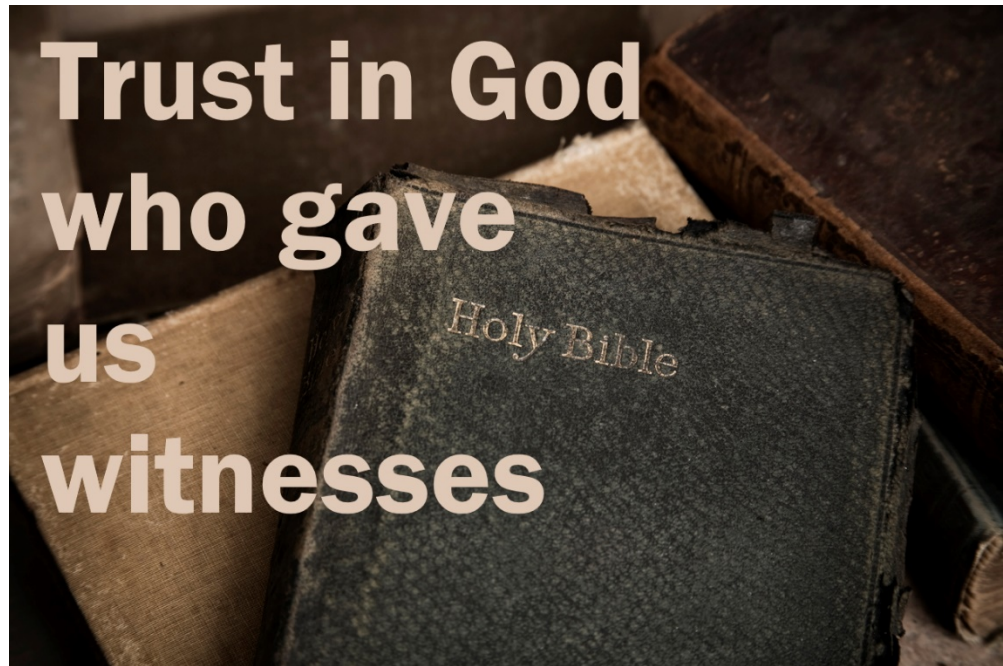
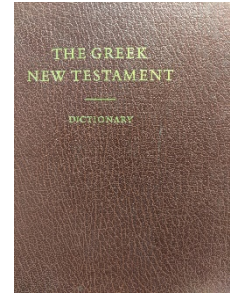


16 February 2020  
Trust in God who gave  
us witnesses  
Luke 24:13-35  
First Mennonite Church



I have many Bibles. I have a big black heavy study bible, a Hebrew OT Bible and a Greek NT Bible that I used in seminary. I have some plain Bibles too, which I use because they are different English translations.



I even have a small but incredibly impressive-looking Bible I used when I travelled a lot in Asia. That was before I had a phone; now I carry a bible on my phone. But, the Bible on the screen has a rich black leather cover, metal corners so that the leather doesn't bend out of shape, gold edging, and high-quality Bible pages that are so thin and expensive.



Some Bibles have the title, Holy Bible, on the cover or spine. The word, holy, makes the Bible seem so precious, so very special that something inside of us tells us to handle it very carefully and display it just right.

The Bible seems so lofty, so holy, so heavenly that it's easy to forget that the characters

in the Bible, the ones who are tapped on the shoulder to bear witness to God's plan to save the world, **are anything but holy and special**. On the contrary, the witnesses in the Bible are like us—they are very ordinary and very typical people like us.

Take for instance our two characters in this morning's gospel reading, Cleopas and his unknown companion. On the first day of the week after the death of Jesus, they are on the road to Emmaus. As they walk, they try to make sense of the catastrophe of Jesus' death and the unbelievable reports of his having come to life again. A stranger joins them on their walk. This stranger is Jesus. And they don't recognize him. Think about that for a moment. They don't recognize the very person who, before their very eyes, healed the sick, taught with authority, and debated with the religious leaders in and around Jerusalem. They don't recognize the person they followed for 3 years.

Some say the reason they didn't recognize Jesus was because they were walking in the late afternoon, so the setting sun was in their eyes. That strikes me as a weak excuse. Another, more plausible excuse is they were too traumatized and sad to recognize Jesus.

Cleopas and his companion don't recognize Jesus when Jesus first scolds them for their "*slowness of heart*" and not even when Jesus patiently takes them through "*Moses and all the prophets*", interpreting for them how all the events surrounding Jesus' life, death, and resurrection make sense in light of God's ultimate goal of saving the world.

It's only later, at the table when this stranger takes bread, blesses it and breaks it—that they remember. "*Their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.*"

And then the experience ends. The stranger disappears, and this story ends with a new beginning. What were they going to do about this encounter? I'll tell you in a few minutes. But first...

I don't know about you, but these two characters on the road to Emmaus don't inspire a lot of confidence. I mean, if you were going to enter into a business relationship with Cleopas and his companion, and needed to cut them a cheque, would you do it when they can't even remember who you are? They don't recognize the one whom they thought was *a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people* (Luke 24:19). They fail to see Jesus walking right next to them even though he was the very *one they had hoped would redeem Israel* (24:21).

The characters in our impressive looking Bibles are so human. Take Abraham, for example. Though he had been relatively successful in his business life, acquiring many

possessions, his family life, his marriage, was not what we today would describe as good. We don't have time to go into all of Abraham's family problems: his union with his maid, Hagar, his double dealings with Sarah, his lying to the Egyptian Pharaoh to save his own skin.

Then there is Matthew. Matthew was a tax collector which meant that he worked on behalf of the Roman government in Judea. Rome was not well-liked by the Jewish people, because they were an oppressive foreign occupying force in their country. You know from reading your Bible that tax collectors get a uniformly bad press in the gospels - and well they should. Tax collectors often collaborated with the Roman occupation forces, and collected way more tax than was necessary. Often they collected more tax from those who could least pay it, the widows and the orphans.

Peter and Paul were also tapped on the shoulder to bear witness to God's plan to save the world. Would you choose Peter to be an eye-witness, and then have him write an Epistle? Would you entrust the Word of God to an impulsive, unreliable fisherman? Then there is Paul. Would you choose Paul if you were wanting to steer clear of an opinionated, stubborn zealot?

Why did God choose someone like Abraham and Sarah to be the parents of the great nation of Israel through whom all the nations of the world would be blessed? Why did Jesus choose Matthew, Peter, or Paul out of all the possible choices for a disciple? And why would Jesus choose to reveal his resurrected body to Cleopas and his companion when these two had obviously failed the course, Relationship 101. They couldn't remember a face, nor could they remember a name!

We wonder why God would choose such plain and ordinary characters to be God's witnesses? I honestly don't know. The Bible doesn't explain the choices of God; it merely reports them. The choices of God are usually beyond us, go right over our heads - particularly to those who have been chosen! All too often God's ways are not our ways...

I think God has a sense of humour choosing people like you and me to be witnesses. Maybe God likes a challenge.

As best we can tell, Jesus did not write, other than that one time in the gospel of John, when he wrote in dust. Rather, Jesus **entrusted his teachings** to his followers, none of whom were archivists, librarians—well, few of them were scribes. All of them, however, shared a common, but dangerous trait. **They were all eager gossips.**



*Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us, they asked? Once Cleopas and his companion got over their embarrassment at not recognizing Jesus, they told others about their encounter with the Risen Jesus.*

Given this motely crew, I'm amazed at the foolhardy trust Jesus placed in folks like us to share, write down, and translate the gospel!

Though we might be surprised—and even suspicious—of witnesses who can't remember a name and face, **God apparently isn't**. Remember Jesus' prayer in Matthew 11:

*"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will."*

Or Paul's words to the Corinthians: *"Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish, weak, low and despised in the world"* (1 Cor 1: 26-27), and I would add: to give witness, both verbally and in written form to God's salvation.

The life of Jesus teaches us that incarnation is **terribly vulnerable yet infinitely miraculous**. Most Sundays I stand up here behind this pulpit and attempt to translate the gospel message from the language and culture of the Bible into our time and place more than 2000 years later. I try hard to prepare, choose my words with care, and then I stand here and preach. And I know that the moment the words are out of my mouth

they fall like seed spread onto the soil of your diverse lives, which are marked by pain and joy, openness and probably even some suspicion. And yet I hope and pray that the words I preach will help not only to bring life and hope, but also shape who you are as disciples of Jesus. And sometimes I know that the Spirit has been at work transforming you and me, because I see it happen. Mostly, it happens in ways I can't anticipate, and sometimes in no clear relationship to the actual words I spoke.

This is how it is when we read or listen to the words in the Bible. These wonderfully human, ordinary, yet powerful words, are always a "**living word!**" As Jesus says in John 6:63: "*The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.*" This is the same Jesus who says, "*the Spirit blows where it wills; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit*" (3:8). Might that explain our Bible? Might that be why we have four gospels? Why we have Paul's and Peter's epistles, the books of James and Revelation? Why we have these diverse, sometimes very disturbing, sometimes incredibly beautiful stories in the Old Testament? Each person, including Cleopas and his friend, encountered God, and then tried to tell what they had seen and heard using humble human words which made sense to him or her. Today, we read those words in English as they were translated from ancient languages. Somehow through these translated words, we encounter God once again and in new ways.

I imagine there are some of you that might wish our Bible was a little less human, less vulnerable, more divine, maybe a book that was dropped straight out of heaven. But you read every page of the Bible and you see evidence that God has met us in **our reality**—a God-given, God-created reality. Yes, we are fallen and sinful, but that doesn't stop God from speaking and interacting with us. Pentecost **DID NOT** mean that we would all understand things the same way in the same language, but that we might hear the good news of God's salvation in and through Jesus, each in our **own tongue**. That is why for more than 2000 years Christians have translated the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into thousands of languages. That is why we translate the Bible not only into many languages, but into the same language over and over again. In order to incarnate the gospel, we must keep translating. "**All Scripture is God-breathed,**" 2 Tim 3:16 says. That's not a way of putting the word of God into formaldehyde. That's a way to set it free to train us in righteousness, to make us wise to understand God's liberation. That is why human words have been given breath by God to come to life as God's word in us and to us.

FIRST  
MENNONITE  
CHURCH  
VOL. XVI Sunday, August 22, 1976 No. 34

"Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a  
light to my path." Psalm 119:105

NO SUNDAY SCHOOL TODAY

DEUTSCHE ANDACHT 10:10 a.m.  
Walter Thiessen  
ORGELVORSPIEL  
BEGRUßUNG  
EINGANGSLIED: Auf zum Werk (Anhang 26)  
GEBET  
LIED und Kollekte: Recih des Herrn (1,2,4) (157)  
PREDIGT: "Die Erntezeit" Pred. C. Boldt  
LIED: Ein reines Herz (1-3) (179)  
SEGEN

ENGLISH WORSHIP SERVICE 11:00 a.m.  
Walter Thiessen  
ORGAN Prelude  
\*CALL to Worship: O Come, Loud Anthems Let Us Sing(14)  
\*INVOCATION  
GREETING  
ANNOUNCEMENTS  
\*HYMN: How Firm A Foundation (1,2,5) (260)  
SCRIPTURE Readings:  
Childhood - Mark 10:13-16 (NT 42) ages to 11 yrs.  
Youth - Psalm 119:9-16 (OT 542) ages 12-30 yrs.  
Age - Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 (OT 591) ages 31 and over.  
\*HYMN: I Love To Tell The Story (593)  
SCRIPTURE Readings:  
Salvation - Romans 5:1-11 (NT 142)  
Forgiveness - 1 John 1:5-10 (NT 218)  
Praise - Psalm 145 (OT 555)  
HYMN: O Wonderful, Wonderful Word (587)  
DEDICATION of Bibles  
OFFERTORY Prayer, Music and Response:  
"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him, all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen." (638)  
Rev. H. A. Wiens  
MESSAGE  
\*BENEDICTION (444)  
\*CLOSING Hymn: O Grant Us Light  
(\* The congregation will please stand)

Our red pew Bibles are the Revised Standard Version of the Bible (RSV). The English words in the NT portion were first published in 1946, while the OT books were published in 1952. The second edition came out in 1971, and they arrived here at FMC in 1976. A dedication service was held on August 22, 1976. Here it is. These Bibles have been in our pews for 44 years! Well before I arrived at FMC, a decision was made to read the scripture from a newer translation, the NRSV. I think it was done because the NRSV is so much easier to read and understand than the RSV.

For some of you, it was hard to follow along, when the translation that was read from the pulpit was different from what was in the pew bible. I can understand that since

the RSV and NRSV are two completely different English translations. Since, we got the projector and screen in the sanctuary, almost all of you, except maybe a couple of people in the balcony who bring their own Bible, follow the scripture reading on the screen, as it is the same version as the one read from the pulpit. As the books are no longer used, the worship committee decided to find a new home for them. That new home will be in Malawi, Africa.

None of us are fluent in biblical Hebrew or Greek. We all rely on different translations, mostly English ones, for our faith and life. God chose ordinary people like you and me to be witnesses in the same way that Cleopas and his friend were chosen to be eager gossips! We all share a commitment to the Bible as our authority for faith and life.

What I'm trying to tell you after 20 minutes is that the Bible is not God. We should never idolize the Bible. The Bible doesn't point to itself, but to God. The Bible gives witness to God. We do not trust God because we trust the Bible. We trust the Bible because we trust God. Translations of the Bible come and go. But, it's God who always remains with us. For us to trust the Bible is an act of faith—always!—faith as trust in

the one who encounters us there, who speaks to us from there, sometimes as loud as a hurricane, at other times like whispers barely audible, and who is with us in Spirit as we read, interpret, translate, and wrestle with it. Thanks be to God!