

“Who Hid the Books?!”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden
for FUMC Grand Junction, Sunday, Jan. 3, 2021

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ
website: <https://www.fumcgj.org/sermons/>

Scripture Text: 2 Timothy 3:14-17 [NRSV]

OPENING

(*A brief statement concerning:

- the nature of this series: a teaching series aimed at better understanding the Bible and
- this sermon: introductory of a complex subject.*)

- The term “hidden” in popular use: Most of us love a good mystery!
 1. Think of the works of best-selling mystery writers John Grisham, Ken Follett, the late Mary Higgins Clark, Patricia Cornwell, Dan Brown, George Lucas – even J.K. Rowling! In the fertile imaginations of these brilliant folks, “hidden” is a term of “intrigue”, used to thrill, terrify, entertain, even teach important life lessons, values, good vs. evil, etc.
 2. “Hidden” can also have a darker side, more like “secretive” or “intentionally deceptive”.
 3. But as a term for folks who take the Bible seriously, “hidden books” is misleading b/c it contributes to the wrong impression of how the

Canon – or the “official list” of what’s in the Bible and what’s not – came to be.

- This leads me to the first of my points in this series, and that is understanding the three guiding principles of how the Canon came to be. We looked at these in fair detail a year or so ago in one of the segments of my *Beyond My Flannelboard Faith* series, but let me remind you of them:
 1. Authoritative source: as close to an “eyewitness” as possible
 2. Soundness of doctrine
 3. How widespread a text’s use in Christian formation, i.e., how influential it was in shaping the community of faith

These principles apply not only to what we will discuss in terms of the formation of our Bible, but also to other collections held by some groups to be “canonical” or sacred Scripture, e.g.,

1. The *Book of Mormon* and the LDS Church, and
 2. Any of a number of so-called “Gnostic writings” produced in the second century CE (early in the Christian era).
- (*ILLUSTRATE both of these briefly*)
- Why pursue this? Three important reasons:
 1. To correct misunderstandings about how our Bible came to be.
 2. Because we can learn a lot about the roots of our Christian faith and our Bible from this, especially what is called the

“Intertestamental Period” dealing with Judaism in the post-exilic time period leading up to the time of Christ.

3. To come to a better appreciation of “the living Word of God” and how to listen for that Word today in discussions of Biblical application.
- A quick aside: The scope of this series: Just the Old Testament Apocrypha / Hidden Books. There are many such works that could be part of a New Testament discussion, but none of those became disputed parts of the New Testament canon, as the books of the Old Testament Apocrypha did.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY TO THIS DISCUSSION, Part I

The Scripture Collections that Gave Rise to the “Hidden Books”

I. The LXX

- ✓ The legend of the 70 or 72 scribes
- ✓ The more probable process, as a reflection of the history of the Jews in the Diaspora.
- ✓ Comparison to the Masoretic canon of the Hebrew text: The source of the “hiddenness” of the Apocryphal writings.

TO THE SCRIPTURE TEXT FOR THE MORNING

- What’s the significance of all this to the Scripture text for this morning? Well, for the better part of the church’s life, going right back to our beginning,

“the Scriptures” were understood to include the Apocrypha.

So, the author of 2 Timothy, from which 3:14-17 was read earlier, had these texts in view in his statement, “All Scripture is inspired by God...”.

And, as important, that author’s formulation could not include what we call the NT b/c it had not yet been (1) collected and (2) come to be regarded as canonical/sacred Scripture!

THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY TO THIS DISCUSSION, Part II

The Scripture Collections that Gave Rise to the “Hidden Books”

II. The Latin Vulgate –

- ✓ Jerome, 4th century CE, the most learned Biblical scholar of his time, commissioned by Pope Damasus near the end of the 4th cent. to provide a Latin translation of the Bible for the Church.
- ✓ Jerome was dissatisfied with the Old Latin version of the Old Testament and worked from the Hebrew texts in producing the Latin Vulgate.
- ✓ Jerome indicated the lesser status of the apocryphal books (as included in the LXX) in prefaces to them; although, in subsequent centuries, these prefaces were not always included in copyists’ work. So that, by the Middle Ages, the apocryphal works were accorded canonical status and included in copies

of the Vulgate, especially following the Council of Trent in 1546.

All along the way, the principles of Canon formation detailed above were at work!

III. Martin Luther's translations

- ✓ Part of the fruit of the 14th-16th century Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther went to the best of the Masoretic and Greek texts to translate the Old Testament and the New Testament, respectively, into German.
- ✓ Comparing his work to the Vulgate and the LXX reveals *the hidden books!* Martin Luther didn't remove these books from his Bible, which would provide the precedent for the authoritative Canon of the Protestant Bible, but he did pull them from their places in the Old Testament that he had received (LXX and Vulgate) and put them in their own collection between his Old Testament and his New Testament.

TO THE SCRIPTURE TEXT FOR THE MORNING

- What's the significance of all this to the Scripture text for this morning? Well, if we really want to be Biblically literate (and not dangerous!), we have to have:
 1. An understanding of how we got the Bible we have, AND

2. At least some knowledge of the content of the Apocrypha.

We'll pick up with our first look at that content next Sunday.

HOLY COMMUNION

The celebration of the Living Word in our midst.

In 2 Tim 3, Paul (ostensibly) speaks to the role of Scripture in guiding the church. Critically important to this is the goal: Not rigid dogmatism based on a legalistic reading of the church's "sacred writings"...but salvation through faith in Christ (2 Tim 3:15). In other words, relationship with Jesus, guided by the experience of the faith community as enshrined in the Scriptures.

CLOSING WORDS at END of BOTH SERVICES

Prayer for Jan. 6th...Epiphany: That the truth of God will be revealed for all to see at the end of the day.

For our country, state, and community as we experience the most chaotic and divisive post-election season in our history. May God protect us from the worst of our human nature and help us to aspire to our "better angels" in the coming weeks.

BENEDICTION