

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11

Title: "Finding Strength"

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(Various Bibles Used as Illustrations/Visuals in the Sermon)

This Bible belonged to my late great grandparents. It was published in 1871 and while there are no written marks in the text of this Bible, a few words are scrawled in the front cover and near the back – words so faded that it is nearly impossible to read them.

There is also evidence of how this Bible accompanied them in life. Obituary clippings and Remembrance cards testify to the fact that this Bible was with them as they grieved.

It was with my great grandparents in times of prayer, and they even collected a few prayers, clipped from articles to keep with them. There are book marks, one of which marks the beginning of Joshua – was that foreshadowing of my birth, you be the judge!

Another book mark lists scriptures to read in difficult times of life – when in sorrow read John 14, when you feel lonely or fearful read Psalm 23. All of these things and the worn out binding, testify to the importance of scripture in the life of my great-grandparents, particularly in times of sorrow and grief.

This Bible belonged to my late uncle which he received on September 29, 1963 presented to him in Sunday School. Now, this Bible doesn't have little keep sakes in it and in fact, the inside looks relatively new and unworn. And while my uncle was not a big churchgoer, at least in the years that I knew him, he was always a big outdoorsman, and it is there that I believe he experienced these scriptures. Like Psalm 96 which says, "Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the fields exult, and everything in it." I believe my uncle experienced many of the truths of scripture simply by being out in God's great creation.

This Bible belonged to my late grandmother and while it is similar to that of my great-grandparents in the way that it contains little treasures and remembrances from her life, there is one big difference, other than the fact that it is much newer. It is large print. My grandmother, a faithful churchgoer all her life, and guitar player and singer who loved

to glorify God through music, wanted to have scripture with her as she aged. And with her eyes beginning to get weaker and the very tiny print that is often found in many Bible presenting a challenge, she got this Bible to accompany her through the remainder of her earthly journey.

Now, this Bible looks very similar to this Bible doesn't it? Same size, both large print. But this Bible did not belong to my grandmother, this one belongs to me and it was the very first Bible that I ever purchased. That's right, as I was heading off to in 2008, I wanted scripture to go with me and I didn't have a Bible of my own so I went shopping. And if you have ever been Bible shopping, you will know that there are a crazy number of Bibles out there! There are many translations, different bindings, large print, regular print, Bibles with a few pictures scattered about, study Bibles that includes notes, study Bibles that include commentary for preachers and scholars, and still other variations. But as I set out, I remembered my grandmother's Bible and how the large print was helpful to her as she aged and so my choice was simple. I wanted one similar to hers so that it could always accompany me even if my eyes begin to fail. And this Bible went with me to college, through ups and downs that college brings, it went with me to many Bible studies, it sat with me on my bed in time of sorrow and distress, the truths within gave me strength for all that life was bringing, and these truths also guided and accompanied me through my discernment of a calling to ministry.

Scripture, our Holy Bible, can be a powerful companion and provider of strength on life's journey. Whether that journey began in 1871 or before or 2008 or later, Scripture is meant to be there with us through it all. For Jesus, this was no different. And while his scriptures were only what we know as the Old Testament and his life was still breathing truths in the scriptures that would become the New Testament, scripture was with him and we see that clearly in our reading today. As he was prepare to begin his earthly ministry, after being baptized by John the Baptist, he was led out by the Holy Spirit for this 40 day fast - which is hard to believe because if I go 8 hours without food I am already getting a little tired and a little cranky - but for 40 days he was out there -

can you imagine his weakness at the end of that period? The pain of hunger and the mental strain of it all? And then, he's tempted in that moment of weakness. In a temptation to turn stones into bread, which I'm sure was quite tempting after 40 days without, in this temptation, Jesus, leaned on Scripture to find his strength and quotes Deuteronomy 8:3 when he says "man does not live by bread alone". In a temptation to jump off the temple with a terrible and deadly word-for-word interpretation of Psalm 91:11 being used against him, Jesus, knowing better that to fall for such deadly interpretations of scripture, leaned again on Scripture for strength quoting Deuteronomy 6:16 saying "do not put the Lord your God to the test". And finally, in a temptation to rule the world, which is already his to begin with, and all he has to do is bow down and worship Satan, he banished Satan with power and strength as he leaned once more on Scripture, Deuteronomy 6:13 saying "worship the Lord your God, and serve only him".

Beloved in Christ, our trials may not be like those of Jesus - but they do come. Our temptations may look different - but they do arise. Life will have its moments of weakness and while it may not be the weakness that comes from having no food - we will have moments of being weak and feeling vulnerable. We will have struggles and so, just as Jesus did, we lean on Scripture for the strength to face it all. Every Sunday, when we come together for worship, it is my hope that you find strength here. Strength in the truths of these words that we read, strength in the truths of these words that are spoken, the truths that are sung and the truth that music share, strength in the truth that here we are part of a beloved community and that because we are, we are never alone. There is much strength in knowing that we never need to bear life's burdens alone. We have the strength of Jesus with us. We have the strength of scripture with us. And friends, we have the strength of each other.

This week, we here at First Congregational Church are embarking on two journeys. With the beginning of Lent, we started once more on the ancient journey toward Easter as we reflect deeply. And this week, we also started on a new journey, the journey of

our work and ministry together! Now... when it comes to the Lenten journey, we know where it ends as we go to the cross and the glories that lie beyond and scripture helps lead us there. But this new journey that we are on together, as I begin to serve among you as pastor, what lies ahead is not so clear. Where will the Holy Spirit lead us as we seek to grow in faith? Or how will we live out our faith together in continued and new ways? Or how will our faith community transform? We may not know the outcomes or answers to these questions, but we do know that the same Spirit that leads us once more to the glories of Easter also leads us on this new journey together. We know that the strength that we find in Jesus accompanies us on this new journey together. We know that the strength of scripture accompanies us on this new journey together. And we know that the strength of each other accompanies us as well. What a blessing and what a joy it is to journey with you all! Amen.