Rule of the Last

Even if I’m sitting alone in a cozy nook with a blanket and a cup of tea, reading is an inherently social act. Not only am I interacting with the thoughts of the author through the medium of text, but my reading is informed by a complex social web. That book found its way into my possession through social interactions. Whether literature or nonfiction it almost certainly belongs to a genre informed by a series of social conventions. Most importantly, my interpretation of the content is going to be heavily shaped by my particular social location. I am a straight, cis-gendered, educated, white male. I bring all of that with me to the text.

If this is true of all reading it is even more true of scripture which is most frequently read in communal settings thick with socially constructed rules of interpretation. We never read the Bible alone, and the people we read the Bible with are perhaps the most significant influence over how we understand and apply it in our lives.

No reading of scripture occurs in a vacuum and no interpretation of it is universal in the sense that it is free from being enmeshed in the particularities of time, place, and culture. Every interpreter starts from their own perspective, surrounded as they are by social and cultural forces frequently beyond their awareness. We are always constrained, but also empowered, by the context we inhabit which provides us the tools for creating meaning. So far, you can hopefully see how this is self-evident. By virtue of my life experience and social location certain aspects of the text will jump out to me, which you might not notice, and vice versa. The same passages of scripture will be interpreted differently by people in different contexts.

The challenge which many of us may not feel comfortable with acknowledging is that not every context is equally useful for interpreting the Bible. The Exodus story looked very different to enslaved African Americans than it did to white slave-owners, but this was not merely a case of differing equally valid perspectives. The slaves were better equipped than their slave-owners for reading the truth of the Word of God from scripture.

Augustine famously coined the Rule of Love for interpreting the Bible, when he said, “[w]hoever... thinks that he (sic) understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation on them that does not tend to build up [the] twofold love of God and our neighbor, does not yet understand them as he ought.” (Christian Doctrine, 1.26.40). The logic of this rule is that the very purpose of scripture is to testify to God’s love so any reading of the text which leads away from love should be excluded from the outset as inconsistent with the fundamental purpose of the Bible.

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When discussing the context in which we read scripture there is an analogous rule, call it the Rule of the Last: when interpreting scripture the experience of the marginalized and oppressed ought to be given priority in determining the meaning of the text. The logic of this rule is that the love of God is inherently liberative, that God has a “preferential option for the poor” and thus any reading of the text which fails to lead to greater justice for marginalized and oppressed persons should be excluded from the outset as inconsistent with the fundamental purpose of the Bible. Reading the Bible in prison is categorically different from reading the Bible in the halls of power.

What the Rule of the Last means for many of us is that we are operating at a significant handicap if we attempt to do Bible study or worship without the voices and perspectives of marginalized and oppressed persons in our midst. We simply won’t be able to get certain things about the Bible right so long as we are reading it while isolated among people of relative affluence and privilege. The next time you prepare to read scripture look around you. Who is reading along with you? Who is missing? To better understand the Bible go find the ones Jesus called the least and the last, and ask them if you might read these ancient words together.

— Aric
On June 16th, 8 of us headed to Portland, Oregon to serve. The youth's first project was to serve on Night Strike under the Burnside Bridge. Delaney and Becky painted nails, Nick, Nathan and Harrison served food, and Dawn and I served as hosts and were able to talk with people.

On Friday we canvassed a McCoy Park neighborhood with fliers for Saturday’s Bridge Town Kids. In the afternoon we did a scavenger hunt in Portland learning more about the area and in the evening we walked around Portland giving out socks, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and coffee. Saturday we headed to McCoy Park where we helped low income families play games, serve food and have lots of fun. Saturday we headed back to Sherwood so we could spend the weekend with our Fathers. On Monday we all headed out to the Clackamas River where we got to white water raft. We will be sharing more of our details soon. We had a fabulous trip.

Thank you to Dawn Perazzo for being our second adult and to our church family for the support, prayers and love we receive. This is a fantastic opportunity and we thank you.

- Lana Cole,
Youth Director
Memorial Service: **Remembering Jim Haynes**

Service will be 11am on Saturday July 23rd at Sherwood High School with a reception to follow. Speak to Darla to help with providing food for the reception.

“**Pets Unleashed**”: **Weekend VBS Coming Soon**

Saturday, August 13 will be a one-day vacation bible school for kids packed with fun. More details coming soon!

**UMW: No Summer Meeting**

Just a reminder that UMW does not meet in July or August.

**Leadership Team Meetings**

1st and 3rd Sundays after worship

Meeting Dates This Month:

July 3 at 11am
July 17 at 11 am

**Give a hand to Helping Hands.**

Donate food, help with sorting, or volunteer on box packing or distribution days (3rd Sat. of the month), or join us on Mission Sundays!

Call Gerry or Dotty Edy for details:

(503) 625-7975

**JULY BIRTHDAYS**

2 Bill States

Did we miss your birthday? Please send your info to Holly to put in future newsletters.
SHERWOOD UNITED
METHODIST CHURCH

Reaching out to the hungry: in body or spirit

PO Box 127
22280 SW Washington Street
Sherwood, Oregon
97140
Tel: 503-625-7115
E-mail: hollysherwoodumc@gmail.com
www.sherwoodumc.com

At A Glance for July 2016

Sunday, July 3 at 10:00AM—Worship
Sunday, July 10 at 11:00AM—Leadership Meeting
Saturday, July 16 at 9:30-10:30AM—Helping Hands Food Box Distribution
Sunday, July 17 at 10:00AM—Mission Sunday / Potluck
Saturday, July 23 at 11:00AM—Memorial Service for Jim Haynes at Sherwood High School
Sunday, July 24 at 10:00AM—Worship
Sunday, July 31 at 10:00AM—Worship
Saturday, August 13—All-day Vacation Bible School

Church Staff

Pastor
Aric Clark
aricclark33@gmail.com

Youth Director
Lana Painter
lcole@rcinv.com

Pianist
Cindy Souza
armza2@yahoo.com

Song Leader
Eden Francis
ms.edenf@gmail.com

Administrative Assistant
Holly Dhynes
hollysherwoodumc@gmail.com

Pastor Aric’s Office Hours

Thursdays 9am-1pm