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Pentecost 2
2 Peter 1:20-2:3

BACK TO THE SOURCE!

These are confusing times. The intensity of news media and social media can send our minds reeling and inflame our emotions. It plays on our fears, inflates our self-righteousness and even ignites much uglier inclinations. So much is sheer propaganda disputed by the other sheer propaganda. Distilling reality out of the social messaging soup is an impossibility in the midst of fever-pitched hysteria and cultural meltdown. And how are believers supposed to process all this? What should be our reaction? How can we determine right from wrong? What's our starting point? Dear fellow believers, in the swirling chaos there is still a single, steady light of unchanging truth. It is God's Word, the Bible.

An ancient Latin church-phrase says *ad fontem*. That means, "Back to the source!" That's something Lutheran pastors say to each other as they wrestle with circumstances or evaluate things they read or hear: *ad fontem!* Back to the Source! Go back to Scripture. That will make things clear. In these harrowing days every Christian needs to go back to the source. The Bible is the best source to go back to because 2 Peter today assures us that the Bible is God's own Word and therefore it will help us navigate through so many conflicting messages in the world.

If you are negotiating unfamiliar roads at night you might turn the volume way up on your GPS and cock your ear toward it whenever it speaks so that you don't miss anything. 2 Peter calls for that kind of attentiveness when it says: *We know this above all else*. In other words, pay attention, nothing else is more important than this!

We read on, *We know this above all else: No prophecy of Scripture comes about from someone's own interpretation*. A prophecy is simply a preaching or a proclamation. This says "prophecy of Scripture." Scripture precisely means the words written on the pages of the Bible. Let's hear that again, *We know this above all else: No prophecy of Scripture comes about from someone's own interpretation*.

There are two ways the original New Testament Greek allows us to translate this—the end result of both is the same. One way is to say no prophecy of Scripture came about by its own unloosing. In other words, the Bible didn't develop on its own, didn't merely evolve from folklore or tradition. The other way is to translate no prophecy of Scripture came about by personal interpretation. In other words, none of the men who wrote the Bible put pen to paper and said, "Here's how I see things."

Then how did the Bible come into existence? The answer is worded as strongly as possible: *In fact, no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were being carried along by the Holy Spirit*. Not even once did a man slip in his own thoughts or opinions or culturally conditioned worldviews when writing the Scriptures. The writers of the Bible, the men, were like a pen in the Holy Spirit's hand. He carried them along and gave them the words to write.

When you write, you might use a crayon, a pencil or a magic marker. Each writes with its own unique look. But, regardless of the writing utensil, the words are yours. In the same way the Holy Spirit used a poet like David, a scholar like Paul, a common farmer like Amos or a blustering fisherman like Peter, but the words through each of them are the Holy Spirit's words. And even though David and Paul lived 1000 years apart from each other, their message, their doctrine, is exactly the same—no differences, no culturally conditioned changes, no human errors because the Author, the true, eternal God does not change.

To look into the pages of the Bible is to have a look into the very heart and mind of God. If we were fully able to grasp this reality, people would eagerly give up their life savings just to have a peak at a single page. But here God freely opens it up to us all without any cost and permits us to devour as much as we want! What an amazing God we have! No matter what we encounter our motto can be “Back to the Source” because the Bible is God’s own Word.

It seems like it should be so easy then, that there shouldn’t be such a confusing casserole of religions and beliefs out there. But the sin we’ve inherited from Adam and Eve naturally blinds the world to the truth. You can watch and see that no matter how hard society strives to get it right—“our society needs this, our society needs that”—they always miss the mark. They never quite get it. Even worse is that the natural human mind, my mind, your mind, every human mind, is not merely neutral to God’s Word. It’s hostile to it. Without the Holy Spirit’s help, even when we understand clearly what the Bible says, our natural thinking is, “Well, it can’t *mean* that! It must mean something else.” That’s when people tend to so-called interpret the Bible to something that suits them better. Instead of going back to the source we’re tempted to reject the source.

Here in 2 Peter God makes a dreadful promise what to expect in a sin-ruined world like this. He says, *There were false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you.*

Among you. They wear the name Christian. They virtue signal. 2 Peter goes on, *They will secretly bring in destructive heresies.* Literally translated, they will smuggle in destructive heresies. In other words, it won’t seem like destructive heresies. It’s not likely someone will say, “Let’s destroy your faith with some false doctrine!” In the church setting they may let the truth stand, but alongside it they’ll coax in some ambiguous ideas. In the social setting they’ll sound more loving, more open-minded, more reasonable, more relevant, and may even have the best of intentions. But their personal “truth” is actually nothing more than mistaken human sentiment.

We are told, *They will secretly bring in destructive heresies even denying the Master who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves.* That’s why it’s so important to go back to the Source not only to steer clear of false teachers or social messaging but also to avoid falling under God’s judgment ourselves.

The particular danger for you and me is to think that we are in no particular danger. I mentioned that our thinking naturally tends to reject God’s truth. Therefore when 2 Peter says, *Many will follow their depraved ways, and because of them the way of the truth will be blasphemed. In their greed they will exploit you with fabricated messages. Their condemnation announced long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.* it’s easy to think, “Come on, Saint Peter, aren’t you overstating it a bit?” If a pastor today would talk that way we’d think he was being extreme. Do you see what happens? God gives us a dire warning and we only take it to heart sort of. Do you see how quickly we are prone to put ourselves under God’s damning judgment?

Likely, every one of us at some point has thought, “If I only had a little more time, I could be a better Bible student.” Well, what has God given us with coronavirus? Time! Ask yourself, have you become a better Bible student? Do you see how our nature is always to resist, always to stay away, always to reject God’s truth? In so doing we place ourselves under God’s judgment!

Instead God graciously urges us to go back to the Source, back to His Word. He urges us to go back to the Source because He wants to save us. There in His Word and only there do we find rescue from His anger. That’s because the Bible is all about Christ. Through faith in Christ’s sufferings and death we have a God who is now reconciled to us and no longer at odds with us. For Jesus’ sake our sins are forgiven. God is our friend. We have peace with Him and eternal life to come.

So whether you are looking for some guiding light in these confusing times, would like to understand your God and His will better, or would like some assurance that your church is still teaching the truth faithfully, remember

ad fontem—back to the Source. The Holy Spirit will bless us as we go back to the Source because the Bible is His Word and He promises to work in our hearts and minds through it for our salvation.