

OF BIBLES AND HERSHEY BARS
October 16, 2016 2 Kings 22: 1-13
The Church of the Covenant

The story is told during World War II of a young English lad who was skulking about “the colonials” base. (I learned this very English terminology from our very English adult ed speaker, Dr. John Guest!). He spied under a tent and saw a box marked “Hershey Bars”. So captivated was he by the thought of an entire box laden with chocolate he slid the box out of the tent and was making away with it when a stern voice ordered him to halt. “Who goes there?” The soldier figured out what was happening and the boy stuttered that he promised he would never do it again. The kindly soldier opened the box, and took out a Bible –it was filled with Bibles, not chocolate—and handed it to the young man. He said, “If you promise to read this book I will let you go. If you do read it your life will never be the same”. The boy agreed and ran away with his new Bible. Indeed the boy did read this book from cover to cover. And indeed it *did* change his life. *He was to become the Archbishop of Canterbury in the Church of England.* We never know what power this Word has over our lives until we open it and read it and make it our own. The riches of this world fade and melt away like a chocolate bar. But the Word of God endureth forever. Savor it and it gives life. The Word of God reforms whosoever reads it with an open, humble, yielded heart.

King Josiah in ancient Israel was to feel the affect of the power of the Word of God. Israel was in one of those times in its history when it was far away from the Lord. The kings of his era “*had done evil in the sight of God*”. They worshiped other gods. They sacrificed children in “the high places”. Besotted with excess and extravagance their hearts were far from the Lord their God. Affluence either makes one grateful to God or it causes people to forget their Lord and to consider themselves wiser and better than God Himself. People loved things more than they loved God –the very definition of idolatry. The temple and the priesthood had fallen into corruption; the very leaders who were to call the people to repentance were themselves far away from the God they purported to serve. Into this sorry state of affairs entered a miracle. They were doing renovations in the temple and came upon a book hidden away and forgotten for years. It is the present book of Deuteronomy. This rediscovered book was brought to King Josiah to be read to him aloud. Hilkiah the high priest said –“*I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord*” (2 Kings 22: 8) When the book of Deuteronomy was opened and read to King Josiah “*he rent his clothes*” (v. 11), always a sign of extreme mourning and repentance.

What were the words read that so seared the conscience of the King? Perhaps it was the blessings and the curses, the Lord saith: “*Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse: the blessing if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God...the curse if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside...to go after other gods which you have not known.*” (2 Kings 11: 26-28) Whatever it was that was read to King Josiah, he was cut to the heart, he rent his garments, and he repented. He REFORMED Israel by the Word he had received. He was deemed one of the good kings of Israel. For he had found the book of the law in the house of the Lord!

The Bible is still a hidden book. Oh, to be sure it is right in the temple, right where it has always been, just as in King Josiah's day. It sits on the shelf unread; it sits on the coffee table gathering dust. But it is as the Bible says about itself, "*the whole counsel of God*" and this is quoted in The Westminster Confession of Faith of our church as what we believe. So many people adrift; open the BOOK and find the anchor in life. Our individual church Mission Statement is "*To know Christ and make Him known to the next generation.*" What we say we are about as a church is "knowing Christ" and the best way to know Christ is to know Him through the study of His Word. And we say we are about "making Him known to the next generation" and the best way to make Him known to those who follow in our footsteps is to have Him known through the study of the Bible. There is no saving knowledge of God apart from the scriptures; that's what Protestants believe. So it is why we make such a big deal about Sunday School and Adult Ed classes. It is why this Fall we have made such a commitment to Christian Education. It is why the largest part of our ministry budget is dedicated to "making Him known to the next generation". It is why we have made sacrificial commitments to bring Jessica Hickman and Pastor Kay Balderose to join Don Nixon in order to KNOW and MAKE HIM KNOWN.

Because a re-found book is always the beginning of re-formation. "*I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord*"! Josiah re-found a lost book. John Calvin re-found a lost book. Martin Luther re-found a lost book. The Protestant Reformation re-found a lost book. It is our task today to re-find the lost book of the law.

My car was stolen from outside the Shadyside Presbyterian Church several years ago. How I wish I had left a sermon tape in the cassette player on the topic "Thou Shalt Not Steal!" The car was recovered in a mall parking lot a little worse for wear but with only one thing missing. Know what it was? Not my tennis racket, not other valuables, certainly not my Personnel Committee notebook –the only thing missing was my Bible. Now allow me a flight of fancy for a moment. Allow me in light of the Hershey Bar story and the young man who became Archbishop of Canterbury to conjecture something –perhaps some young man who stole my car took that Bible, and perhaps even read it. Perhaps he has turned his life over to Christ. Perhaps one day he even becomes a pastor, perhaps even a Presbyterian minister. The Bible has the power to do that in someone's life. I believe that. Read and re-discover it; one can never be the same. When I told this story once, a cynic said: "Whoever stole your car just threw the Bible out the window!"

Choose this day blessing or curse –whether you will read it, believe it, and live it. Or whether you will throw it out the window. As for me, I have RE-found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. It has cut me to the heart, all the times I have kept it hidden away from the very people I have sworn to love. I don't love you if I don't tell you the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. And I promise you, from this day onward, I will never preach anything but the whole counsel of God, so help me God! Because that's what this Bible is. Amen and Amen.

*By: The Rev. Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*