

“Bible”

Chapter five of Barbara Brown Taylor’s

The Preaching Life

1. Anglican theologian Michael Green says about the New Testament,

We cannot allow it the veneration of the sort accorded by Muslims to the Koran. It is not itself a holy book, descended from heaven for our adulation. Its authority is a derived authority, for the place of final truth is not held for us by any book: it is occupied by a Person, and what a thrilling thing that is—to know that in this perplexing and often sub-personal world final truth is personal! The New Testament, therefore, is testimony to a person whom we believe to enshrine all the truth about God and man that we need to know in order to get right with God.¹

Compare this with BBT’s view of Scripture. What does she mean when she says, “For all the human handiwork it displays, the Bible remains a peculiarly holy book” (52)? What does she mean when she calls “the Bible God’s ‘living’ word” (Heb 4:12).

2. BBT enthusiastically recounts some of the gems she found when she learned to really study Scripture:

Adam got his name from *adamah*, the dust of the earth. At least one of the words for God, *elohim*, was plural. The word for “eye” also meant “fountain of water,” and the word for “rib” could also be interpreted “side room,” which told me that Eve was created from one whole side of Adam’s nature. (57)

- a. Have you ever delved into the Bible deeply enough to learn things you illuminated the text and its meaning? What are some of the more precious gems you’ve found?
- b. Jesus said, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (Jn 8:31b-32). In-depth study is foundational to Christian life. Yet few of us report that we engage in such study even occasionally. (BBT, on the other hand, is *paid* to do so!) How often, and in what depth, do you study Scripture?

3. Taylor describes her own practice of studying Scripture as follows:

My relationship with the Bible is not a romance but a marriage, and one I am willing to work on in all the usual ways: by living with the text day in and day out, by listening to it and talking back to it, by making sure I know what is behind the words it speaks to me and being certain I have heard it properly, by refusing to distance myself from the parts of it I do not like or understand, by letting my love for it show up in the everyday acts of my life. (56)

How would you characterize your “marriage” to Scripture? To quote *Ladies Home Journal*, “Can this marriage be saved?” :-)

4. Taylor writes,

¹ “Evangelicals, Honesty and New Testament Study,” from *Evangelicals Today* (Lutterworth: London), 1973.

Over and over, the Bible offers me an alternative vision, not only of myself but also of other people and ultimately of the whole world. Sometimes it seems far-fetched, but other times it seems truer than what is supposed to be true. (55)

- a. How does her subsequent account of a month in Israel model this process of Biblically re-imagining the world?
 - b. What, in your view of yourself (“God made me, and God does not make trash”) and the world needs to be re-imagined in light of the God that “can make a human being out of a pile of dirt,” “can make a barren old couple the proud parents of a chosen people,” “can heal the sick and feed the hungry and raise the dead” (54)?
5. BBT ends this chapter with a visit to celebrate the eucharist in a nursing home. How does Scripture interact with its residents in this anecdote?
6. Following this anecdote, BBT writes,

The Bible tells us the stories we need and want to hear—stories to help us live, stories to help us die, and stories to help us believe we shall live again. Listening to them, we are called into relationship with the One who tells them to us. Believing them, we are changed. (62)

What stories (or passages) in the Bible have changed you, and how?

7. Taylor quotes Lewis’ passage from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to describe our God—“The King is not safe” (59-60). What is she saying here about Scripture?