THERE’S A BUNNY!

OCTOBER 16, 2022

2 TIMOTHY 3:14-4:5

THIS IS OLLIE! HE IS A GREAT DOG...2.5 YEARS OLD AND FULL OF ENERGY AND HE LOVES BUNNIES! DID I MENTION, HE LOVES BUNNIES? WHEN WE ARE OUT WALKING OR RUNNING TOGETHER HE WILL SEE A BUNNY AND GO CRAZY. I CAN TELL HIM TO “LEAVE IT” AND EVEN TRY AND BRIBE HIM WITH TREATS TO PAY ATTENTION TO ME AND STILL, ALL HE CAN THINK ABOUT IS “BUNNIES”!

NOW, I KNOW THAT PAUL (OR WHOMEVER THE ACTUAL WRITER OF 2 TIMOTHY IS) WAS NOT TALKING ABOUT DOGS AND BUNNIES BUT HE WAS TALKING ABOUT THE CHURCH AND HOW WE HUMANS ARE DISTRACTED AND HAVE *ITCHING EARS.* THESE VERSES TODAY START WITH ENCOURAGEMENT FOR TIMOTHY, *HE IS TO CONTINUE IN WHAT HE HAS LEARNED AND FIRMLY BELIEVED, KNOWING FROM WHOM HE HAD LEARNED IT AND HOW SINCE HIS CHILDHOOD HE WAS TAUGHT BY HIS MOM AND GRANDMOTHER (REMEMBER) AND PAUL, THE SACRED WRITINGS.*  SIDE NOTE: THE SACRED WRITINGS WOULD BE THE HEBREW BIBLE, NOT THE BIBLE WE HAVE. IT IS PRE-ENTIRE BIBLE TIME BY A FEW HUNDRED YEARS. IF YOU EVER HEAR, “OH, THE OLD TESTAMENT ISN’T IMPORTANT!” “OR JESUS CAME TO OVER RIDE THE OT”, DON’T BELIEVE IT. ALL THE WRITERS OF THE NT WERE STEEPED IN OR AT LEAST UNDERSTOOD AND WERE OPERATING UNDER THE HEBREW BIBLE AND HOW JESUS TAUGHT IT. SO, DON’T EVER THINK THAT THE OLD TESTAMENT ISN’T IMPORTANT. IT MIGHT BE BORING, GOREY, SCARY AND HARD TO UNDERSTAND BUT IT IS THE FOUNDATION OF THE NT AND WORTH WRESTLING WITH PLUS, THE STORIES ARE GREAT. ANYWAY, IT IS ALWAYS GOOD TO BE REMINDED OF WHAT WE KNOW, HAVE LEARNED AND WHO HAS ENCOURAGED US IN THE FAITH. THE IDEA OF THAT GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES.

NOW WE COME TO A SCRIPTURE THAT MANY OF YOU HAVE HEARD OF: *ALL SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED BY GOD AND IS USEFUL FOR TEACHING, REPROOF, CORRECTION AND TRAINING SO WE CAN BE EQUIPPED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK.* THE BIBLE IS IMPORTANT FRIENDS. IF WE, AS CHRISTIANS, ARE NOT INTERESTED IN WHAT IT HAS TO SAY TO US AND WE DON’T TRY AND STUDY IT, WE ARE LIKE DOCTORS WHO NEVER STUDIED ANATOMY BUT ARE HEART SURGEONS OR LAWYERS THAT DON’T KNOW THE LAW OR VETERINARIANS THAT HATE ANIMALS.....YOU GET THE IDEA.

I BELIEVE WE NEED THIS REMINDER ABOUT THE BIBLE AND IT’S IMPORTANCE BECUZ WE HAVE ITCHING EARS AND WE ARE EASILY DISTRACTED BY THE THINGS THAT STOP THE ITCH, AT LEAST FOR AWHILE. MOST OF US APPROACH OUR FAITH LIKE OLLIE APPROACHES AN ITCHING EAR, IF I SCRATCH IT, THE ITCH WILL GO AWAY. THE PROBLEM IS, SOMETHING CAUSED THE ITCH AND THAT’S WHERE WE MIGHT WANT TO PONDER ABIT. WHY DO I HAVE AN ITCH? WHAT AM I TRYING TO SCRATCH? IS IT A SYMPROM OD SOMETHING ELSE?

YEARS AGO I WENT TO A CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION AND SPIRITUALITY WITH THE DALAI LAMA AS ONE OF THE GUEST SPEAKERS. HERE WAS THE TOP BUDDHIST IN THE WORLD AND A PERSON ASKED HIM IF EVERYONE SHOULD BECOME A BUDDHIST AND HOW TO GO ABOUT MAKING THAT HAPPEN IN THE WORLD? I WILL NEVER FORGET HIS ANSWER, “NO”. HOW COULD IT BE NO IS WHAT I FELT FOLKS WONDERING? THIS IS THE BIG CHEESE OF BUDDHISM AND HE SAYS, “NO”? HE EXPLAINED, “IF YOUR TRADITION ISN’T BUDDHISM” AND LOOKING AROUND, MOST FOLKS TRADITION WAS NOT, “YOU SHOULD GO DEEP IN YOUR OWN TRADITION.” LOOK AT THE ITCH, STRUGGLE, LEARN, EXPERIENCE, SUFFER. PAUL AND TIMOTHY WOULD HAVE LOVED THIS GUY!

I LOVED WHAT HE HAD TO SAY BECAUSE SO MANY OF US PICK AND CHOOSE WHAT IS COMFORTABLE AND EASY WHEN IT COMES TO PRACTICING FAITH, RIGHT? I ESPECIALLY THINK IT IS TRUE WHEN IT COMES TO THE BIBLE. WE APPROACH SCRIPTURE LIKE A BUFFET WHERE WE PICK A LITTLE OF THIS, A LITTLE OF THAT. WHEN WE SAY, “THE BIBLE SAYS......” OR “THE BIBLE SAYS IT, I BELEIVE IT AND THAT SETTLES IT.” WHAT IS REALLY HAPPENING IS THAT THERE IS NO CONVERSATION. IT SEEMS LIKE THE ONES WHO CAN QUOTE THE BIBLE GET TO MAKE THE RULES, RIGHT? WE OFTEN DON’T KNOW ENOUGH TO SAY, “WHAT?” SO WE LET SOMEONE ELSE TELL US WHAT IT SAYS AND THEN WE LET OTHERS TELL US WHAT GOD SAYS AND WE MOVE ON TO SOMETHING EASIER, MORE PLATABLE, MORE FITTING.

IN ONE OF MY CHURCHES, I ENCOURAGED ONE OF THE LEADERS TO STUDY THE BIBLE FOR HIMSELF AND HE SAID “*NO, I’LL LET SCHOLARS THAT I RESPECT TELL ME WHAT IT SAYS.”* WELL, OK BUT WHAT IF THEY ARE BIASED OR ? LET’S FACE IT....THERE IS STUFF IN THE SCRIPTURE THAT I/WE DON’T UNDERSTAND, OR WE DON’T LIKE, OR ITS TOO HARD AND SO.....WE MOVE ON. WE ARE DISTRACTED BY “THERE’S A BUNNY” ....OR THE GOOD FEELINGS OF POP XTN BOOKS, SERMONS, CHURCH SERVICES, PODCASTS....WE ARE DISTRACTED BY BEING FED TREATS, LIKE OLLIE.

IM WONDERING; WHAT IF TIMOTHY AND MANY OF US HAVE MISSED WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE BIBLE TO BE INSPIRED BY GOD? MAYBE WE HAVE MISSED THE BOAT WHEN WE THINK ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE BIBLE TO TEACH US AND CORRECT US AND TRAIN US? WHAT IF THE WAY FOLKS USE THE BIBLE AS A BLUNT INSTRUMENT TO POUND ON PEOPLE IS NOT THE POINT AT ALL? WHAT IF KNOWING THE BIBLE IS MORE THAN “USEFUL”? WHEN I THINK OF THE WORD, USEFUL, I THINK OF VEGETABLES OR PRUNES OR TOOTHPASTE OR STURDY SHOES. WHAT IF THE BIBLE IS MORE LIKE THE MOST AMAZING MEAL, FULL OF A MILLION COURSES, MEANT TO BE SAVORED AND ENJOYED AND IS HEALTHY AND TASTY AND NEVER IS TOO MUCH? WHAT IF WE LOOKED AT THE BIBLE, THE SCRIPTURES IN A DIFFERENT WAY? ALLOWED IT TO FEED US DIFFERENTLY, WE MIGHT JUST WANT TO FEAST ON IT ALL THE TIME.

MARCUS BORG, WHO DIED IN 2015 WAS A NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLAR AND THEOLOGIAN, WROTE SO MANY GREAT BOOKS, WAS PART OF THE JESUS SEMINAR THAT EXAMINED WHAT JESUS REALLY SAID IN SCRIPTURE HAS SOME GREAT SUGGESTIONS ABOUT HOW WE CAN REIMAGINE THE BIBLE....

1. THE BIBLE IS A FINGER POINTING TO GOD, IT IS NOT GOD. SOMETIMES WE SEEM TO WORSHIP THE BIBLE INSTEAD OF THE ONE WHO INSPIRED IT. AS UMC’S WE DO NOT BELIEVE THE BIBLE IS INERRANT OR INFALLIBLE BECAUSE IT IS A BOOK, WRITTEN BY HUMAN BEINGS.....NOT A BIG GOD FINGER ON THE PAPER. THE REALITY IS THAT HUMANS MET TOGETHER TO PRAYERFULLY DECIDE WHAT SHOULD BE IN IT. THERE WERE LOTS OF DISCUSSIONS AND THERE ARE THINGS THAT WERE LEFT OUT AS WELL. HUMANS HAVE WORKED DELIGENTLY TO TRANSLATE SCRIPTURE INTO ALL KINDS OF LANGUAGES BUT IT IS ALWAYS A WAY FOR THE FINGER POINTING TO GOD, THE BIBLE IS NOT GOD! THE WORD THAT BECAME FLESH AND DWELT AMONG US ALWAYS TRUMPS THE BIG WORD WRITTEN DOWN SITTING ON YOUR COFFEE TABLE OR IN OUR BOOKSHELF.
2. THE BIBLE IS A LENS THROUGH WHICH WE VIEW GOD AND LIKE ALL GLASSES WEARERS, WE ALL HAVE A DIFFERENT PRESCRIPTION, A DIFFERENT CURVATURE, A DIFFERNET LENSE THRU WHICH WE SEE. WE READ SCRIPTURE AND WE INTERPRET IT THRU OUR OWN EXPERIENCE, OUR OWN NEED, OUR OWN DESIRES, OUR OWN TIME IN LIFE. EVERYTIME, I READ THE BIBLE I FIND THAT DIFFERENT SCRIPTURES HIT ME A DIFFERENT WAY DEPENDING ON MY CIRCUMSTANCES. THAT IS WHY THE WESLEYAN QUADRILATERAL IS SO IMPORTANT FOR HOW WE LOOK AT SCRIPTURE. THE QUADRILATERAL IS SCRIPTURE, TRADITION, REASON AND EXPERIENCE. THAT A GREAT LENSE THAT HELPS US IN OUR INTERPRETATION.
3. THE BIBLE IS LIKE A SACRAMENT, SOMETHING THAT BRINGS US INTO AN EXPERIENCE OF GOD LIKE COMMUNION OR BAPTISM. WE METHODISTS CALL SCRIPTURE READING A MEANS OF GRACE. REMINDER; GRACE IS GOD’S UNMERITED FAVOR; IT IS A GIFT.
4. THE BIBLE IS A LAMP SHINING IN THE DARKNESS. THE LAMP DOESN’T TAKE AWAY THE DARKNESS, IT LIGHTS UP A SMALL SECTION AND ALLOWS US TO FIND OUR WAY. OFTEN WHAT WE GET IN THE DARK IS JUST ENOUGH LIGHT TO SEE THE NEXT STEPS. NOT A MAP OR BLUEPRINT FOR EVERY STEP FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES, NOT A GIANT FLOODLIGHT BUT A LAMP, ENOUGH FOR EACH STEP AND EACH DAY!

THE BIBLE IS ABOUT TRANSFORMATION, NOT ABOUT INFORMATION. IT IS NOT A TEXT BOOK OR A HISTORY BOOK OR EVEN A DIRECTION PAMPHLET LIKE IKEA BUT, IT IS A LOVE LETTER FROM THE GOD OF THE UNIVERSE. IMAGINE IF WE COULD LOOK AT THIS LOVE LETTER AS A LAMP, A SACRAMENT, A FINGER POINTING TO GOD, A LENS FOR SEEING GOD? OPENING OURSELVES TO THE BIBLE IN THIS WAY WOULD HELP ALOT OF OUR ITCHES TO BE SCRATCHED, THE WORLD WOULD EXPERIENCE US DIFFERENTLY AS THOSE WHO DO GOOD FOR OTHERS, WE WOUD ENCOUNTER GOD IN DEEP WAYS,

THERE’S A BUNNY, THERE’S A BUNNY, THERE’S A BUNNY. LEAVE IT! COME HOME.