



let it shine

The Word in Scripture

“There is yet more light and truth to break forth from God’s holy word.” With these words, Pastor John Robinson encouraged his parishioners as they departed from Europe for the spiritual and political freedom they hoped to exercise in the “New World.” These “pilgrims,” forebears of what would become the United Church of Christ centuries later, believed that God was still speaking, even as they modeled their exodus after that of the children of Israel from Egypt as recounted in the Bible.

What does the United Church of Christ, as descendants of the Pilgrims, the Puritans, Congregationalists, German Reformers & Evangelicals, the Christian Churches of the 19th century, and those who have joined us since from all walks of life and faith, believe about the Bible today? The Preamble of the UCC Constitution reads, “[The United Church of Christ] looks to the Word of God in the Scriptures, and to the presence of the Holy Spirit, to prosper its creative and redemptive work in the world.” Thus, as our current President and General Minister, Rev. John Thomas, has said, the Scriptures bear witness to “the presence of the living Word itself, to which the Bible always points, but which it can never quite contain.” The Bible is our guide for faith and practice as a church, but each generation of believers, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, must interpret and live out the Word of God as revealed in Scripture in light of its current circumstances, needs and demands. In that way, the Bible is a book of expectation, a book through which God is still speaking.

Moreover, as the United Church of Christ, we are called “to proclaim in word and action the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” No interpretation of the Bible is a matter of mere debate, but is exercised under the authority of Christ and the call to proclaim and live good news. Whatever reading of scripture does not promote “good news” is no Word of God, especially because we see in scripture the full gamut of human experience. Paul Hammer writes, “The great authenticity of the Bible is that it’s all there, the good and the bad, the glory and the triumph of human life.”

Our Theological Roots

The “good news” is that God has worked in and through the lives of faithful people, in Scriptures, and throughout history, including the history of the UCC, to bring about a fuller understanding of the justice and peace that we affirm as a Church, even in the midst of difficult times. We are also a multi-cultural church and an Open and Affirming church in our national and covenantal commitments. We believe Scripture speaks to these commitments, although not always as loudly and clearly as some would want. Nonetheless, if Christ is our Lord, and we read the Bible through the “spectacles” of the Cross, then we will always err on the side of the poor and the disenfranchised, because such is the scope of the biblical narrative as a whole.

And so, as the United Church of Christ, we follow Christ’s lead toward the Word of God, and we let the Holy Spirit empower us to interpret that Word as revealed in the Bible for each new generation of believers, because God is a still-speaking God.

Reflections:

- How is the new light of God’s Word still heard today in your walk of faith and in your congregation?
- How is the Bible used today in your personal life and in the life of your congregation for reflection on what needs be done on behalf of the good news of Jesus Christ?
- How can the Bible, “rightly divided,” still speak even to people outside of your congregation – in your family, workplace or community?

Resources

- UCC Constitution and Bylaws: www.ucc.org/aboutus/constitution.htm
- “What is the United Church of Christ/What We Believe”: www.ucc.org/aboutus/whatis.htm
- John Thomas, “Taking the Bible Seriously:” www.ucc.org/theology/thomas.htm
- Paul Hammer, “Taking the Bible Seriously:” www.ucc.org/theology/hammer.htm

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