

From The Pastor

What would be our sadness if the Word of God were taken from us? Initially there would be great wailing and concern. We would grow troubled for a time with concern about our relationship with God. How would we stay in touch with God and remain faithful to the truths and the ways of God? How would we remember Jesus in the richness and the promise of his life? After a time, such concerns would fade away and the tensions of faith would lessen. Our lives would be greatly impoverished leaving us searching for the peace and hope that only God can offer. Even still, time has a way of dulling the memory even for the most precious of things. Life would just become 'normal' without the truth and the richness of God's Word.

What would be our joy if, after a generation or two, the Word of God was found and rediscovered? Consider the joy and hope that would be rekindled in the soul. Perhaps there would be a degree of fear and concern regarding our stance before God for having forgotten the Word and the truths it offers. Would God understand and forgive us? Would God still consider us his beloved people? Might we be filled with joy and rejoicing because we have recovered the meaning and the truth about ourselves and our existence through the Word of God?

Historically, after many years spent in exile in a foreign country without the Hebrew Scriptures, the people return to find the city and the temple in ruin. After a period of restoration, some of the old scrolls and the Book of the Law are found in the rubble. A great festive day of celebration is planned by Ezra the priest/scribe along with all the other teachers of the law to introduce again the Word of God. All gather to share in and be enriched by this solemn day of rededication to the Word.

The mood is mixed. There is, initially, a mood of fear and uncertainty with concern about God's faithfulness. Would God be mad at the people for having forgotten the precepts of the Law? After the people are assured of God's joy at their finding the Word, they are all called to make the day holy and inspired with joy for having been restored to the wisdom and promises of God's Word.

I think this is a powerful reading that should inspire us to value and love God's word in scripture. So accustomed are we to hearing the Word that it is often taken for granted, and at times not given our full attention. The Word of God is a living relationship through which we come to know and love and follow Jesus. Specifically, I am referring to the Word of God and the scriptures, the Bible; but as you know, the Word is Jesus himself deserving our full attention and reverence.

This is the connection with the gospel. Jesus himself studied and loved the ancient Hebrew Scriptures. Today, as Jesus is early in his public ministry, he enters the synagogue to worship. He is invited to read from the scroll of Isaiah and chooses a passage that he is obviously familiar with. Jesus has looked at this passage often, and it is clear he has spent time with it in prayer. The fruit and identity of the passage for Jesus is that he claims it as a personal identity, a mission statement, for his life's work.

The Word of God, which is the written scripture, is now claimed by and fulfilled in the Word of God that is Jesus himself. Jesus is the one who will make the written Word come alive by his accomplishment of all it promises. Jesus claims the passage from Isaiah for himself as a way to reveal his identity as Messiah, as well as to make known the kind of Messiah God has given to us.

Jesus claims for himself, 'the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord'.

Jesus fulfills these words and does all he has promised. Now the path of the Kingdom has been set, and we are the ones to hear and fulfill the Word of God. Like Jesus, we would do well to take this passage to prayer and ponder how it might be effective in our lives. Make the passage your own as Jesus did. The Spirit of the Lord is upon *you*. From your baptism, *you* have been anointed for the Lord, and by the Lord. *You* and *I* have the Spirit of the Lord and share the call to make present his promises to others.

Consider the verses personally. I/we, in some way or another, have been sent to bring hope to the poor, freedom to the imprisoned, and sight to the blind. This is our Christian call. How do *you* make it evident in *your* personal experience? The poor may be those poor in love. The imprisoned may be trapped in an addiction, and the blind may be sightless in anger and unforgiveness. The opportunities are endless.

This is the power of the Word of God. Take the Word personally. Read scripture regularly. As you read you may be helped by asking three questions to enter the reading more deeply. What did I hear in the reading? How does it affect me? What is my prayer? Enjoy the Word. It is a source of life.

Father John Esper