

**Who's the Boss?**  
A Sermon Preached  
December 29, 2013  
Trinity Cathedral Church  
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Our grandson Casey is an Army kid, so he's already moved twice since he was born in Louisiana four years ago.

In Texas, at Fort Hood, he attended a wonderful pre-school class that he was very sad to leave when his family, my daughter Katie, her husband Joe, and their daughter Quinn, just two days old, moved to Fort Rucker, Alabama, where Joe is a Warrant Officer training to fly helicopters for the Army.

There was no room for Casey mid-year in the pre-school at Fort Rucker, so my daughter asked around and learned from other parents that there was a good pre-school at the big Baptist Church in the nearby town of Enterprise.

Now Joe and Katie are not particularly religious *or* spiritual, so they were a bit wary of sending Casey to a Baptist school, but he enrolled there and had a great time for a few months before summer vacation.

When I visited them in Alabama this summer I asked my daughter if Casey had come home with any religious learnin' from those Baptists. She advised me just to watch Casey and I'd find out what he'd learned.

Soon enough, we heard kids squabbling in the backyard, where Casey was playing with his neighbors, two bossy sisters.

Now when you're about 3 to 8 years of age, one of the big topics of conversation is "Who's the boss?"

I could hear the girls yelling at each other: "I'm the boss" and "You're not the boss of me."

Then my grandson ended the argument by announcing with great authority:

"God is the boss of everybody!" God bless those Baptists!

"God is the boss of everybody!"

Some of us take a lifetime before learning to **live** the meaning of the words we recite every time we say this prayer to Our father, who art in heaven: “*thy* kingdom come, *thy* will be done, on earth as it in heaven.”

Learning to live those words, truly accepting that “God is the boss of everybody—including ME” is one of the major lessons we learn by reading the Bible.

One year ago I challenged this congregation to take the Bible Challenge issued by our Bishop, Barry Beisner, by reading the Bible, day by day, from January 2013 through January 2014.

About 150 people said they’d give it a try. Some joined small groups that met weekly or bi-monthly or monthly. Some have been reading the Bible on their own. Some drifted away and returned. Others threw up their hands and quit some time before the Israelites reached the Promised Land. But most of the people who pledged that they’d try to keep up, did so.

Recently, I sent a list of questions to all the participants who had signed up for the Bible Challenge last January, asking them to share their experiences of reading the Bible in a year.

Today I’d like to share with you some of what they told me, as well as some of my own realizations as I read the Bible and facilitated a Bible Challenge group that met every Thursday for an hour and a half as the Lunch Bunch. I won’t share names of the contributors, to whom I am most grateful, but they’ll know who they are.

Almost everyone agreed that keeping up with reading three Old Testament chapters, three New Testament chapters and a Psalm every day was truly a challenge, and many confessed to getting behind and trying to catch up on a regular basis.

Some shared that they had first experienced the Bible in a rigid setting where they had been taught that every word of the Bible was true and came straight from God.

Reading the Bible again and discussing it with Episcopalians who were never raised with the concept of Bible inerrancy, folks from other Christian traditions

reported feeling delighted, relieved and liberated to realize they not only could *have* their own understanding of scripture, but that their interpretations were valued and encouraged by others in the group.

People who met in groups shared that they loved the camaraderie that developed, and they learned a great deal from listening to other people's comments and questions.

Here is some of the theology they shared with me:

“We learned in reading the Bible that it's wise to obey God and it's very dangerous to disobey God.”

Some became annoyed that “people in the Bible were so dense and stubborn and willful”—until we realized that we, and people we love, can be very dense and stubborn and willful, too.

Identifying with characters of the Bible, the heroes and the sinners, was a surprise for some, who had regarded Bible characters as distant and vague.

“All the jealousy, greed and hunger for revenge repulsed me,” someone confessed, “until I realized that being jealous and greedy and lustful and hungry for revenge is part of the human condition.”

Another shared: “Left to our own devices, left to our own will, we can do a lot of damage to ourselves and others, just like people in Holy Scripture.”

Many of us grappled with what some insisted on calling “the Old Testament God”—that mean, violent, exasperated, and vengeful God so often depicted in the Hebrew Scriptures.

But by reading the *entire* Bible and by attending Dean Baker's lectures on the Old Testament, many came to view God as “a Great Lover of our Souls”—a God deeply in love with each one of us, even the ones who disobey, even the ones who take forever to accept God's love.

One participant observed: “In reading the entire Bible I noticed that it tends to evolve away from punishment and in the direction of forgiveness and kindness to others. It becomes less tribal and more universal.”

“The Bible provides readers with far more questions than answers, but it forces readers to wrestle with important questions that can enrich their lives and lead them to greater wisdom.”

“These questions include:

What is my duty to others?

How should I respond to the suffering of others?

Which is more important: justice or mercy?

How can I give greater meaning to my life on earth?”

Another reader perceived in both the Hebrew scripture and the New Testament a consistency in the “concentrated emphasis on social justice issues.” He observed that: “Current efforts to abolish or reduce programs that serve the most impoverished Americans today would be condemned by such prophets as Amos, Hosea, and Micah. Throughout the gospel, the teaching and actions of Jesus were primarily focused on the needs of the marginalized, the disenfranchised.”

Some people had fun reading the Bible. One mother and son duo completed all the questions every month from the *Read One Bible Story a Week Challenge*, applying the Bible stories to everyday life for a five year old. The mother was delighted to hear her son quote the Bible:

“When I’m about to leave and he doesn’t want me to go” the mother shared, “my son often says to me: ‘Where you go, I will go, and where you stay I will stay’ from the story of Ruth and Naomi.”

God loves us and God forgives us.

“The Bible is one big, long love letter from God to us, forgiving us for everything we’ve done wrong, and begging us to return and flourish under God’s care.”

We witnessed this so often in scripture when God gave people one more chance to repent and return, then another chance and another.

God heals us. And who is the greatest healer of all? Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

As one participant shared: “Jesus is the greatest gift for all mankind, and He is seen in every book of the Bible. To know Jesus is to know God. I am head over heels with this lover of my soul.”

“Jesus was there all along,” someone declared. “Jesus really is God come to earth to set us straight after generations of getting it wrong.”

As a young man, Jesus did **not** walk confidently into the temple, open a scroll of Holy Scripture and read aloud lists of abominations punishable by stoning. Jesus did **not** admonish people for eating shellfish, or wearing two types of cloth, or having tattoos or piercings or braided hair or for lying with men or women.

No, for his debut performance in the synagogue, Jesus opened the scroll to the prophet Isaiah and read aloud these words: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.”

Then Jesus ended by having the audacity to tell the religious elders: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your presence.”

God loves us. God forgives us. God heals us.  
And one thing more: God NEEDS Us.

God needs us to love and forgive each other. God needs us to serve the captives and the blind and the oppressed. God needs us to offer healing prayer and healing touch to each other. God needs us to spread the Good News.

Look around you. Sitting in your midst here this morning are people to love you. There are people right here and right now who can help you learn to forgive yourselves and others.

You are invited to come to the East Transept after receiving communion each Sunday and ask for prayers from people called to pray words aloud from their hearts, words of comfort planted by the Holy Spirit.

Do you believe this? Does it seem too wonderful to be true?

I’ve learned I can’t **think** myself into acting a new way, but I can **act** myself into thinking a new way

Let's try a little of that action right now. Please repeat after me:

God loves me.

God forgives me.

God heals me.

God needs me.

Please keep saying those words to yourself until you truly believe them. If you those words don't ring absolutely true for you, guess what? You're in good company.

But here at Trinity we offer many ways to take action so that you can experience for yourself God's healing and forgiving love. Not one of Trinity ministries could survive without your involvement.

As the Director of Adult Spirituality, I'm grateful for the many Trinity people who are eager to share their gifts by offering classes throughout the week in coming months about Jesus, Christianity, spirituality, theology and church tradition. Please pick up one of these lavender brochures to learn about all the offerings from now through Lent.

But wait—there's more!

Is forgiving yourself and others a real challenge for you? Then please join the clergy, staff, vestry and entire congregation during Lent as we read and discuss the book *Radical Forgiveness: God's Call to Unconditional Love*—available in the Trinity Bookshop.

And if that wasn't beyond wonderful, Bishop Beisner has just issued a new Bible Challenge to begin in Lent—and he's so excited about it that he's ready to give to anyone who doesn't own one your very own copy of our Book of Common Prayer.

This new challenge, starting in March, is to read just one chapter of the New Testament and one psalm a day, along with reading one very short daily service within the *Book of Common Prayer*. We'll offer classes to teach you how to do this on your own or with a group.

Next Sunday we'll be honoring the people who have met the Bible Challenge, either the daily or weekly challenge, with a blessing in church, cake in the Great Hall and a luncheon in the Assembly Area after the 11:15 service.

Please help us celebrate this wonderful achievement of our Trinity parishioners.

And please help us celebrate that every day, whether we read the Bible or not, all of us are loved, forgiven, healed, and NEEDED at Trinity Cathedral.

And let's never forget: Who's the boss of everybody? GOD.