

August 29, 2010  
Psalm 119:97-105  
1 Timothy 4:11-16  
Creekside COB

**“Taking the Bible Seriously”  
Rosanna McFadden**

**Good morning! I’m happy for the chance to preach once again. I’d like to begin with a few acknowledgements and a disclaimer. First the acknowledgements: my primary sources of inspiration for this message are the Bible and Laurie Mastic. I’m not claiming that those two have equal authority in my life, but I want to give credit where credit is due. Second, as disclaimer: anyone who uses the Bible to argue a point is liable to be accused of “proof texting.” Proof texting is taking a verse or short passage out of its larger context, and basing an entire argument on a very small percentage of information -- very like what bloggers or unscrupulous reporters today do to public figures to try to twist the meaning of their words. Sometimes politicians can sound as if they’re saying exactly the opposite of what they actually mean. Proof texting is often a matter of opinion. A tongue-in-cheek definition is that if I agree with someone, they’re taking the Bible seriously; if I disagree with them, they are proof texting.**

**I’m going to be doing some proof texting today, and I want to do that with as much transparency and integrity as possible. My goal is to give you a broad overview of the Bible, and to do that, I’ll be citing a lot of passages which I have shortened to just a few verses. Whenever possible, I’ll have the text and the references up on the screen. I would invite you to write any of those references down so you can read them on your own and put them into a broader context, or go back to them if they raise questions for you.**

Several years ago, when we were still meeting at the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Laurie Mastic told a children's story in which she claimed that the Bible contains a whole library of books. Most of us know that within the covers of the Bible are 66 different books, and almost all of them have multiple chapters. But what Laurie was claiming is that there are not just separate books, but different types of literature included in the Bible. I absolutely agree. If you just received a Bible today, or if you are a Sunday School teacher, or if you have never read the Bible, there is an entire library waiting for you to explore. In fact, you might think of this sermon as an extended children's story -- for adults, too.

The Hebrew people who compiled what Christians often call the Old Testament had a different name for that collection: the Tanakh. The Tanakh was the combination of the Torah, or Law, the Nebvi'im or Prophets, and the Ketuvim, or Writings. From the first letters T, N, K, came the acronym Tanakh. Let's look briefly at samples of each of the Law, Prophets, and Writings.

The Law -- Torah is more literally teaching, or instruction -- was the most important part of Hebrew scripture. The first 5 books of our Old Testament -- Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy -- are the books of the law. Here's part of a passage from Exodus which you've probably heard before.

**LAW Exodus 20:12-15**

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

You shall not commit murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

These are 5,6, 7, and 8 of the 10 Commandments.

The books of the Prophets often bear the prophet's name: Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Habakkuk. They are divided into major and minor prophets—not more important and less important, but longer books and shorter books. This passage is from one of my favorite prophets—it's actually a prophesy about prophesy. This passage is quoted in the New Testament book of Acts:

**PROPHETS** Joel 4:28-29

I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

The Writings include history as well as worship and wisdom literature. Books like Psalms and Proverbs are poetry, but they don't have rhyme and meter as is often the case with poetry composed in English. Sometimes the only way to tell biblical poetry is the way the lines are broken into stanzas. There are 150 poems in the book of Psalms. Here is a short part of one of them.

**POETRY** Psalm 57:8-10

Awake, my soul!

Awake, O harp and lyre!

I will awake the dawn.

I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples;

I will sing praises to you among the nations.

For your steadfast love is as high as the heavens;

your faithfulness extends to the clouds.

Here's an introduction to a historical record of people and armies.

**HISTORY** I Chronicles 27:1

This is the list of the people of Israel, the heads of families, the commanders of the thousands and the hundreds, and their officers

who served the king in all matters concerning the divisions that came and went, month after month throughout the year, each division numbering twenty-four thousand.

This passage goes on for 33 verses in great detail; I don't find it riveting reading, but it is amazingly comprehensive, and it shows who and what was important to these people.

There are stories throughout the Bible, many that have colorful characters and political intrigue. This is the beginning of an adventure:

#### **ADVENTURE    Joshua 2:1-4**

Then Joshua son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went, and entered the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and spent the night there. The king of Jericho was told, "Some Israelites have come here tonight to search out the land." Then the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come only to search out the whole land." But the woman took the two men and hid them.

If you don't like adventure, there's also romance:

#### **ROMANCE    Song of Solomon 7:10-12**

I am my beloved's,  
and his desire is for me.  
Come, my beloved,  
let us go forth into the fields,  
and lodge in the villages;  
let us go out early to the vineyards,  
and see whether the vines have budded,  
whether the grape blossoms have opened  
and the pomegranates are in bloom.  
There I will give you my love.

There are also some gory and disturbing stories in the Bible. The next text has no place in a children's story, or probably even in public

worship. I'll show you the citation and you want to read it on your own if you wish.

**HORROR** Judges 19:22-29

There is fantasy literature: the kind of wild, unearthly characters that you might find in a graphic novel. This text is from the New Testament, from the very last book of the Bible.

**FANTASY** Revelation 17:3-4

So he carried me away in the spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations.

There is even humor -- much of which we miss because we don't get the cultural context, or because we think that taking the Bible seriously means leaving our sense of humor outside in the parking lot when we come to church. But I'm certain the following passage would have made folks snort at the absurdity:

**HUMOR** Isaiah 45:9-10

Woe to you who strive with your Maker,  
earthen vessels with the potter!  
Does the clay say to the one who fashions it, "What are you making"?  
or "Your work has no handles"?  
Woe to anyone who says to a father, "What are you begetting?"  
or to a woman, "With what are you in labor?"

Note to self: if you come across a woman in labor, do NOT go up to her and say, "What are you doing?"

And finally, although I've never heard it called a cookbook, there is one recipe in the Bible. I don't think anyone has ever made it; even

**the prophet Ezekiel, who did some pretty weird stuff, talks God out of this one.**

**RECIPE    Ezekiel 4:9-12**

**Take wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and spelt; put them into one vessel, and make bread for yourself. During the number of days that you lie on your side, three hundred ninety days, you shall eat it. The food that you eat shall be twenty shekels a day by weight; at fixed times you shall eat it. And you shall drink water by measure, one-sixth of a hin; at fixed times you shall drink. You shall eat it as a barley-cake, baking it in their sight on human dung.**

**I share these passages in part to show you the variety of literature in the Bible, but also to note that taking the Bible seriously doesn't necessarily mean taking every passage equally seriously. Even the most devout and the best-intentioned among us have to make some choices. Some of these choices are pretty clear: should I commit adultery? No. But when Jesus talks more about adultery in Matthew 5, he says, "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away." I may be in the company of saints today, but I notice that none of you have torn out your right eye. Is Jesus warning about the perils of sin and that we should take great pains to avoid it? Absolutely. Does he really want us to tear our eyes out? I hope not.**

**Sometimes the choices are not so clear. For instance, there are people who would think that for me to preach a sermon on taking the Bible seriously is a contradiction in terms. After all, 1 Tim 2 -- just a few chapters before the text for this sermon -- says, "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man. She is to keep silent." This verse has provided a way for some people to say that women should not be in pastoral ministry. And yet I know that the same apostle who wrote those words also said, "In Christ there is no Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free." I see the gifts that God has given to women around me, and how our congregation and denomination have been enriched by the leadership of people like Janet and Betty. I have felt God's leading in my own life, and have chosen to follow that call, even though I know it will not be universally accepted.**

**I have been blessed in my life to know many people who take the Bible seriously: family members, church members, friends, teachers, and professors. Some have devoted their lives to studying the Bible. And here's a great mystery: they don't all agree about what it means. Sometimes their differences are small, and sometimes they are significant. I don't think everyone's opinion holds equal authority: I have also known a few people who claim to take the Bible seriously but have never actually read it. But even those who have taken time to wrestle with the Bible don't see it exactly the same way. I have come to believe that this is a gift from God. Have you ever wondered why there are four gospels? They each tell the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, but they tell it from different perspectives, and for a different set of listeners. Hearing a variety of stories doesn't need to be a cause for confusion or division, but an opportunity to listen to one another and to hear God's word in the lives of other people. It is our responsibility and a great privilege to read the Bible, hear it read in worship, study it in Sunday School or with a Bible study group, and come to informed decisions about how we will let this book influence our lives. The power of the Bible is not in how much of it we can quote from memory, or even in believing all the right things. The power of the Bible is in how we embody it in our lives. Faith is not a matter of knowledge or of even of belief, it is trusting God to shape the way we live every day. This is why Jesus was so hard on the Pharisees -- they knew the Law better than anyone and followed it to the letter, and in the process neglected justice, and lost sight of the love of God.**

**The Bible shows us the love of God, exemplified in the life of Jesus, who was God in human form who died for us. The Bible can change your life -- but only if you let it. This book can change the way we see the world and ourselves, and can shape our relationships with our children, our families, our neighbors, and our enemies. I want you to hear some passages which have shaped the lives of people at Creekside Church:**

***[Video here]***

**Taking the Bible seriously means allowing the story of Jesus and his love to guide our lives, as individuals and as a community of faith. We won't all tell exactly the same story, and that is not the goal. But if**

**you take this book, read it, talk about it, ask questions about it, challenge it, and cherish it, you will become part of God's great story and the story of Jesus and his love will live in you and touch those around you.**