

**Psalm 119:1-16 Joshua 24:14-16, 19-24 1 St. Peter 4:7-11 St. John 15:26-16:4a**

Committed to the Word

**Mission Statement:** The Anglican Church of St. George the Martyr is a community of believers in Jesus Christ seeking to live out the Gospel among ourselves, seeking to take the Gospel to the world, and committed to being Biblical in our faith, liturgical in our worship, and evangelical in our witness.

**4. We are committed to being biblical:**

As the Scriptures are our guide in all matters of faith and practice, we will endeavor to provide biblical education and spiritual growth opportunities for all age groups.

I wish to begin today's sermon with two quotations taken from the 39 Articles of Religion and one from The Form and Manner of Ordering Priests. The first can be found on page 603 of your Book of Common Prayer and is from Article 6 regarding the sufficiency of Holy Scripture for Salvation. "Holy Scripture," the Article states, "containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." The article then concludes with a list of all books considered canonical as well as those considered non-canonical and yet worthwhile reading as an example for life and instruction, even though they may not be used to establish any doctrine.

The second quotation can be found on page 607 of your Book of Common Prayer and is taken from Article 20 regarding the authority of the Church. "The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith: and yet it is not

lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of Salvation."

The third and last quotation can be found on page 542 of your Prayer Books. It is a question asked by the Bishop to be answered by the priest being ordained. "Are you persuaded," the Bishop asks, "that the Holy Scriptures contain all Doctrine required as necessary for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? And are you determined, out of the said Scriptures to instruct the people committed to your charge; and to teach nothing, as necessary to eternal salvation, but that which you shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the Scripture?" To which the priest is instructed to reply, "I am so persuaded, and have so determined, by God's grace." (For those ex-Episcopalians, you may like to compare this question with that asked in the '79 Prayer Book on page 532, "Will you be diligent in the reading and study of the Holy Scriptures, and in seeking the knowledge of such things as may make you stronger and more able minister of Christ?", to which the priest simply replies, "I will.")

The careful wording of the two articles and that of the 1928 Prayer Book ordination question aims to eliminate any conflict between Church authority and the freedom of the individual Christian, by demonstrating that both are dependant upon God's Word written. The position laid down in these three statements is quite clear. While it is possible for faithful Christians to hold to different opinions with regard to things of which the Scriptures are silent (such as the wearing of a tie versus a bow-tie or the positioning of

the Baptismal Font in the building), there are very definite boundaries within which we are all bound to live and practice our faith by virtue of the fact that God has expressly stated that this is His will. So, we are at once both bound and yet free.

This is because both the individual Christian and the Church to which they belong by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ exist because of and for the message as set forth in Scripture. In one sense it may be said that the Church did not create the message, but rather the message created the Church, even though it is true that the Church preceded the message written. Be that as it may, both the Church and the message written were created by God for the purpose of knowing Him and patterning our lives according to what can thus be known about Him. Consequently, without the message as set forth in Scripture the Church would be unable to compose any specific statement of doctrine about God because God, by virtue of His invisible nature, has to declare Himself if He is to be known, that is to be known as more than simply Someone out there...

It is true, of course, that the Scriptures must be interpreted by the Church in more ways than one...in its verbal preaching and teaching as well as in its physical and practical application of what it teaches in its attempt to address the differing needs of each successive generation. Thus our faith is not totally and inextricably anchored in the past, but is rather alive and vibrantly new in the present because truth, although perhaps packaged and presented in different ways, remains essentially and principally the same regardless of the changing fads and fashions of cultures and societies. What is right will always be right and what is wrong will always be wrong even though the demonstration or explanation offered in our manner of reasoning may be adapted to suit an alternative

audience. We see this even in the time of St. Paul who preached the same message from different angles when addressing Jews on the one hand and Gentiles on the other hand.

But the underlying, foundational, bedrock truth can never change without making God out to either be a liar or a self-contradictory lunatic. The Apostle Paul made this abundantly clear in his message to the Galatians where he said without apology, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven (and we might add the Holy Spirit Who has often been cited as leading the Church in a new direction), preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.” Whoops, how amazingly politically incorrect, St. Paul! Task, tsk, tsk. Let’s see if we could rephrase that, shall we? Next verse. “As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.” Wow, he said it again! Obviously this must have been something really important for him, don’t you think?

But why? Why was it so important for St. Paul to have the gospel preached unchanged? Well, actually, the answer to that question is really rather simple. What we have to understand, dearest beloved brethren, is the fact that if God’s Word changes, God changes and if God changes, we have absolutely no assurance of faith because what we believe is necessary for salvation now may not be true by the time we come to stand before His holy throne to be judged...indeed, there will be no standard judgment as there will be no standard to judge by if God keeps changing His mind. Believe me, you don’t want a God like that. A God who bows and kowtows to every whim and fancy of fickle and finite humanity.

So, if there is but one holy standard for faith and practice, what does that mean for us living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Well, the most obvious is that we, together with the Church of

all Ages, must be committed to upholding that one holy standard against all odds as without it we have nothing and we are nothing. If we are to know God and to live according to what pleases Him we need to know and apply His Word, because we will not find that information anywhere else. And if we are to know and apply His Word we will have to hear it taught by the Church, we will have to read it prayerfully for ourselves, always asking the same Holy Spirit Who inspired it to illuminate it so that we might understand what we are reading, we will have to study it diligently and intently using the many, many study aids available to us, we will have to memorize Scripture as the Psalmist says that this is the only remedy to prevent us from sinning against God and our fellow human beings, and finally, we will have to meditate on it, mulling over in our minds what we read and study so that we might correctly apply them to every day situations.

In his chapter on Personal Discipline, in his book *The Pursuit of Holiness*, Jerry Bridges gives us three practical questions to ask as we read and study God's Word. He says that we ought to ask ourselves what the particular passage or verse teaches us concerning God's will for a holy life and, then we are to ask very specifically how our lives measure up to that which we just learned, and then finally we need to ask ourselves what definite steps of action we need to take in order to bring our lives in line with that particular teaching. The more severely specific and determinedly definite you can be in this exercise the better. Vagueness can never produce clarity.

So, do we here at St. George's live up to the fourth point of our Mission Statement objectives? Do we provide biblical education and spiritual growth opportunities for all age groups? Well, I will leave that question for you to answer in the privacy of your own

heart, but I sincerely hope that we do live up to this because if we don't we have no business calling ourselves the Church of the one Who embodies the Word of God. If we preach any other doctrine than what has been once delivered to and received by the Church, or if we neglect to teach the whole counsel of God, or if we make one part of Scripture repugnant to another part of Scripture, or if we add or subtract to God's Word written, or if we embrace anything that blatantly contradicts what the Holy Spirit has revealed we are, according to the judgment of that same Word, accursed.

So, dearest brethren, as we come to feed upon Him Who is the same yesterday, today and forever, the eternal and unchanging Word, let us ask Him to grant us the deep desire and the pure pugnacity to be constantly and consistently committed to all things biblical, as God's gracious gift of His Word written and revealed is the only true guide we have in all matters of faith and practice.