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**Encounter Christ...Grow in faith...Love as Christ loved...Tell the Story**

***What does it mean to say the Bible is true?***

At Bethlehem in our first All-Congregation Sunday school, one of the activities was for people to write down questions they have about the Bible. We're working through them in worship there, but they're important questions so I'm addressing them in the newsletters as well. If you want to submit a question, you can either write it down and put it in the offering plate, or email it to me, or message me on Facebook, really at any time. The first question we dealt with will require the longest answer. So, two people asked very similar questions. "What percentage of the Bible is "real" and what is "fake" (parables?) How do we know which stories are real (actual) compared to what stories are fiction or a paraphrase of what happened?"

First, let's say this – facts are important. We are living in a time when too many people disregard facts about current events that don't fit what they believe. But those kind of facts can usually be verified, at least to a point.

You can look at a written record, or listen to a recording or watch a video. You can look at statistics. There can be opinion and bias sprinkled in, but facts do exist and the more you try to get at them before you express an opinion, the more what you have to say will count for something.

Having said that, there are other kinds of truths that we live by all the time that aren't facts. We use metaphors. We talk about things like true beauty and true love...love and beauty aren't really facts, but when we experience them, we know they are deeply true.

I don't believe any part of the Bible is fake...I believe it all comes from a relationship between the authors and the God who inspires the writing. But I believe God's truth isn't limited to just reporting factual events.

Let's start with the New Testament. All of the New Testament is centered on one actual event – the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We can't prove Jesus' resurrection happened, and ultimately belief in the resurrection is an article of faith. But the evidence that it did happen is much better than most people know. We can go into that deeper at some point if people are interested.

The New Testament writers, however, aren't just interested in accurately reporting an event. They are also trying to make sense of it – what did Jesus' resurrection mean for them and for the world? That isn't really fact, but it is truth – and I believe that the authors are working in close relationship with God as they sort out that meaning and write it down.

Jesus himself tried to help people understand the meaning of the Kingdom of God by using parables. Parables are stories not even meant to be fact, but rather to make clearer the deep truth of the Kingdom of God. There may be a couple things in the Old Testament that could be considered parables, but mostly, when we talk about parables we are talking about specific teachings of Jesus.

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Now let's go back to the Old Testament. Much of the Old Testament is meant to tell about actual events. The older the story is, the less evidence outside the Bible we have that it is factually true. But events in the time of King David and later do have some supporting evidence from archeological finds and ancient history.

The stories of Abraham and Sarah and their family are so ancient, we can really only accept on faith that they actually happened. But what is true for sure is that those ancient stories tell us something profoundly true about God and God's work.

Some of the books of the Old Testament weren't even attempting to talk about facts. The Psalms are really songs, poems and prayers. Actual events may have inspired them – mostly we don't know. But we don't generally think of poetry, music and prayers as factual truths.

Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are a collection of wisdom sayings...they are true, and again I believe they arise out of the relationship between God and the person who wrote them down. But you still wouldn't really call them facts...that just seems weird.

It gets trickier with the really ancient stories – creation, the fall, the flood, the tower of babel. Creation happened, but the account in Genesis isn't meant to be a scientific account. It's meant to talk about the God who creates. And the fall, the flood and the Tower of Babel stories show God's perpetual struggle to keep evil from destroying that creation.

Often those most ancient stories are very similar to stories from other ancient cultures, but they show a God who is different from the other gods. They show a God who leans toward love and blessing rather than domination and punishment...even if just a little bit more than the other gods.

And that's how we get past the whole argument of whether something really happened or not...ask the question "What does this story say about God?" And most specifically, what does it say about the God who was most completely revealed in Jesus Christ. That's how we interpret scripture – through the lens of the crucified and risen Christ.

We take on faith that what's in the Bible tells us something about God – and frankly, when we read it through the lens of Christ, sometimes I think it tells us what God is not. When we ask what the story says about God, then we can move past the question of whether it's an actual event or not.

Let's use Jonah as an example. Jonah is probably the easiest story where you can say OK, whether it's an actual event or not, what does it say about God?

You know the Jonah story – he's the one that got swallowed by a big fish and vomited onto the shore at Nineveh.

Some people are convinced that the Story of Jonah and the big fish describes an actual event....that it really happened.

I don't. You might call it a parable. I actually think it's meant to be satire – it's meant to be funny. Again, I believe it's a story inspired by God in the relationship between God and the author. It is God's truth. But as I said earlier, I don't believe God's truth is not limited to factual events.

I think the point of the Jonah story is to reveal our own human pettiness and our frustration with a God who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love – even for the people we hate. That's a powerful truth and it doesn't matter whether the story is satire or a description of an actual event.

In Christ's peace...and truth,

*Pastor Kris*

## **October Calendar**

October 7	9:00 am—Worship with Holy Communion
	9:45 am—Sunday School!
October 14	9:00 am—Worship
October 21	9:00 am—Worship
	9:45 am—Sunday school
October 28	9:00 am—Worship

## **October helpers**

Cleaners—Cindy and Jerry Otto

Lectors—Ficks

Ushers—Jerry Otto

Communion Assistant—Merlin Fick

## ***Bubba's Closet***

Bethlehem is collecting new and gently used winter coats, hats and gloves for Bubba's Closet in the Lincoln Public Schools. If you have things your kids or grandkids have outgrown, or you just want to participate, bring your items to church and Pastor Kris will get them to Bethlehem.

## ***Service through the ELCA***

Hurricane season is a busy time for Lutheran Disaster Response. Plus, there was the earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia. Please consider a gift to the ELCA's Lutheran Disaster Response. Here is the link:

<https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Relief-and-Development/Lutheran-Disaster-Response/>