# The Best Library of All!

Sermon preached by Rev. Chuck Cole 10/20/19 at St. John’s UMC Staunton,VA

# 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, 15 and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All scripture is inspired by God and is[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Timothy+3%3A14-4%3A5&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29853a)] useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

4 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: 2 proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. 5 As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

When I allow myself to open to what I am seeing and don’t just book through the observation room one of my favorite views in the world is looking down in the reading room of The Library of Congress. I am struck by the floors of stacks of books realizing that this is just a small portion of the collection. Books are really cool in and of themselves but what is so cool is the mind boggling reality that gathered in one place is an enormous portion of the learning, thinking, and creativity of humanity over the centuries. Not only is it awesome in what is there but also what else might come what if I could access it all could be discovered what growth might happen.

There are other Libraries of course that are awesome but there is one Library that is unique in all the world. The Word of God, in the Bible, we have a library of 66 books which are unique in that they contain the inspired word of God to us which is true of no other collection of books. It is the most wondrous Library possible and all its wonders are freely accessible to everyone. Though all areas of knowledge are profoundly valuable in the pages of the Word we have what we need to be made fully human by Grace.

Our passage this morning proclaims this truth when it says that Holy Scripture, all of it, Genesis to Revelation and all those books in-between are useful for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness to equip the people of God to live out the good works set before us.

That means that Leviticus with its ancient laws, and judges with its Gory stories, and Revelation are intended and if we allow them to they can equip us to live out the good works - including our transformation toward Christlikeness- that he has set before us.

All of the scripture provides teaching - it instructs us, it reveals to us the character of God, what he desires for us, how he has brought about salvation, how we are meant to come to him and how we move continually closer and closer to the likeness of Christ.

It provides Reproof - it shows us where we are going wrong.

It corrects us- it helps us to move from where we are wrong in our actions to right actions.

It trains us in our hearts, minds and souls to be more and more like Him.

In Holy Scripture we have a beautiful example of Grace an undeserved gift which we often take for granted. That red book in front of you in the pew is a depository of treasures a precious repository of life. Unlike the books in the Library of Congress without God revealing it to us we could never know him or what we need to be made whole again.

Right after the Reformation in England the crown provided each church with an English translation of the scriptures and they commenced to read them out loud and the churches were filled continuously to hear the word of God they were hungry for it. Everything it said.

They were hungry because they recognized they had been starved. They recognized the power of the Words.

I think to some degree familiarity - or at least constantly being around the word to some degree - having it in our homes whether we read it or not, hearing it read in church on Sunday, having pew Bibles etc breeds a kind of contempt not of hostility but perhaps of an indifference or we take it for granted to some degree.

The scripture is an unimaginable gift that He did not need to give. Let us receive it for what it is a beautiful expression of love an invitation to right relationship with the God who loves us so much he died for us.

Let us be Bereans.

Bereans were a group of people that are commended in the book of Acts because they heard what Paul had to say about Christ and the Gospel. They heard him out and then they went to the Scriptures to see whether it was true or not before accepting it or rejecting it. They searched the scriptures taking them seriously. They recognized that in the scripture they had the truth and so they listened to other voices and then tested it against the scripture to see if it was true. They were open but the scripture was the standard and that is a way to receive the word. They opened their minds to it fully.

Listen or read carefully, examine and test what you read or hear claiming to be truth about anything having to do with us as people by the scripture. Truly engage it.

Along with opening our mind to the scripture and testing what is claimed to be truth. Another key is to open our hearts to it. Make yourself vulnerable to it.

I was blessed to read the testimony of a woman who when she was a girl In Egypt had gotten a hold of the New Testament and was secretly reading it. She Got to The story of the woman caught in adultery in John. She read where the woman is dragged before Jesus and accused of adultery and the men say “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. 5 Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?”. She then read how Jesus bent over and started writing In the sand and then it says he straightened up and said - once she read the word said she closed the book.

Why you might ask.

She had come to love Jesus and began to believe that he might be the answer to the deepest needs of her heart but she could see only two equally horrible possibilities 1) If he says stone here then he is just like the hateful judgmental Imams and culture of conservative Islam that she was a part of 2)Jesus dismisses the woman’s sin and affirms that Christians are just the immoral people that the Imams and others say they are. She couldn’t bear either one so she struggled for weeks to open and continue reading.

As we know he stopped the stoning by having mercy by pointing out that the men were guilty of sin - the list in this circumstance alone is lengthy - the simplest of all is their action totally lacks any hint of love of neighbor or true desire for justice in its greatest sense and so they melt away. That takes care of concern number one. Now number two, is he going to condone or excuse her but he does neither he says “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” 11 She said, “No one, sir.”[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+8&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-26382b)] And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.” He treated her as a full human being. She is guilty but mercy triumphs over judgement and he the one who is the perfect judge the sinless one who could have thrown the stone, did not, but he says to her “Go on your way, and do not sin again. He treats her as the fully responsible moral agent that can be fully restored to life as it is intended for us in Christ.

This Egyptian woman said she received Jesus into her heart at that moment, trilled a joy shout and danced. She let the Spirit reach her.

Oh I yearn for those times when my heart is like that. Let us seek that for ourselves.

Open yourself to the Word whether preached, listened to or read.

To help change it up every once in a while, read a different translation, listen to an audio version, find a different preacher to listen to on the internet, tv, or radio. Etc.

Maybe re-engage with the word this Advent in the midst of all the business read 1 chapter of Luke each day during Advent and you will be done on the 24th day by Christmas Eve you would have read the whole and

We have been given in the word a beautiful gift God revealing life giving gift that sometimes we do not truly open up too. Let us search the word like the Bereans on every issue that we face allow the word to be the determinant of truth and not what we would prefer to be. Also let us open our hearts to the voice of the Spirit speaking, let us be so engaged in the word that there are times that we cannot continue to read because it matters that we are terrified of the implications. Let us treasure the word of life the gift of unimaginable magnitude we have received. Amen.