

Devotions for Oct. 24 - 30, 2011

Monday, October 24, 2011: Purpose Daily reading: Luke 1:1-4

The Bible is God's book, through which God accomplishes divine purposes. It's also a very human book, written by inspired witnesses in a particular time, to a particular people and for a particular purpose. Luke's Gospel is written for a very specific purpose for a very specific reason: "so that you may know the truth concerning things about which you have been instructed." Luke writes to a man named Theophilus, "friend of God," and Luke assures him that his words are based on good information. The word translated "truth" is better translated "certainty" or even "safety." This writer, who was not an eyewitness, writes an "orderly account" of Jesus' story so his student can get it right. Ask God to instruct you in the truth today.

Tuesday, October 25, 2011: Mail Daily reading: 2 Timothy 2:8-10

We affirm that the Bible comes from God in that we trust that the Holy Spirit was and is active in and through this word, its creation and its transmission (inspiration). We want to dispel the idea that this book comes from God in the sense that God dictated it directly through the authors (inerrancy). This idea of divine dictation is prevalent, modern and creates all sorts of problems for biblical interpretation. At the same time, we affirm that the Bible comes from very human sources. The New Testament authors would probably find it incredulous that Christians accept their writings today as "God's Word"! In the case of Luke's Gospel, we are literally reading someone's mail, though we believe this letter has been edited by the early Christian community for future publication. In 2 Timothy, we read Paul's words for Timothy. Today, ask God for a new perspective on the origins of the Scriptures.

Wednesday, October 26, 2011: Divine? Daily reading: Hebrews 4:11-13

Is the Bible divine or human? Lutherans have historically answered, "yes!" What does that mean? When some Christians say the Bible is divine, they mean that God wrote it, dictated the exact words to human beings to write down, and therefore the Bible is inerrant; everything it says about life, faith, science and history is factually accurate. But traditionally most Lutherans mean something else when they claim the Bible is divine. Martin Luther said that the Bible is like the manger. It has a few crooked nails and a few warped boards, but what really matters is that it holds the perfect Christ. While Lutherans certainly affirm that the Holy Spirit is involved in writing the Bible, when we say the Bible is divine we mean that God uses its words to accomplish God's divine purposes. We mean that this book points us to Jesus, the Lord and Savior of all creation. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible points us to Jesus. Ask God to give you deeper insight into the nature of the biblical witness.

Thursday, October 27, 2011: Human? Daily reading: Luke 9:28-36

Though the third Gospel never says who its author is, it has long been attributed to a gentile, a Greek physician named Luke. Not an eyewitness to Jesus' life, death and resurrection, Luke hears stories about Jesus from others. Whoever tells Luke the story of Jesus doesn't just say,

"Yeah, there was this guy named Jesus, a carpenter's kid. Nice guy. Really good teacher. Got pretty popular with the crowds. Too popular for the Romans. They nailed him up on a cross." No, whoever tells Luke about Jesus not only shares the events of Jesus' life, but also their meaning, giving witness to their faith that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, who ushers in the new Kingdom of God, freeing all creation from the power of sin and death. As God so often does, God uses that confession of faith to create faith in Luke, drawing Luke in to God's heart, connecting him to what God is up to in the world, and changing Luke's life.

Friday, October 28, 2011: Means Daily reading: Philippians 1:14-18

Does it matter if we believe the Bible is both a human and divine book? First, this way of seeing the Bible encourages us to read the Bible not as an end in itself but as a means to an end – to come to know and love God more. We don't read the Bible so much like a textbook but as part of a living conversation with a living God. We don't read it to memorize facts, but to grow in relationship with our Lord. We don't worship a book; we worship the One to whom this book points. I can memorize the Bible and remain utterly unchanged. But I can also read it cover to cover every year and it's never the same, because God speaks to me where I am at that moment, and changes me. Ask God to help you read the Scriptures in such a way that they help you know and love God more and more.

Saturday, October 29, 2011: Struggles Daily reading: Jonah 1:17-20 and Deuteronomy 21:18-21

Pick up where we left off yesterday: This way of seeing the Bible helps me with some of the intellectual struggles I've had with it. In order to be a faithful Christian, do I have to believe that the earth was created in six days and that it's only 6,000 old? Do I have to believe that there was a literal human being named Jonah who lived in the belly of a big fish for three days? Do I have to believe that God ever thought it was a good idea to take my rebellious son outside the city walls and stone him to death, or slaughter people who don't believe what I do? No, because these confessions of faith will come through the beliefs, values and cultures of those who wrote them. That doesn't mean that there aren't some absolutes, but those absolutes are not in the details. They are in the much larger story of God's love and God's work in the world through Jesus. Ask God to help you see the Bible through the much larger story of God's love.

Sunday, October 30, 2011: Hope Daily reading: Romans 5:1-5

Finally, this way of seeing the Bible gives us hope. If God can do such amazing things through the faith confessions of ordinary people, maybe God can use even our confessions of faith to accomplish God's will in amazing ways. Maybe, when we share what God means to us, the power to impact the lives of others doesn't lie in our story at all, but in the One to whom our story points. Maybe we'll be as surprised as Luke at what God is able to do through our confessions of faith. Human and divine, both! This is an amazing book not only because of how it came to us, but because of how God continues still to speak through it. So open it. Read it. Let God speak to you through it.