
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

February 28, 2016

The Central Purpose of the Bible

“This is eternal life: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent.”
John 17:3 (Common English Bible)

Perhaps the greatest honor of my ministry was the invitation to preach for the First Presbyterian Church of Havana, Cuba this past Valentine’s Day. Over 400 people were in attendance and it appeared that every one of them brought their own Bible. But there was something more. There was something in the manner in which their Bible was clutched in their hands, a strong sense that they were holding close to themselves a life support device. Present was a sense that if they let go of their Bible they would be letting go of life itself. True, I had only been in their country for five days. Maybe I was sensing more than was actually present, but I don’t think so. There was a spiritual power among these worshippers that I often miss in worshipping communities in the United States. And the source of that power appeared to come directly from a Bible held securely in hand.

It is not difficult to discern those who are well fed from those who are hungry. The evidence is in the eyes and in the manner in which people carry themselves. The eyes of the hungry are desperate and the body appears weak. It isn’t so for the well fed. The eyes are clear and hopeful and there is present in the body, strength - not only physical strength but a strength in which the individual faces opportunities and challenges of the day. The worshippers that morning in Havana were well fed. It was in their eyes. It was in their smiles and the warm manner in which they greeted one another. It was in the positive manner in which they anticipated worship. And in their worship, it was as if each person was on tiptoe, searching the worship space for evidence of the risen Christ. They were a people well fed. The source of their rich nourishment held in their hands.

I preached that morning on the importance of not becoming distracted. When we are distracted by difficulties and challenges, we become afraid. The Bible calls us to remain focused on one thing; to remain focused on the risen Christ. It is this focus that reminds us that we live not by our power but by God’s power. Perhaps you have heard the expression, “Preaching to the choir?” Simply, it means preaching to those who have already heard. That morning in Havana, I preached to the choir. Since the political revolution in that country of the late fifties and the U.S. embargo since 1961, life for the Cubans has been one difficulty followed by another. Life is hard for the average citizen of that nation. But for the Christian community, they are well fed – not necessarily with physical bread but with the bread of life, Jesus Christ.

In the words of Christ, “This is eternal life: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent.” That is the central purpose of the Bible, to make known God. It is this central purpose that shines forth from every person who regularly reads the Bible and lives by every promise found there. The Bible changes lives. It fills spiritual hungers inside all of us, and releases the uncommon power of God for our life today and all of our tomorrows. I accepted an invitation to preach the Bible to a congregation in Havana, Cuba. When I stepped into the pulpit and looked into their eyes, I saw a people who had already heard

Doug Hood