

Prophecy of Scripture
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2 Peter 1:16-21

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’ ¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

¹⁹ So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, ²¹ because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Matthew 17:1-9

¹ Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³ Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴ Then Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ ⁵ While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!’ ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Get up and do not be afraid.’ ⁸ And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. ⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, ‘Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.’

Some of you may remember the band The Moody Blues. They were a favorite of my father’s and, thus, became a favorite of mine. Spoken words from *Days of Future Passed* take me back to listening to the album as a child immediately: “Cold hearted orb that rules the night, / Removes the colours from our sight. / Red is grey and yellow white, / But we decide which is right. / And which is an illusion?” I think of these words often when Jesus is referred to as the light of the world or, like today, when our reading speaks of how Jesus was transfigured, “his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.” For the record, I also think of laundry detergent commercials when I hear that last part. When I think of the brightness which Christ brings, even if a small light like the oil lamp shining in a dark place mentioned in 2 Peter, I think about what a difference Christ’s light makes in our lives.

Without Christ’s illumination, where would be we? I think it would be something akin to The Moody Blues song. It would be as night. Just as red appears grey and yellow appears white without light, so, too, without light would we not see things as they truly are. Without light, we must guess,

make our own, individual decision about which is right and which is an illusion. As a child, can you remember seeing shadows at night and imagining them to be something they were not, perhaps something innocent becoming sinister? How did adults reassure us? They turned on the light.

Christ came to bring the light so that we no longer need guess as to what is right and what is not. In fact, when we follow Jesus' commands to love God and love neighbor, there is no decision to be made by us. God has declared God's love and judgment with grace and saving acts, as we read further on in 2 Peter, "The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance."¹ "Who is my neighbor?" the lawyer asked Jesus and Jesus responded with the story of the Good Samaritan, someone faithful Jews would not have chosen to be kind to or forgiving of or loving toward. Even "those" people, Jesus intimated, are to be loved. No decision, no judgment call needed on our part.

Have we learned that lesson? Not as much as we might like. We admit this, we confess this, we do not deny that we view the world and its working as more complicated than simply loving one another even in our *Book of Order*. From the third chapter of the section Foundations of Presbyterian Polity, which speaks of and from the history from which we come and whose influence we claim, our forebears wrote: "Now though it will easily be admitted that all synods and councils may err, through the frailty inseparable from humanity, yet there is much greater danger from the usurped claim of making laws than from the right of judging upon laws already made, and common to all who profess the gospel, although this right, as necessity requires in the present state, be lodged with fallible men."² Even today we make judgments and, while we try our best, we are fallible men and women.

The other side of that, though, is that even in our confusion and humanity, we try to be faithful. I got to welcome a class from Carroll this past week and briefly taught them about being Presbyterian, in the context of modern religion. Because we cannot understand ourselves in modernity without recognizing the influences of history, I explained that a foundational tenet of ours, as also stated in the Foundations portion of the *Book of Order*, is that "Christ gives to the Church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its order and discipline. Scripture teaches us of Christ's will for the Church, which is to be obeyed. In the worship and service of God and the government of the church, matters are to be ordered according to the Word by reason and sound judgment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."³ This guiding of the Holy Spirit has been part of who we are as believers since the first Pentecost.

Another foundational tenet, as seen in the way we govern ourselves, without one central ruler but with decision-making shared by all, can be simplified to say that one person can get things wrong.

¹ 2 Peter 3:9.

² *Book of Order*, F-3.0107 Church Power.

³ *Book of Order*, F-1.0203 Christ Gives the Church Its Life.

Multiple fallible people have a better chance of sussing out the movement of the Spirit than one person. Another way of saying this is found in 2 Peter: “no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” One person interpreting Jesus’ teachings must consult with other voices for better understanding. And many of Jesus’ teachings are so layered that one reading is not enough. There’s a captioned image⁴ floating on the Internet with Jesus sitting on a rock, saying “Now listen up, I don’t want four different versions of this going around.” The joke gets at the subtle, and sometimes not-so-subtle, differences between the four gospels and it points to even the earliest believers understanding Christ’s message in ways particular to them and their settings. If they who heard first- or second-hand couldn’t escape their personal human interpretations, what hope have we!

The importance of the wisdom of others and the moving of the Holy Spirit among others is **the** reason we come together to worship God. We are made to be in community where we can learn from one another, share our wisdom and our questions and doubts, where we seek help and where we offer help. You absolutely can connect with God outside of these four walls, and I hope you do. But you cannot be a believer in the sense which Christ intended if you do not join others in learning and listening and praying. Later in Matthew, Jesus continues teaching and says, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”⁵ This line is familiar but we don’t readily remember what precedes it: “...truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.” How can we ever get to agreement if we do not come together?

As we prepare to enter this Lent, we’ll look to the voices of others than just Matthew. In a similar way, your own Lenten study, and preparation for Easter, need not be limited to the Bible. I encourage you to seek the voices of others – written or spoken. Read the devotional contributions of your neighbors. Ask a friend who claims another faith tradition how he or she prepares during Lent, how he or she celebrates Easter. The Holy Spirit is in these places. In these places we have hope that we will come to better know Christ. In these places we hope to use these opportunities to practice loving our neighbors. In these places we seek to listen to Christ as God commanded: “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; **listen to him!**” So may it be for you and for me.

Let us pray: Holy Spirit, make yourself known among us and for us and for God’s glory, we pray.
Amen.

⁴ meme.

⁵ Matthew 18:20.