

Sermon Title: **“The Bible and Half Truths”**

Bible: **John 20:19-31 & Deuteronomy 23:12-14**

When: on the Second Sunday of Easter, April 24th, 2022

Where: about 30 people (plus YouTube live streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, you are the resurrected and living God. You are with us, in us, and among us. Please guide us to your life and your will. Let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. Today’s Scripture Readings

Do you like today’s Scripture Readings? The first reading, a Gospel Reading from John, is part of the lectionary for Year C, the second Sunday of Easter. The second reading, Deuteronomy, is from the Bible and the book of “Half Truths,” by Adam Hamilton. Our church has a study group called “Armchair Theologians.” We are reading the book “Take This Bread,” by Sara Miles. The other church that I serve, Hollister United Methodist Church, had a Lenten Book Study with this book, “Half Truths.” The last two verses of the Gospel of John teach us that not all stories of Jesus were written in the Bible. With the ideas from the book “Half Truths,” by Adam Hamilton, I would like to talk about the Bible and our thoughts. I hope and pray that our Armchair Theologians will have the passion and inspiration to share what we learn from the book of “Take This Bread” someday.

2. How to Read the Bible

When we read the second reading from Deuteronomy, what do you think of it? Wow, the Bible tells us where the bathroom should be located in the church, not inside, but outside! So, we should have only outside bathrooms, right? No. But, believe it or not, in the 1880s, where the bathroom should be located was debatable at the church. At that time, indoor plumbing started to be widely used. So many congregations started to discuss indoor bathrooms. But many preachers, based on today's Deuteronomy Chapter 23, explained that church bathrooms should be outside and that God was against indoor plumbing. Does this make sense to us? No. Thus, when we read the Bible, we need to look at ourselves, at where we are, as well as the scripture's text and its context.

Here are some other examples that do not make sense to us, if we try to follow them today. "Don't wear blended fabrics or sow two different seeds in your fields." (Leviticus 19:19) "Eliminate pork and shrimp from your diet." (Leviticus 11:7-12) "For men, don't trim the edges of your beard." (Leviticus 19:27) Did you know that these are in the Bible? As a result, do we need to follow them today?

How about this? "Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent." (1 Timothy 2:11-12) Unfortunately, some churches still do not allow female pastors or female leadership. How about this? "That slave who knew what his master wanted, but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted, will receive a severe beating." (Luke 12:47) Does this mean that slavery is

acceptable and allowed? Unfortunately, we have painful and shameful aspects that are hard to accept in our history of allowing slavery in the United Methodist Church.

When we read the Bible, we need to think of not only the Scripture itself, but also its context. Furthermore, we need to think of who we are and where we are, because our God is the living God, and because this living God still speaks to us.

3. Some Half Truths

Have you heard the saying: “God helps those who help themselves”? Is it in the Ten Commandments? Yes or No? Or is it in the Bible? Yes or No? It is neither in the Ten Commandments nor in the Bible. The idea of “God helps those who help themselves” could be in the Bible. But it is a half truth, because God helps those who cannot help themselves. The Bible teaches us to take care of the orphan, the widow, and the foreigner. There is no question of whether to help those who are in need. That’s why I believe that we need to help the Ukrainian refugees and our Tongan sisters and brothers, as well as the homeless through a safe parking program and St. Joseph’s. What we need is to discuss how to help them. Even when we cannot help ourselves, God will take care of us. Because we are the body of Jesus Christ, when our church members are sick, we pray for them and help them with food or rides, and more. Thus, “God helps those who help themselves” could be a truth, but it is not the whole truth.

How about “Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin”? Is it in the Bible? Yes or No? Did Jesus tell us to love the sinner? Yes or No? No, Jesus did not tell us to love the sinner. What Jesus told us

is to love our neighbors and our enemies. This made me think a lot and look at myself, because there is a danger in “Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin.” According to the author, it is a danger of pride. When we love the sinner, in our mind, we might say “You are a sinner, but I graciously choose to love you anyway.” Can you see the pride? “I will love you despite the fact that you are a sinner.” Can you see the pride? I need to confess that I have pride. Because of this danger of pride, I believe that Jesus told us to love our neighbors, who can be our enemies. I am just a human being, I cannot be in a position of God. Perhaps, I can “Love my neighbor despite the fact that I am a sinner.” What can you see here? I can see not pride, but grace.

There is also a danger of hating the sin. That’s because what Jesus was more interested in was not talking about our sin, but God’s forgiveness. The Bible taught us not to hate the sin, but to hate the evil. Rather than talking about the sin in someone else’s life, what the Bible taught us is to hate the evil that tempts us.

It is still difficult for me to love my neighbors and my enemies. But I try to rely on grace not on pride day by day. I try to look at God’s forgiveness rather than the sin. That’s because I also need God’s forgiveness and God’s grace.

4. The Resurrected and Living Jesus!

In today’s Gospel Reading from John, the resurrected Jesus came to the Doubting Thomas. Because of the Doubting Thomas, Jesus came to the disciples again. Sometimes we can doubt. Sometimes we can misunderstand. But no worries. As Jesus came to Thomas, our

Jesus will come to us. In our faith journey, God already gives us many means of grace by which we can know God's will and experience God's grace! When we read the Bible, when we sing hymns, when we pray, when we have small groups, when we help each other, when we forgive and love each other, we can be with Jesus. Our Lord is the resurrected and living Jesus Christ. As Jesus was with the disciples, our Jesus is in us, with us, and among us. Let us follow our resurrected and living Jesus. May God's grace and love be overflowing through us.

Closing Prayer

O Lord, when we are lost, please be with us. When we doubt, please give us faith. When we misunderstand, please guide us. Please help us to open our eyes to see you, the resurrected and living God. And please help us to see you in us, with us, and among us. In Jesus' name. Amen.