

“Living Bread”

October 16th, 2022

Rev. Kimberly Heath
Wall Street United Church

2 Timothy 3:14-17; 4:5-8 FNV (First Nations Version)

SACRED TEACHINGS WILL MAKE YOU WISE

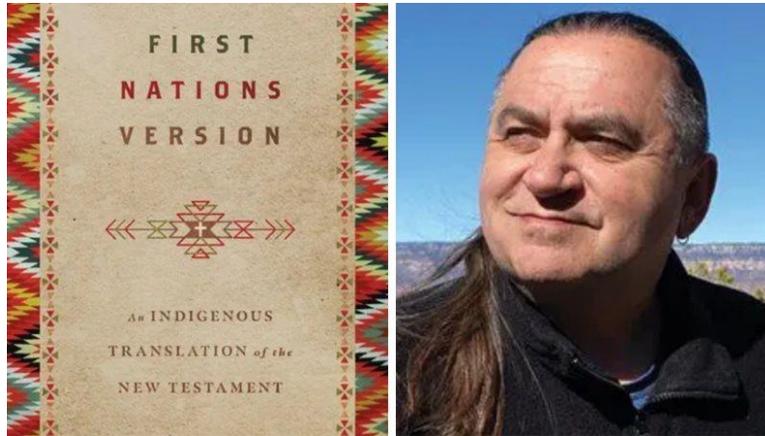
Bad-hearted people will go from bad to worse. These are humans behaving like tricksters who lead people down the same kind of path they have been tricked into walking. But you should keep following the ways you have been taught, the teachings you are sure of, for you know who it was who taught you. From the time you were a young boy you have known the Sacred Teachings that are able to make you wise as you trust in the one who has set you free and made you whole, Creator Sets Free (Jesus) the Chosen One.

All the Sacred Teachings come from the breath of the Great Spirit and help us to teach others about Creator's ways. They help us correct wrong thinking and bring lives into balance. They show the good and right way to walk the road of life. In this way, those who walk with the Great Spirit will have everything that is needed to do good things for others.

When the Chosen One appears, he will decide the fate of the living and the dead and bring his good road to us in all its fullness. In light of these things and in the sight of the Great Spirit and Creator Sets Free (Jesus) the Chosen One, I call on you to complete the sacred task of making his message known! Be ready whether the time seems right or not. Patiently instruct others. Give strong counsel, warnings, and firm words to strengthen their hearts. For a day will come when people will not listen to good teaching. They will gather around themselves teachers who will tell them what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and believe made-up stories.

But you must remain clear-minded in every way, stand strong in hard times, and do the work of a good storyteller. Keep doing what Creator has called on you to do. For my life is already being poured out like a ceremonial drink offering, and the time for me to walk on has come. I have fought the good fight. I have walked the good road to its end and stayed true to our spiritual ways. There is a chief's headdress for doing what is right waiting for me in the spirit-world above. Our Honored Chief, whose decisions are always right, will honor me with a headdress on that day, and not only me but also all who have loved his appearing.

The scripture reading that Linda just read was from the *First Nations Version: An Indigenous Translation of the New Testament*.



Thanks to colonialism and residential schools, something like 90% of Indigenous peoples in North America do not speak their ancestral language. An Ojibwe and Yaqui Methodist minister, Terry M. Wildman had the idea of a Bible translation in English that followed the oral storytelling traditions of Native people.

I think this is so cool, because normally when you think of Bible translation you think about translating from the original Bible languages into a new language. But Wildman had the idea of translating into a style of English that would make the text more relatable and accessible to English speaking Indigenous people.

Wildman started by rephrasing Bible passages for inmates in a prison ministry. He found the cadences and word choice resonated with other Native people also.

Some translations aim for a word-for-word translation from the original texts and some aim for a thought-for-thought translation. The First Nations version translates the thought or the meaning of the text that will make the word or phrase most relatable to their intended readers today.

One example is how they chose to translate the word “sin”. As Wildman explains “For many of our Native people, the English word “sin” evokes the memories of boarding school, where “sin” was often the length of our hair, or speaking in our native language, or anything related to our cultures. The biblical concept of sin is expressed in the Greek word ‘hamartia’, which means ‘to miss the mark’ or ‘to fail to do what is right.’ All human beings are broken and fail to live in Creator’s ways. Some try but fail, some don’t even try, and others give themselves over to evil ways. We have translated “sin” as either “bad hearts,” “wrongdoings,” or “broken ways,” depending on which one best fits the context.”

In 2015, OneBook Canada offered to fund Wildman's translation efforts. The former head of Wycliffe Bible Translators, Canada, and over a thousand Indigenous pastors and theologians from dozens of nations provided input into this translation. The translation was published in 2021.

Today's scripture reading is about scripture reading.

You might remember the context from 2 weeks ago. The apostle Paul knows that his time on earth is coming to an end, and this letter to Timothy contains some of his final words. Paul is aware that the church is young and vulnerable, and he wants to share with Timothy what he considers to be the most critical principles of the faith. More than anything Paul wants Timothy to keep the faith by continuing to hold to the sacred scriptures.

Paul says to Timothy in 2 Tim 3:16-17 "*All of scripture is God-breathed (or inspired by God) and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character, so that the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do everything that is good*".

In an unstable, confusing and sometimes hostile world, Paul wants to give Timothy something solid to stand on or maybe an anchor to hold them in the chaos. That anchor is the wisdom of God found in the scriptures.

When Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, it was just a letter. But now that letter is part of sacred scripture. He was talking about the Hebrew scripture or what we sometimes call the 'Old Testament'.

What is scripture? Texts that are deemed to be sacred writings are scripture. From the beginning to the end the Bible is a very human book. There wasn't an angel who handed a large, beautiful, leather-bound King James Version of the Bible to someone on a mountain that then became the Word of God. No, the Bible is a medley of different kinds of text. It's funny to even call it a book, because it's a collection of historical accounts, poems, letters, stories, prophetic and apocalyptic literature, and these were written by different authors at different times and from different places. There wasn't even an editor who took all these texts and made sure they all agreed with one another and had an identical message. No wonder there are differences and even discrepancies within the text!

Over the years and centuries, the people of God — the Church— discerned that some writings seemed more inspired than others. Some seemed to have a thread of the Holy Spirit binding the pages together. Some texts seemed to draw us closer to understanding God: Creator, Jesus and Holy Spirit. These have become our holy scriptures.

Why did Paul urge Timothy to hold fast to scripture? First, because it's the primary way we can connect to and learn about Jesus and about who God is. But also, Paul gives a warning that someday people won't be interested

in the truth but will go off on their own way. *“They will turn their ears away from the truth and believe made-up stories”*.

I couldn't help but think how true this is today. This past week a jury in Connecticut decided that the right-winged conspiracy talk-show host Alex Jones has to pay nearly a billion dollars in damages to the families of the tragic Sandy Hook massacre. 26 people, including 20 children in grade 2 were shot and killed at the elementary school. Very shortly after the shooting Alex Jones claimed that the shooting was a hoax, that the 2012 massacre never happened, and that the grieving families seen in news coverage were actors hired as part of a plot to take away people's guns. As a result, parents who had suffered unimaginable loss also had to deal with horrible harassment from all kinds of people who bought into Jones' lies. Some were going so far as threatening to dig up their children's graves to prove it was a hoax.

There is a lot of wackiness that quickly shifts from wacky to evil in our world today.

“They will turn their ears away from the truth and believe made-up stories”

This past week an old friend called me a liberal – I think “accused” might be a better word. I don't think he was trying to pick a fight, just perhaps highlighting our differences. But it bugged me. I'm not entirely sure whether they meant capital “L” political party liberal — or small “l” lefty liberal — but either way, I bristled at the label.

We live in a time when we are increasingly divided along tribal lines. The gulf between the left and right is getting bigger and bigger. It's getting harder and harder to talk to people on the other side of the divide. We were heading in this direction before, but the pandemic has made it worse. I've mentioned in the past that when societies or communities go through a mass trauma together — and this pandemic was a societal level trauma — initially the crisis brings people together. But as you progress through and begin to heal from the trauma **the crisis begins to split people apart**. We come together to survive the initial and ongoing trauma but as we recover, we tend to splinter. We are seeing that big time right now all over the world, here in Canada, and even in our community.

I bristled at being put into one of today's tribes because all my life I have fought to try to fit in while being an oddball-Christian. Even within the church you get these tribes. I don't fit so well into some circles in the United Church because I am deemed too evangelical — too into Jesus — and I don't fit into evangelical circles because I don't believe homosexuality is a sin. I'm simplifying things a little here, and that wrestling to fit in may have a lot more to do with my own addiction as a people pleaser and what I

perceive others are thinking, rather than reality.

Here's the thing. I don't want a left or right or purple or green label. If you're going to label me, label me a Christian. In the middle of the push and pull of who the world wants me to be or accuses me of being, I have found a center and an anchor through my faith in Jesus, and that anchoring comes primarily through reading the scriptures. A lot of people think they know what Christianity is, but they aren't really rooted in our primary sacred text.

I read an article recently about evangelical Christians in the Southern U.S. Maybe I shouldn't be surprised but I really *was* surprised to learn that within that group of people, Biblical literacy is terrible. I'm surprised because they are the first to use the Bible as a weapon; but when they were polled on some basic Christian understanding about Jesus and faith, they did terribly. The number one thing they understood about being a Christian and that identified them as evangelicals was their anti-abortion and anti-homosexual stance. In other words, their definition looked a whole lot more political than biblical. There are 6 verses in the entire Bible on homosexuality — it's not a big topic! Jesus never mentions it. Money and possessions are named more than 800 times. That's a big topic. There are something like 2000 verses on the poor and caring for the poor — that's also a big topic.

Now before I get too high on a horse, liberal leaning churches also don't know their Bible very well. They/we might even be worse. In other words, Christians are moving into the battle lines which were drawn by culture instead of by actual theology based in scripture, and as a result we are getting further and further apart.

But that's not how it should be! I don't blame the world for being the world, but I do blame Christians when we fail to be Christian ... when we fail to shine the light of Jesus.

21 years ago I heard a wonderful sermon. I wish I could remember who preached it — if my Dad were still here he would remember. The preacher instilled in me the conviction that if I wanted to make a difference in my preaching and in my ministry, I needed to be steeped in the Bible. Though I had cherished the Bible for most of my life, (I remember reading and loved Psalm 139 as a teenager), this sermon gave me a new commitment to read the Bible daily. In the last 21 years I have read it entirely in almost each of those years. There were a couple of years when I intentionally did something different and didn't attempt the whole Bible in a year. This is one of those years. Instead I am listening to the Bible through something called the Bible Experience — it's wonderful! If you don't have an Audible subscription, (it's pretty pricey) but a great and refreshing way to listen to the Bible in a dramatized style. I have all sorts of tips on reading the Bible — like for heaven's sake don't start at the beginning, start with the gospels!

More than anything, being steeped in scripture gives me an anchor in the middle of the current of culture (maybe the rapids of culture is a better metaphor) where it seems some currents are going this way and others are swirling around and going that way. In the middle of it all I feel more rooted. I have a sense of how I am called to live and the values that Jesus calls me to. It's not a rule book: it's a relationship. There is a depth, an ancient wisdom, and the power of the Holy Spirit flows through these texts that Paul felt and Christians all through the ages have experienced, and I continue to experience today.

True Christianity unites. It does not divide — because God unites! Jesus brought together so many different people. He took the time to talk to people like Nicodemus – a well-respected Pharisee, and as we saw last week he cared for and healed Samaritans with leprosy. The Holy Spirit unites us. That was one of the hallmarks of the early church, and it was how it brought in different people. It wasn't easy. It's always been easier to live with and work with people who look like you and dress like you and think like you. The early church had all sorts of challenges because of the differences in the church — but that's what made it the church!

As Galatians 3:28 says: *“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”* Friends, there is no longer liberal or conservative, left-wing or right wing, there is no longer democrat or republican, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus! Do you believe that? I pray you do. God knows we need Christians so rooted in faith and in scripture that we are willing to die to that tribal part of us and willing to live a faith of love and unity for all people. Thanks be to God.

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