

Sermon for Pentecost Sunday 2017

Grace and peace be to you through the Holy Spirit, from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. It's pretty common, as I wander around Othello, to hear people speaking Spanish. I am trying to learn Spanish, but so far I am a long way from being fluent. I take great hope from the sentence in the second reading that said, "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability." I keep praying that the Holy Spirit will give me the ability to speak Spanish, but in the meantime I still have the Spanish language resources that the Spohrs provided.

Learning a new language takes practice, and keeping a new language takes usage. The more we use a language the better we get at speaking in that language.

In 2007 the ELCA launched the "Book of Faith Initiative" to help Lutherans become more fluent in the language of Scripture, what the ELCA calls, "the first language of faith." According to the ELCA, "The vision of the initiative is this: that the whole church become more fluent in the first language of faith - the language of Scripture - in order that we may live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened, and empowered by the Word. ... The fulfillment of this vision depends on all of us." On the back of every newsletter we declare ourselves to be a "book of faith" church, so I'm curious to find out how well we know our first language of faith. Do we know the Bible, or do we just talk about it?

Now, there are a lot of things in the Bible, some well known and some not well known. Church nerds like me sometimes find ways to pull things out of the Bible that aren't even really there! For instance, you may not know that there is a baseball game going on in the Bible. Consider this; the whole story starts with "In the big inning". Then, Eve stole first, Adam stole second, Cain struck out Abel, and the Prodigal Son came home. The Giants and the Angels were rained out, but Noah was safe. At some baseball stadiums parking is a problem. You may not realize this, but the Apostle Paul was in favor of car-pooling, because in Philippians 2 he tells the believers to be in one Accord.

Knowing what's in the Bible may come in handy in your everyday life. Picture this: A woman was riding the bus to work and reading a book when a young man sat next to her. The young man asked her, "What are you reading?"

"The Bible" was her reply.

"I don't believe in God or the Bible", said the man. All of that stuff is just too unbelievable to me. Do you really believe what the Bible says?" The young man asked.

"Yes I do" replied the woman.

Well, there sure are a lot of weird stories in the Bible" continued the young man. "What part are you reading now?"

"I'm reading the book of Jonah" was the woman's reply.

"Do you honestly believe that Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish?"

"I don't know, sir," said the woman, "But when I get to heaven, I'll ask him."

"But suppose he isn't in heaven?" the young man said slyly. The woman answered, "Then you can ask him."

The ELCA launched the "Book of Faith Initiative" because biblical illiteracy is a problem in, not just the Lutheran Church, but in almost all Christian churches. We just don't read the Bible! So, here are:

TOP 10 SIGNS YOU MAY NOT BE READING YOUR BIBLE ENOUGH

--10 The Preacher announces the sermon is from Galatians ... and you check the table of contents.

--9 You think Abraham, Isaac and Jacob may have had a few hit songs during the 60's.

--8 You open to the Gospel of Luke and a WWII Savings Bond falls out.

--7 Your favorite Old Testament patriarch is Hercules.

--6 A small family of rodents has taken up residence in Psalms.

--5 You become frustrated because Charlton Heston isn't listed in either the concordance or the table of contents.

--4 Catching the kids reading the Song of Solomon, you demand: "Who gave you this stuff?"

--3 You think the Minor Prophets worked in the quarries.

--2 You keep falling for it every time when pastor tells you to turn to First Condominiums.

And the No. 1 sign you may not be reading your Bible enough:

1) The kids keep asking too many questions about your usual bedtime story: "Jonah the Shepherd Boy and His Ark of Many Colors."

It's Pentecost Sunday, the birthday party of the whole Christian Church, so let's play a party game called, "Bible Trivia Challenge". I thought it might be fun to find out how we're doing on the first language of faith. Here's how we'll play:

You are already divided into two teams, the north side and the south side, kind of like the Civil War. There are 10 questions, some easy, and some more difficult. I will ask a question, alternating sides for each question. If one side either cannot answer their question or answers it incorrectly, the other side has a chance to steal the question. If neither side can answer the question I give you the Bible reference and the first one to look it up from either side will get the chance to answer. Everyone should have a Bible within reach, so let me know now if there isn't a Bible near you and I'll get one to you.

Here we go:

Question 1 (N)

Where was King David born (Bethlehem) 1Samuel 16:4-13

Question 2 (S)

Who was the first king of Israel? (Saul) 1Samuel 9:27-10:1

Question 3 (N)

What is the name of the king that sentenced the prophet Daniel to the lion's den? (Darius) Daniel 6:9-16

Question 4 (S)

Who is the third child of Adam and Eve? (Seth)

Genesis 4:25

Question 5 (N)

Who is the king of Babylon that sentenced Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to the fiery furnace?
(Nebuchadnezzar) Daniel 3:13-18

Question 6 (S)

Who baptized Jesus with water? (John the Baptist)
Matthew 3:13

Question 7 (N)

What is the name of the town where Jesus was born?
(Bethlehem) Luke 2:4-7

Question 8 (S)

When Jesus was arrested Peter cut off the ear of the slave of the high priest. What is the name of the slave?

(Malchus) John 18:10

Question 9 (N)

Where are Jesus and the disciples when Peter makes his bold confession that Jesus is the Messiah? (Caesarea Philippi) Matthew 16:13-16 or Mark 8:27-29

Question 10 (S)

Who fell from a third floor window during Paul's long sermon in Troas, proving that you can actually preach someone to death? (Eutychus) Acts 20:7-12

Hopefully this little exercise has shown you that it's fun to know the Bible, not just for the pleasure of playing a fun game, but also for the truth it contains and the message of salvation it proclaims. My prayer is that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, all Christians can work together to become much more fluent in our first language of faith, the Bible. Amen.