

Dear Friends in Christ,

We are nearing the end of Lent and Easter is just around the corner. I find it a continued blessing that we live in the Northern hemisphere and that the seasons of the year add meaning to our liturgical calendar. Easter arrives with spring and the celebration of the light breaking into the darkness corresponds with longer days, budding trees, and the greening of the world. It's as if God has said all over again, "Let there be light and life!" and—*voile*—it happens. Light in our world is a literal miracle. Without the power of the sun, life would be impossible and life would cease to exist. We exist because God said, "Let there be light!" And it's with this celebration of the light that I want to end our exploration concerning the church's doctrines of the Scriptures. Without the *illumination* of the Holy Spirit, we cannot understand or interpret the meaning of Scripture.

The Bible is not one book among many. It is a special book. Not only is it *inspired* by God in order to *reveal* all that God intended about himself, in a *clear* and *infallible* manner, but God himself enables us to understand it, and we cannot understand it apart from his *illuminating* power. Our understanding and belief in the meaning of Scripture is tied directly to this concept of *illumination*, which means that those who don't believe in or reject God will not be able to comprehend the goodness of God as expressed in the Scriptures.

I know that this analogy is going to date me a bit, but I remember a day long before GPS and the smart phone. Karin and I were leaving on our honeymoon, and all we had to go on in terms of navigation was a paper map of Texas that I bought at a gas station. Reading the map was fine during the day, but as the sun set, it just became another piece of paper. Without light, the map couldn't tell me where to go and how to get there. Fortunately, we had a flashlight, and Karin would *illuminate* the map in order to call out our exits and turns. Because of the light, we got where we needed to go.

Reading the Bible is much like reading that old fashioned map: you need a special kind of light to be able to make sense of it, and that light is the Holy Spirit. I often find that when I bring up the Spirit, people don't know what to make of this mysterious person of the Trinity. Although the work of the Spirit can be mysterious, there is one very clear way in which He is working to bring *illumination* to the text: The Spirit gives us the Church. Under the third article of the Apostle's Creed, which concerns the Holy Spirit, we confess that we believe in "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church". Our confession of the Church falls under the third article of the creed because it is the Spirit that gathers, creates, empowers, and sustains the church. And we gather together as a Church to read and interpret the Scriptures and to engage in the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

The Spirit teaches us how to understand the Bible through the Church. This happens in several ways: First we see it in our lectionary. Notice how the Old Testament readings inform and are connected to the New Testament readings and vice versa. The readings illuminate each other and teach us how to understand them. Secondly, God has called and ordained ministers to preach the Word and to teach the members of the body of Christ. The Scriptures are illuminated by the Spirit through the preaching of the Word. Lastly, the Word is illuminated and brought to life through the ministry of the Sacrament. We are illuminated to the reality of God by experiencing him through the Eucharist. We don't just have theoretical knowledge that God is good, we literally "taste and see" that he is good by eating at his table. It shouldn't surprise us that the Spirit works through physical means to help illuminate His Word just as Jesus Christ Himself is the Word made flesh.

As we wrap up lent and move into Easter, I want to encourage you to do two things. First, pray to the Spirit that He might help you understand and love God's word. Pray to him each day before you read your Bible. Never open your Bible without asking for His help. He will answer your prayers. Secondly, pay attention to our lectionary, ask God to show you how His word works as a whole, and start to think about the lectionary as a back and forth conversation through time that illuminates our understanding about God. More than anything, we want you to know and love God, and that your love for Him would overflow into love for others. Easter is coming and the Light of the world draws near!

Grace and Peace,
Blaine Davis
Your seminarian