

"This Is My Chosen"

Famous theologian Karl Barth said, “take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.” (Times Magazine, 1966). That mantra - Bible in one hand, newspaper in the other - morphed in theological social justice circles to become “preach with the Bible in one hand, the newspaper in the other.”

Barth was talking about how context matters immensely. One way scripture is alive is because we are alive. So each time we come to the Bible we bring with us whatever is going on in our lives. We come with newspapers. This is our context.

It means, what I notice today will not be what I notice tomorrow. And the same goes for you. (Which is why group Bible studies are so lively! We all bring different insights!) Our contexts change, even as the words of Scripture do not.

Today, I come to scripture with a newspaper that is worried on the edges, worn. It has tear stains. It has several angry pencil pokes through it.

Since I last stood before you, the head of the USA regime bombed Venezuela, kidnapped their head of state and his wife, and killed soldiers and civilians. He has stated the USA will run the country for now, until it has a favourable to the USA government. But their oil indefinitely belongs to the USA.

This imperialism is how the USA runs Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands, the Northern Mariana Islands and American Samoa. These countries can some-what govern themselves, so long as they obey the USA. Their residents are either US citizens or US nationals, but they don't get representation in the government, they cannot vote for president, and the last to actually be given statehood was Hawaii in 1959. The USA also claims two more territories that Columbia also claims.

It seems Donald Trump wants Venezuela to become one of these territories too. And Columbia. And Mexico. And Greenland. And Canada.

Anyone who thinks there will be a 51st state doesn't know USA how the USA operates. The USA doesn't add more states. The flag has 50 stars; and its image is held sacred. More states add stars. And add unknowns to the elections. No, the USA makes more subservient territories. If Canada, or just Alberta, were to turn wholly to the USA, there wouldn't be a 51st state. There would be the latest in a long line of "would-be-states" who cannot vote, cannot receive government social security, do not have health care, but owe allegiance, taxes, and deference.

I also come today with Scripture. Scripture highlighted, debated with in the margins, and underlined with comments like, “Oh yeah!” I read Jesus is born in occupied territory. His local Herodian government is trying to balance the locals who are being taxed but cannot choose their leaders; and the Roman occupiers who permit some self-governance so long as that government is subservient to Rome. My context today highlights he is in the Judean territory of Rome.

In Jesus' time, the people are dreaming of King David - of when the country could rule itself. And they're dreaming of the reign of God, when no human rules at all but only God. And peace is known fully and thoroughly. They are dreaming of the prophet Isaiah. We heard God introduce God's servant who brings forth justice, tenderly, softly, quietly. God's own who is chosen, in whom God delights, who won't snuff anyone's light out and won't destroy the broken. Someone who is strong enough to never faint or be crushed until God's will is done and justice reaches all the world.

I feel that yearning growing in me as I stand here with the Bible in one hand, and the newspaper in the other.

Oh that newspaper. The Epstein files are not released. What has been released speaks of raping children and rumours of murdering grandchildren born from rape. 99% of the files remain hidden. The 1% released alone took down a prince. What horror is hidden? Who leads us who should be in prison?

That Bible – it says to bring to light those who have been condemned to hidden dungeons. Bring insight to those who have been kept unaware.

My context points out all the voices who are silenced. All the victims who disappear under unusual circumstances. All the need for a disinfecting light among the rich and powerful.

That newspaper - Asked in a wide-ranging interview with The New York Times this week if there were any limits on his global powers, Trump said: "Yeah, there is one thing. My own morality. My own mind. It's the only thing that can stop me. I don't need international law,"

If you didn't know Karl Barth's quote, you likely know Lord Acton's: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men."

Unlike Trump, Jesus actually does have global powers. He actually can control the weather and calm the storm; he actually can resurrect the dead. And yet, with all this power... he plays by the rules.

That Bible – We read today Jesus comes to John for a baptism. John tells him, "But I need baptised by YOU!" Who is John to offer a baptism to the Lord of the Universe? But Jesus says no. For it to be proper, and righteous, Jesus wants baptised by John. He doesn't want to use his power and authority to be above the law - but to fulfil it.

In this self-denial, in this refusing to use power for personal exception, personal gain - Jesus is the Beloved, God's son, and pleasing to God.

We know that after baptism Jesus is tempted again and again by the devil to use his power for personal use. To refuse any limits. And again and again, Jesus passes the test. Throughout his ministry, Jesus' miracles and power are for others - healing others, restoring others, uplifting others - and he doesn't use it for himself. Even on the cross, he refuses to use his power for self-gain.

My context shows me the huge difference between the dictators of the world, and the Lord of Love. My context shows me the example a human leader gives me to follow, compared to the example a fully-human, fully divine leader gives me to follow.

That newspaper... ICE is the USA dictator's private army. And they have murdered 16 people already. This week they murdered the first white person – a mom who'd just dropped her son off at school. Since I last stood here ICE attacked by own city. People I know were roughed up. People I know had coworkers disappeared and their spouses showed up at work crying, frantic, unsure where their loved ones were and if they'd be seen again. My former home's Catholic diocese issued a dispensation telling people to not attend Christmas mass, or any mass, if they felt ICE would target them. Friends messaged each other arranging who would pick up kids at school before the bell rings because that sliver of sidewalk between the school and the bus is public land, and ICE was waiting to capture children and adults. In Ohio, no school pick up ended in a murdered parent. But it did in Minnesota.

The fear is intentional. The cruelty is intentional. The pain is intentional. So is the acceleration, the escalation. The USA has a mid-term election coming up. If the election is not manipulated, these power-abusing people will lose power. So manipulation, gerrymandering, happened and is happening. This is where in the USA it is possible to change representative districts. Similar to how our riding was changed. Now imagine our riding was just Robinson street and a line from there all the way to all of the GTA. Could we ever get representation? Could Robinson street out-vote all of Toronto? That's what's occurring in the USA to be sure non-MAGA supporters are the minority in each area. The problem is the number of MAGA supporters is getting smaller and smaller. If an election is held, it is looking like MAGA will lose. And so, to stay in power, there cannot be an election.

To cancel an election, Trump needs a war. Any war. A war with NATO. A civil war with USA vs. USA. Any major crisis. The plan, over the next 3 months, is to provoke that crisis. There is going to be much more violence and "unprecedented" things. I don't know if he'll get the war he wants. I do know he'll try.

That is the newspaper.

The Bible is speaking to us too.

Isaiah's prophetic poem continues - now addressing you and I, and all God's people - I who made the heavens and earth, and all within them. I, who give breath to all people and spirit to all life. I - God - have called you all in righteousness. I have taken you all by the hand and I keep you all. I have given you all as my promise, my covenant, to the world to be a light to the nations, to be hope in hopelessness, to be freedom to those without liberty, to be enlightenment to the cloudy minds. I am God - and before these things have happened, I tell you of them. The former things are passing away and I am doing a new thing.

We, you and I, all of us together, are God's promise to the world that things shall get better. They will get better. We, you and I, and all of us together, are empowered by God to be that hope and freedom, to be that education and joy. We might have candles with dim wicks, but God chooses just such candles to spread light. We are bowed and broken, but God is seeking such reeds to drop the seeds of hope.

Wounded healers: God is a wounded healer and seeks the wounded to be healers.

If you're feeling wounded, and heavy. Stressed and worn. If you're a broken reed and a candle in the wind – then you're just who God is seeking. You are God's promise that God won't abandon us to tyrants and evils. You are the living proof God chooses the lowly, the weak, the hurting and abides with us. You know the truth – the former things are passing away and God is doing a new thing. There will be new dawns. There will be release. There will be resurrection. Life, love, God cannot be defeated.

God's wounded, you are empowered to heal. May we each spread the hope that God is with us, God will be with us, and God shall always be with us. We do not face scary times alone. **Amen.**

Scripture Readings - January 11, 2026 – Baptism of Jesus - LCPC

Isaiah 42:1-9 NRSV

The Servant, a Light to the Nations

42 Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
 my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
 he will bring forth justice to the nations.
2 He will not cry out or lift up his voice
 or make it heard in the street;
3 a bruised reed he will not break,
 and a dimly burning wick he will not
 quench;
 he will faithfully bring forth justice.
4 He will not grow faint or be crushed
 until he has established justice in the
 who gives breath to the people upon it
 and spirit to those who walk in it:
5 Thus says God, the LORD,
 who created the heavens and stretched
 them out,

 who spread out the earth and what comes
 from it,
6 I am the LORD; I have called you in
 righteousness;
 I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
 I have given you as a covenant to the people,
 a light to the nations,
7 to open the eyes that are blind,
 to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
 from the prison those who sit in darkness.
8 I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I
 give to no other,
 nor my praise to idols.
9 See, the former things have come to pass,
 and new things I now declare;
 before they spring forth,
 I tell you of them.

Matthew 3: 13-17

The Baptism of Jesus

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” 15 But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. 16 And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw God's Spirit descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from the heavens said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” May God's spirit shape our understanding of these words.

And may they awaken in our hearts.



