming that we have missed the corporate sinfulness of racism, sexism, heterosexism, disregard for the earth, and standing silently on the sidelines rather than risking saying something to confront another.

I don't have to stand in the Garden of Eden to know this is true. There are moments I fall flat on my face. There are moments I benefit from the color of my skin and gender. Brokenness alongside blessedness. Genesis preaches and proclaims that the way it has been, is, and will be. We live in the messy middle of those twin truths.

Today, as you breathe and slowly exhale ~ name your blessings. Name the moments when you noticed a trace of God's grace. Now name the places where you struggle to embody or be embraced by such grace. The time you said something, the moment you laughed at a joke that push another down, the time you tried to puff out your chest in order to feel strong. Both are truths in our lives to be explored as pathways to the Divine. Breathe and be in God's presence today.

August 25 ~

So far this week we have affirmed that YOU are created in God's image. Sometimes, as the Apostle Paul says in Romans 7:15, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." Unfortunately, we can get stuck in the muck of messiness; brokenness can become our address and permanent residence. This is true individually and collectively. When we do, Scripture says that we are in Exodus and Exile.

These two metaphors are vital in Scripture. Exodus (the second book of the Bible) describes how God's people are enslaved in Egypt. Pharaoh always wants more and more and more...never enough. I have known Exodus in my life living as a perfectionist, Type A person. I can be quick to find the flaw, the place where something or someone comes up short. Exodus can be systemic in forms of discrimination thrust unjustly on others. Pharaoh enslaves people out of fear. We still say and do things to others out of fear. Exodus remains a place and address in our souls in many ways.

Then, there is Exile, where the people of God are captured and carted off by a foreign power. You can read about this many books of the Hebrew Scripture (Isaiah and Jeremiah are two examples).

Sometimes we can feel captured and carted off to a foreign place, like a stranger in a strange land. We can feel this way physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. Remember the exercise from a few weeks ago where I invited you to check in on those four dimensions of life – physical, mental, emotional and spiritual? Remember the body scan prayer practice last Sunday? I did that so you could see both the blessings and brokenness. But the promise of God's presence and the Exodus/Exile of life.

If you have not had a chance, I encourage you today to find a piece of paper and see how you are doing mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. To quote Ruby Sales, "Where does it hurt?" To quote Mary Oliver, "What is it you intend to do with your one wild and precious life today?" Spend time dwelling and diving deep into the interior of your life.

August 26 ~

The Psalms are the book of hymns of the Hebrew people. Some of the 150 poem/prayers sing praise to God, about 1/3 are laments or the Blues being sung to God by God's people. Some are for the community to sing, and some are for individuals to personally lament. Some are to be sung while traveling (see Psalm 121) – and you thought your mom came up with singing in the car on a journey! Some are to be prayed processing the pain, passing along our hurt and frustration to God. Of course, Psalm 23 is one of the most famous. To build on the juxtaposition of blessedness and brokenness of this week consider these two verses – that sit side-by-side in the psalm:

He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk
through the darkest valley.

Wait...if God is guiding me along right paths, why/how would I ever be in a dark valley? Why wouldn't God always lead me on smooth, level places? Shouldn't God's GPS help me **avoid** the pitfalls and valley places? Do you hear the continued truth in Scripture of blessing and brokenness; praise and pain; healing/hope and hurt sitting side-by-side? We rush so quickly to either/or in life. Either it is the best or worst ever. Scripture offers us a sense that in life there both/and. This is an echo that is found in countless places and passages throughout the Hebrew Scripture.

Where right now do you feel that the sailing is smooth and steady? Perhaps a relationship with your partner or friend? Perhaps a new volunteer opportunity? Where is there a valley moment when you consider COVID numbers or discrimination or a pain that is particular to the art project called, "Your Life"?

Hold these, because in Scripture God holds both together too.

Prayer: Precious Lord, take my hand; lead me on and help me stand; when I am tired and weak and worn; give me the curiosity/courage/grace/love to carry on. Amen.

August 27 ~

This week, I have invited you to enter Scripture and the creative tension found in a few of the passages and books. I pray there have been moments of insight, questions, and especially a sense of God's presence. As we wrap up and wind down another week, I invite you to pray with me.

Crafting and creative God, life is such an endless mystery. While we would prefer quick fixes that don't invite us to change, we know this is rarely the way of being human. Often the challenges can be overwhelming, and we wonder whether we are really making a difference. We see our own short comings and want to resolve those as fast as possible. There are so many voices offering us solutions that the slow, steady work of the Spirit seems too difficult or demanding. Yet, when those other ways fall short or we still struggle with the Exodus and Exile of life, this can open us to You in new ways. Let Your breath infuse and inspire our daily living. Let Your fingerprints be found in our souls in new ways. Let Your presence be a light in the valley moments. For these truths of Scripture, we give thanks to You, Author and Source of Life. Amen.