

ST. BARTHOLOMEW’S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

The Very Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Dean

Scripture: Various

“Be All You Can Be – in Christ!” (part 2)

THE KEY, THE ENGINE, AND THE FUEL

Last week we talked about the importance of being all we can be in Christ. That is the standard for the believer. Realize our spiritual potential and then we will realize our personal potential. It is the same for the Church. Our parish family, St. Bartholomew’s, is seeking to be all we can be in Christ. This means taking some time for self-evaluation, looking at our context, reordering our priorities with a new vision and mission statement, and seeking the Lord for direction and how to more effectively reach our community with the Gospel.

God wants us to be all we can be both individually as members of the Body of Christ and as the Body as a whole. I likened it to having a new car. To maximize the potential of the car, you need the key, an engine that sparks, and fuel. The key to being all we can be in Christ is to be born again, the engine that sparks is the Holy Spirit whom we receive when we are born again, and the fuel – well, that is what the Holy Spirit needs if the engine will run well.

Our mission statement provides us the fuel. Let’s look at it again – Our mission is to share Christ’s love and His Word with our community and world through Christ-centered outreach, prayer, worship, and Bible Study. There’s the fuel. It is why our next step is to develop strategy teams for each of these areas. We also are going to raise up a communications team to get the word out concerning the activities of these four areas.

But first, we need to look at these four elements of our fuel. Last week, we looked at the vital importance of prayer – our daily communication and interaction with the Lord; that’s an area we can grow in as a church. I asked everyone to take a look at their own prayer life to see if it needed improvement or not.

BE IN THE WORD!

Today, I want to talk about God’s Word – its importance highlighted in our mission statement with the term “biblical study.” When I look back at my life, I know that there are three reasons why I am here with you today as a believer and as a priest – my parents, other believers (i.e. the church) and God’s Word. Certainly I am here too because of the work of the Holy Spirit – but the Holy Spirit uses these three to transform us. But of the three, which is the most important? My parents will not always be with me; I may be cut off from other believers if I am thrown in prison for being a Christian; but the Word of God? I will always need the Word of God to be all that I can be.

Recall the Word of God is anything God does or says or shows to reveal Himself, His purpose and plan to us. And the ultimate Word of God is Jesus Himself – As **John 1:14** states ***“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”***

But God has called His people to record and preserve His Word first through oral and then written tradition. And His Word has been preserved into a written record we call the Bible. It has been preserved over generation to generation. It is the primary way God communicates to us in this life.

I know some people will ask, wait a minute, if Jesus wants to have a personal relationship with me and if He is so real, why doesn't He just show up and talk to Me? Why can't God make Himself known in special ways more often? Well, let me just say that Jesus has shown up and talked to some of our fellow human beings and that didn't work out so well, did it? God has appeared and done miraculous things in front of people who believed, but that didn't stop them from falling away or doubting. Do you remember what we just heard from our Gospel lesson about Lazarus and the rich man?

Belief and disbelief are heart issues that go beyond what we experience physically in the visible world. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at the right hand of the Father. He is not here visibly with each one of us, but He is here with us spiritually through His Holy Spirit; and sometimes we can physically get glimpses of that presence. But it is His Word that can now inform and guide us and strengthen our faith, daily!

And if we are to be all that we can be, we must be in the Word of God. After fasting for forty days in the Wilderness, the devil came and tempted Jesus to turn the stones He saw on the ground into loaves of bread. But Jesus replied in **Mt. 4:4**, "*It is written* (quoting **Dt. 8:3**), "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*"

In other words, life is about more than just the physical world. It is more than just having enough food. God is the One Who gives and sustains life, period! We cannot live apart from Him. His very Word is life itself. We must seek it as such. It is why **1 Peter 2:2** declares that we are to, "*like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.*"

So how can we be in the Word?

HEAR IT!

First, we need to hear it. **Romans 10:17** says "*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ.*" As a baby how did you learn to communicate? By listening to your parents and others speak. We had to hear words if we were going to speak them. In the same way, we come to faith because someone shares with us the Word of God. We need to hear the Word first, before we are to grow in the Word. The Lord God declares in **Isaiah 28:23**, "*Give ear and hear My voice, listen and hear My words.*" But hearing is not enough.

READ IT!

After we hear it, we need to read it! Listen to **Deuteronomy 17:18-20**: "*Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. 19It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, 20that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in*

the midst of Israel.” This was the admonition of the Lord for the king. But it was not just for the king; it is for everyone. With the modern age, we are now blessed to be able to read the Word of God daily due to the accessibility of God’s Word. We can thank the Reformation and the invention of the printing press for this blessing. Note why the king was to read it – so he would learn to fear the Lord his God, by obeying what it says. It also would keep him humble so he remembers that is but a man under God’s authority. As Martin Luther, one of the great reformers said, “We need to read Scripture every day because we forget Scripture every day.”

It is why the Lord told the prophet Habakkuk in **Habakkuk 2:2**: Then the LORD answered me and said, “***Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets, that the one who reads it may run.***” And yet simply reading the Word of God is not enough.

STUDY IT!

We need to study it! The Apostle Paul reminds the young church leader Timothy in **2 Timothy 3:14-17**: “***You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.***”

What is the Apostle Paul talking about? He is talking about learning the Holy Scriptures which is the same thing as “*sacred writings.*” At that time that was a reference to the Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament. Note that “***All Scripture is inspired by God,***” literally “God-breathed.” Not some but all, and the all comes directly from God! Certainly God used men to write down His Word; and it was done so through their personalities, experiences and particular contexts, but ultimately everything that has been written down has been preserved and anointed as God’s own Word! As such it needs to be studied. In other words, we need to find the meaning of the Word and its application. Otherwise, we will not be able to discern truth from error, how to do what is right and how to be equipped to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. So study the Word! But there’s more.

MEMORIZE IT!

We need to not only hear the Word, read the Word, and study the Word, we need to memorize the Word! Listen now to **Dt. 11:18**: “***You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.***”

Job 22:22, “***Please receive instruction from His mouth and establish His words in your heart.***”

The imagery here is clear. God’s Word is to be impressed on our hearts and souls. It is to be established in our very being. One of the ways this can happen is if we memorize God’s Word. Some often say, “I can’t memorize.” Well, let me ask how many here know the Lord’s Prayer? If you do, you have already memorized four verses of Scripture. Memorization allows us to recall God’s Word at any time. It allows us to know what God says without having to look it up in a Bible. It helps us to bring into

focus what God says wherever we are at. In fact, the Jews developed the practice of tying little wooden boxes with Scripture verses to their right forearm and onto their forehead to highlight the need to have God's Word always on our hearts. Orthodox Jews to this day continue the practice.

For if we memorize God's Word, then we can do something else. So I end with this.

MEDITATE ON IT!

If we are to be in the Word, we need to meditate on it. God told Joshua in **Joshua 1:8**, *"This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success."*

It's why we read in **Psalm 1:1-3**, *"How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! 2But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers."*

And in **Philippians 4:8**: *"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."*

Meditating on God's Word means not just focusing on it but reflecting on it during a specific period of time. To be able to break it down and think about what it means. How do we counteract the false reports of Satan and the sinful messages of the world? We meditate on Holy Scripture. We focus and reflect on God's Word – what He has said, what He has done, what He has promised!

If we truly are to be all that we can be, then we must be *IN* God's Word.

For a day is coming when *"the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."* (**Hab. 2:14**)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!