

April 23, 2015

## Reading the Bible Together

Almost every Tuesday evening (weather permitting) at 7:00, a small group of St. Luke's parishioners meets upstairs in the 'library'. The Christ Candle is lit, individual participants light individual candles to show they are present and we open the Bible together.

Taking turns, we read verses within a chapter, stopping now and then to scratch our heads, sit in utter bewilderment and sometimes (actually more often than you might think) laugh. This is a novel experience with surprising effects. Reading is, for the most part, a solitary experience performed in silence. To experience the intonation of someone else's voice is to share the text in real time: passages come alive. Moreover, anyone can be brought to a complete standstill in front of a single word.

Which seems odd given the way we are inclined to skip over words while reading alone. Dictionaries aside, meaning is often passed over and maybe lost because we are moved along uninterrupted within our individual minds. Who has the time to stop and ponder, much less discuss, a turning point in a story that is thousands and thousands of years old; one that seems so far removed from our time and place as to appear incomprehensible, even anachronistic ; God's story.

This is where it gets interesting. It turns out that after months of shared reading, including all those mispronounced names and places (we give a heartfelt round of applause for anyone's effort to struggle through foreign identifiers) God's story is more relevant, more alive, more demanding and, yes, more complicated because we are reading it together, carefully. A few weeks ago, after finishing Exodus 10, one of the participants asked a question: "Why did God harden Pharaoh's heart? What kind of God would do such a thing?" This is just the kind of question most of us ask privately, and maybe never fully address because it treads so close to the obvious—the elephant in the room, you might say—which is to say nobody talks about the more blatant discomforts associated with real disturbances in the fields of our understanding. In fact, it was something of a relief that someone posed the question, one that could be, but was not considered off-limits.

There is a wide berth for anyone on their journey with faith, wherever they may be on that journey. It seems, after all, a good idea to start with the story-telling in the most beautiful of literary traditions, and include the history pieced together from obscure and bizarre clues leading to the theology at work throughout the 'books'. This is God telling His story. As much as I love to read, I love listening more. Bless all those who come on Tuesday, light a candle and share their voices.