

“WIRELESS: IV – GPS”

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Elkton United Methodist Church

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Christian Education Sunday

Psalm 1

Luke 4:14-21

Last month, my mother and I drove up to Pennsylvania to see my brother and his family. It was on a Friday, and we left early in the day so that we could stop at a couple of places along the way. It was a beautiful day, a lot like the gorgeous days we've had this past week. As we got nearer to Adam's house, I asked Mom if she had ever seen the center of the town they live in, which is Chalfont, Pennsylvania. It's in Buck's County, and though their address is Chalfont, they don't live anywhere near the town center (which, by the way, is about the size of Rising Sun's town center).

At any rate, Mom said she had never been there, and I had only been there once, as a passenger in the car my sister-in-law was driving, but I was certain that I could probably find it. So I turned off on a back road and started driving in what I thought was the general direction of downtown Chalfont. I drove for a while, and started to think I had missed the mark, so I made a turn, and then another turn, and then another turn, and before long, we were out in the middle of nowhere, getting nowhere fast.

Still, you know me, I was certain we were just around the corner, and if I only made a few more turns and went a little further, we'd get there. Mom, meanwhile, was getting antsy. We needed to get to Adam and Linda's, because they were going out, and we couldn't be late – and she was sure, that by now, we were miles away from their home.

I, on the other hand, was sure that we were practically in their neighborhood. So I kept on driving, exploring roads that curved through the countryside. Finally, exasperated, Mom says, "I'm going to call Linda." Well, I wasn't thrilled with that idea – because, well, what if we were miles and miles away – how stupid would I look? – or worse yet, what if we were practically in their backyard, and we were calling for directions!

Then, just as Mom's finger was poised to hit the "call" key on her cellphone, I said, "Hold on! Let's get the GPS!" So, I got the GPS out of the compartment and plugged it in – yeah, I know I have GPS on my phone but it wears down the battery fast, and besides the screen is too small. At any rate, I plugged in the GPS, listened

to the soothing, dulcid tones of the woman with the British accent, and within about five minutes, we pulled into Adam and Linda's driveway. Catastrophe averted!

Thank you GPS! You all know what GPS is, right? Global Positioning System. When I was preparing this sermon, I looked up GPS on the internet and found out some very interesting things about it. GPS came about in the early 70's by our government as a way to improve previous navigational systems. GPS is, according to Wikipedia, "a space-based satellite navigation system that provides location and time information in all weather conditions, anywhere on or near the earth, where there is an unobstructed line of sight to four or more GPS satellites."

You know, I was fascinated when I read that. First of all, I never thought about it being owned by the government, although that makes sense. Secondly, I thought it was amazing that to get reception you have to be in sight of four or more GPS satellites, which explains then, why sometimes you have to wait to get reception.

But, the bottom line is that GPS tells you how to get where you want to go, and how to get found after you've gotten lost. Which is a pretty apt description for something most precious and important to all of us Christians – the Bible.

So far, in this "Wireless" sermon series – we've seen how Twitter reminds us of getting to the heart of the matter, and for people of faith, that is Jesus; and we've seen how WIFI helps remind us of our connection to God through prayer. Last week, we considered Facebook and community, and how the church is community. So today, in the next to the last sermon in this series – GPS sends us right to the ultimate source of direction for our lives as Christians – the Holy Bible.

All Christians revere the Bible, and we, as United Methodist Christians stand in a long line of those for whom the Bible is of primary importance. Our founder, John Wesley, once said: "I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God. I want to know one thing: the way to heaven. God himself has condescended to teach me the way. He has written it down in a book. Oh, give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God. Let me be a man of one book." (On-line, tentmaker.org)

Following in Wesley's footsteps, every year we give our second graders that one, precious book. I love to watch them as they take their Bibles back to their pews, because it takes me right back to that day I received my first Bible right here in this church. I remember holding it and feeling the leather binding. I remember opening it up and hearing the crackling of the pages as they opened for the first time. I remember looking through at the pictures that were interspersed among the pages. I remember thinking that I was going to start reading at the very beginning and go straight through to the end (well, that didn't happen for a number of years, but I had good intentions).

I remember most of all, how special that book felt to me, and friends, I had no earthly idea just exactly how special it was and would become. How sad it is to

think about all those Bibles that sit on shelves and just collect dust. Oh, if their owners only knew the treasures that were right in front of them.

So, that's what I want the children, and in fact, all of you, to know. That the Bible is a precious gift, a treasure trove written for each of us. It has within its pages everything we need to face every day of our lives.

It is, among other things, our story book. It contains within its pages the story of God's people from the beginning. Read through its pages, and remember the beginning in the Garden. Continue reading, and learn about the prophets, kings, friends, enemies. If you read the Bible from start to finish, by the time you get to the end of the Hebrew scriptures, the Old Testament, you know exactly why God sent Jesus to save the world. And then, as you read the Gospels, your spirit will soar from knowing Him. Read on, in the New Testament and you'll see how the church formed, and learn life lessons important even to this day.

The Bible is a precious gift to all of us, not just because it tells our story, but because there is something within it that can help us through every moment, every experience of our lives. One young girl put it this way: "The Bible is God's love letter to me."

She's right. When you're happy, there are scriptures that absolutely, positively help you express that. "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8)

When you're struggling, there are scriptures that help you put those struggles into words. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." (Psalm 23)

When you need to be lifted up and inspired – "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious – think on these things." (Phil. 4)

No matter what you go through in life, there are words in the Holy Bible that speak to that, and they are words through whom the Holy Spirit speaks to you. It is, indeed, a precious gift, and I hope that these second graders will cherish it always.

Another thing I would want them to know, and of which I remind all of you, is that the Bible is timeless. Sometimes, I get so tired of hearing people say, "Oh, that's an old thing that was written so long ago. What can it possibly have to say to me today?"

I'll tell you what – everything. And let me give you a perfect example of what I mean. The other night, I was in a Bible study here at church, and we were looking at the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations from the Old Testament. They were written many, many, many years ago. We were reading the history of the prophets and kings, and learning about how so many of the kings of Israel and Judah were

horrible, and self-serving. We also read about good people like the prophets and Josiah, who led a series of good reforms for a while. Now, that sounds like ancient history, doesn't it?

Well, let me tell you something. For two hours, we had a rousing discussion about those passages, because they have so much to say about our world today. It was unbelievable! The similarities between that world and our world today are uncanny – self-serving people, self-serving leadership, sin and corruption, hopelessness at times.

Now, that might sound like it was a real downer of a class, but instead, the Bible led us to a better way. In the Bible readings, there was also a seed of hope planted by God, and as we discussed our world today, we began to look for that seed of hope too. And we did. We ended the class, not wringing our hands and bemoaning the sad state of our world, but rather talking about ways that we can be prophetic voices of hope in the midst of it all – how, by our words and actions we can call people to be the best they can be, instead of wallowing in self-centeredness and sin. For two hours, this, what some people would call “a dusty old book” captured our attention and called us to faithful discipleship. Friends, it is far from being a dusty old book – it is a living, breathing gift – timeless to every generation.

So I invite you to read your Bible regularly, and don't just read it to see what it meant for those people back then, read it asking “God, what does this mean for my life now?” You'll be amazed what you discover when you do that. These words are timeless.

Which leads me to my third invitation about the Bible this morning – that you turn to it for guidance and direction for your life. If you give it the time it deserves, and indeed, when reading ask the question, “What does this mean for my life today?” or, as the Disciple Bible Study encourages you to ask, “If I took this passage seriously, what changes would I have to make in my life?” – you will discover God's desire for your life.

A woman named Tammy, when asked about what reading the Bible does for her, said: “Each time I leave a Bible study session, I feel encouraged to do things I was fearful to do before. We always end up talking each other into things – to speak up at work, to forgive a sister, to visit someone who is grieving. We know these are the right things to do, but we need a nudge.” That nudge comes from reading the Bible.

All of us need a nudge, everyday, to be the people God created us to be. Sometimes we need a nudge because we're down, and feel like nobody knows what we're going through. Sometimes we need a nudge because we're tired, or lonely, or afraid. Sometimes we need a nudge because we're not sure where to go or what to do. Sometimes we need a nudge because we're overwhelmed by life, and need the peace that passes understanding.

For all of those situations and so many more, if we will only turn to the Word of God, the Holy Bible, we will find what we need.

Let me close with these words of Adam Hamilton:

“I love the Bible like no other book. None other has so shaped my thoughts, my values, my life. Its story has become my story. Each day as I open and read it, I feel connected to God, and find my soul nourished by it. I want to live by its precepts – to allow its words to be ‘a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.’”

(Adam Hamilton, *Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White*, p. 69)

Friends, if you have a Bible, you’re holding a love letter from God in your hand. What a tragedy it would be to have a love letter, and never open it!

My prayer is that these precious children and all of us will open it up and draw life from it every single day. May it be so.

Amen.