

John 1:1-14 The Word Became Flesh

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it... ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son full of grace and truth.

Revelation 10:8-10

⁸ Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." ⁹ So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, "Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth." ¹⁰ So I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.

Communion Meditation

On any given day in my house growing up we had 2 cereals to choose from each morning: Corn Flakes or Rice Krispies, unless my mom caved and bought Sugar Smacks that week. One menu was offered each night by my mother. If you didn't like it, you didn't go out to a fast food restaurant, you could make a sandwich or eat a bowl of that cereal!

On any given day we had three clear Television stations- all free!

On any given day- my parents read one daily newspaper except once a week our small town paper arrived, the Yorkville Enquirer.

On any given month, 3 magazines arrived in the mail- *Popular Mechanics* for my father, *Southern Living* for my mother, and *Highlights for Kids* for me- the one with the hidden pictures, stories and jokes.

My mother had a Bible by her bed, so I did, too, among my Library books.

We had choices- limited ones, but choices of what we could eat, read, consume in my house.

Now, in my hand I have an smart phone. I can access entire Libraries, download books, read my Bible, watch movies, TV, order any product I want, run a presentation for work, look at photos of what you are eating for supper or be a part of your vacation, and I can order any cereal I desire, even have a driver deliver it to my house in a few hours, so my kids can eat that rather than what we cook for supper---all in a matter of minutes.

We have so many choices, so much we can get, so much to eat and consume.

We are stuffed to the gills- maybe even have indigestion from all the stress, options, choices, activities, demands...more than any other people in the history of the planet, we have more of everything.

Yet, we are starving. Starving for real nourishment, real conversation, real relationships. As Harvard scientist E.O. Wilson writes, "We are drowning in information, but starved for wisdom." Starving....

Today we read that the angel in John's vision says to take this book, the Scripture, and eat it. Chew it up, consume it, digest it. Let it get into your bloodstream, your heart, your mind, then live it out so that your footprints and fingerprints you leave will show whose you are.

Scripture- Many times Scripture becomes something we USE. We use it for proverbial wisdom like Benjamin Franklin's "early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise" morality,

Some only enjoy it as an academic pursuit, like studying archeology or literature, but the purpose goes much deeper.

If you eat this book, it will change your life!

Eat this book. What a strange sounding demand. And it isn't the first time in Scripture that we hear it. During the Babylonian Exile, the prophet Ezekiel is told by the Lord to eat the scroll. Jeremiah is told to eat the words of the Lord after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Today it is John who is told to eat the scroll during the time of the worst persecution from Rome.

It seems in the worst of times, God's prophets must speak God's word in a world where people are dismayed, drowning, and hungry for a word from the LORD. It will be sweet to the taste, but could cause indigestion. In difficult times, the world needs God even more.

Much like the time of John, Ezekial, and Jeremiah, some say we are living in the best of times and the worst of times, too. (with credit to Charles Dickens)

We have more of everything, yet the environment is plagued by natural disasters left and right- hurricanes, earthquakes, and wildfires which impact people and all living things.

We have more weapons, and yet we live with the constant threat of local and international terrorism.

We have more technology, and yet we live with cyber threats daily and are obsessed with the media.

We can produce more food than before, and yet, we have a world where hunger is just as real.

We can send a tweet to a large audience, but have less time for real relationships with people.

We have more of everything, but we are starved....for God.

As Christians, we are People of the Book, the good Book, the BIBLE.

Yet we do not worship the Bible, we worship the God revealed to us in the Bible. The entire Bible is the book of revelation. And the fullest revelation is the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. The Bible is how we know the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

If we are truly to eat this book, it will change our lives because God changes lives. In the Scripture we encounter the living God. I wonder if that is a risk we are willing to take.

Eugene Peterson writes about Scripture in this book, *Eat this Book*, as an encounter of the Holy One, the Trinity, but reminds us that most of us worship another god, the Trinity of My Holy Wants, My Holy Needs, and My Holy Feelings. We make a god of ourselves.ⁱ

And that is where the Bible gets tricky, because if you encounter this Living God, your world is turned upside down.

Scripture is both sweet as honey and bitter in our stomachs- hard to digest. As Reinhold Niebuhr put it, "God comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable."ⁱⁱ God offers both judgment and mercy. God's word is both sweet as honey and can give us indigestion. It comforts and challenges us. In Hebrews 4:12 we read, "the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword." In other words, it is dangerous.

Bibles should come with a warning label like the one on your fast food coffee cup, "Warning: contents are hot" except it should read, "Warning: Reader Beware."

Peterson puts it this way,

I might own a morocco leather Bible, having paid fifty dollars for it, but I don't own the word of God to do what I want; God is sovereign. The word of God is not my possession. The words printed on the page give witness to the living active revelation of the God of creation and salvation, the God of love who became the Word made flesh in Jesus, I better not forget it. If in my Bible reading, I lose touch with this livingness, if I fail to listen to this living Jesus, submit to his sovereignty, and respond to this love, I become arrogant in my knowing and impersonal in my behaviors. And enormous amount of damage is done in the name of Christ by bad Bible reading. Caveat lector, let the reader beware.ⁱⁱⁱ

So with care, prayer, and discernment of the Holy Spirit, we read this word. And it reads us. We come to the Scripture with our own experiences, but we never read God into our lives, we read our lives in God's story. The authority of Scripture rests in the Author, not in us. So we come with humble hearts to this living word of God. We study it out of deep respect for the written word and with deep reverence for the Holy Trinity revealed there. We search the scriptures, not just using it to prop up our agendas or support our arguments. The Bible is not a weapon. Reader Beware.

And so, Scripture requires that we do the hard work of interpretation. In a fast food world, most of us want quick and easy. Interpretation takes time and care. It is more of a slow food movement.

In interpreting Scripture we use the little phrase, "it is also written." For instance, we read in Deuteronomy 22 that a new bride found to not be a virgin shall be stoned to death by the men of the town (Deut. 22:20-21). But *it is also written* that the Lord requires that "we seek justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly with God." (Micah 6:8). And *it is also written* that Joseph, faced with the pregnancy of his betrothed wife Mary, chooses mercy and not violence (Matthew 1:19) Joseph is commended for his righteousness. We search all of Scripture with respect. We always ask if the scripture is consistent with who Jesus is. Jesus, the Word made flesh, shows us fully what God is like.^{iv}

Finally, the purpose of the Word has always been our obedience. John Calvin said it "all right knowledge of God is born of obedience."^v Again, brother Eugene, tells of the time he had a member of his church, Anthony Pakados, a thirty five year old truck driver. Anthony grew up in a Greek family, a Catholic home, but none of it rubbed off. He left school after the eighth grade. He said he had never read a book. Then he became a Christian, got himself an old King James Bible, and read it three times the first year after his conversion. His wife Mary grew up in a proper Presbyterian home and went to Sunday School, but she was a bit bewildered by

this change and asked lots of questions. When Mary's questions got too difficult for Anthony, they would invite Eugene, their pastor, to their home, papered with Elvis Presley posters, to help out.

One evening the subject was parables- Mary wasn't getting it. Peterson writes, "I was trying to tell her how to read them and make sense of them with little success when Anthony interrupted, 'Mary, you got to live 'em, then you'll understand 'em; you can't figger 'em out from the outside, you got to git inside 'em- or let them git inside you.'"^{vi}

Anthony may not have read Calvin, but he sure did understand obedience.

Eat this book. Chew on it, consume it, digest it until it becomes living, breathing action. You and I become part of God's saving story. God's story will metabolize into acts of love, cups of cold water, missions into all the world, healing and evangelism and justice in Jesus' name, hands raised in adoration of the Creator, feet washed in company with the Son, life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, God's kingdom life.

If you eat this book, beware! Get ready to encounter the living, Holy God, who loves us just the way we are, but loves us enough, not to leave us that way! Thanks be to God for that Good News.

ⁱ Eugene Peterson, *Eat this Book, a Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 31.

ⁱⁱ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr; Essays and Addresses*, ed. by Robert McAfee Brown (New Haven, CT; Yale University Press, 1986) This phrase attributed first to Chicago Journalist Finley Peter Dunne in reference to the role of the Press as watchdog. Niebuhr and others use it in reference to God.

ⁱⁱⁱ Peterson, 82.

^{iv} Dorothy Bass and Susan Briehl, eds. *On Our Way; Christian Practices for Living a Whole Life* (Nashville: Upper Room), 2010, 28.

^v John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T McNeill, trans., Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), vol. 1, chap. 6 section 2.

^{vi} Peterson, 70-71.