

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Sermon: "Words you can trust."

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:12-21, Psalm 19:7-11

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October 5, 2025

Opener: How Firm A Foundation 685 (tune: St. Denio)

Choruses: Thy Word 496, Speak O Lord

Communion Hymn: Behold the Lamb (Communion Hymn)

Closer: Open my eyes, that I may see 500

Have you ever had someone challenge something you hold deeply true?  
It can shake you more than you expect.

We live in a culture that often questions what Christians confess.  
Things like the virgin birth,  
Jesus' miracles and divinity, his resurrection,  
and the authority of Scripture can sound unbelievable to many.

While most of our neighbors remain congenial  
These tenets of faith are ridiculed, derided,  
By academics and comedians.

Despite this external opposition  
what is maybe more difficult to process  
Is when one of our own trusted leaders  
denies what we consider core or central.

More than the arrows of outsiders  
They betrayals of those among us  
can cause many to question their faith.

You might recall John Shelby Spong  
an Episcopal bishop whose writings rejected traditional beliefs  
about the virgin birth, bodily resurrection, and classical theism.  
You might have heard of Greta Vosper  
An ordained minister of the United Church of Canada  
Who is a professed atheist.

Their distrusts didn't shake me personally —  
they were distant voices in another tradition.  
But closer to home, my heart grew heavy  
when a leader in our own denomination  
Stood up at general assembly (our annual leadership gathering)  
And questioned why we were making such a fuss over human sexuality  
when we didn't even agree about the virgin birth.

And I thought that in our ordination vows  
We promised to uphold the church's doctrine!  
(“447. Preamble and Ordination Questions” *Book of Forms*)

Have you ever had your core beliefs challenged?

Maybe this happened when a leader you trusted  
Disavowed something you held sacred  
Or was revealed to be living a life  
incongruent with what they preached.

Maybe this happened when your own life experience  
Didn't match what was promised,  
Or you found it hard to reconcile the church's beliefs  
With what you encountered in the world.

Such questioning of beliefs isn't new.  
The early church wrestled with them too.

Today we are taking a break from our journey through the book of Genesis.  
Each month I'm planning to preach a topical sermon addressing  
Some of the bigger questions we have about our faith.  
Today is my modest attempt to address the question:  
“Is Scripture reliable?”

To respond to this question, we have turned to 2 Peter.  
This letter, attributed the Apostle Peter, is a circular letter  
That addresses the Christian hope of Jesus' return.

When Jesus ascended to heaven  
 He told his disciples that he would be returning.  
 Many followers of Jesus expected that this return would be soon,  
 At least in their lifetime.  
 But when it became obvious that this return was delayed,  
 Some started doubting this promise.

What is implied by Peter's letter is that some Christian teachers  
 Were preaching heresy, indulging in immorality,  
 And suggesting that Jesus wasn't coming back (see 2 Peter 2:1,13, & 3:3ff).

Peter seemingly aware of his own impending  
 return to the Lord (before the Lord returned to the earth)  
 Wrote this letter to shore up the church's faith,  
 Reminding them that despite false teachers  
 Raising all sorts of doubts and questions,  
 The church had solid reasons to believe.

So what does Peter offer as a defense?

Peter begins by reminding them that he is an eyewitness.  
 That is, he isn't merely someone who has overheard the testimony  
 Of others and has passed it along,  
 but that he was actually there.  
 He heard it first-person.

In our modern era  
 We recognise that memory is sometimes fallible.  
 That being said, eyewitness testimony is still considered crucial in our courts.  
 The fact that Peter was later crucified for his beliefs  
 (and did not recant) reveals the strength of his convictions.

Peter tells his readers that he was there.  
 He was an eyewitness.

Then he reminds them of a particular story of Jesus,  
 The transfiguration,

That time when Jesus led his inner circle up a mountain  
 And in their midst his face "shone like the sun...  
 His clothes became as white as the light...  
 [Moses and Elijah appeared and started talking to Jesus]...  
 And a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love;  
 With him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

Peter paints this vivid picture to remind his readers  
 who Jesus really is; to reveal Jesus' divine nature.

Keep in mind that the ancients weren't naïve and gullible,  
 As Monty Python's *The Life of Brian* would have us think.  
 When Jesus' female followers reported Jesus' resurrection to the men,  
 They doubted them, until they could confirm this truth for themselves.

Peter offers this miracle story as evidence for belief.  
 But it's not just the miracle, the revelation alone,  
 that is meant to be convincing,  
 It is the voice of God Almighty,  
 [Which Peter notes they actually heard]  
 That carries additional weight.  
 Peter offers us God's own testimony:  
 "This is my Son, whom I love;  
 With him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

Peter tells his readers to trust him,  
 To trust in the miraculous acts of Jesus,  
 And God's own testimony about his son.  
 From this vantage point of the transfiguration,  
 Peter then invites them to consider the rest of Scripture  
 With all of its prophetic messages.

The argument that Peter is building... [and this is according  
 To Biblical scholar NT Wright] is that the stories of Jesus,  
 reaching something of a climax  
 in the extraordinary revelation of glory at the transfiguration,  
 [and] mean that one can now read the entire ancient Jewish scriptures

knowing the end from the beginning,  
and can see with God-given hindsight  
how everything came rushing together at the point  
where the Messiah himself emerged.  
(NT Wright The Early Christian Letters for Everyone 105)

To put it simply, Jesus himself becomes the key  
To understanding the broad swath of Holy Scripture.

Just consider that enigmatic curse of the serpent  
That we encountered last month  
in the story of Adam & Eve in Genesis.  
Jesus, his death and resurrection,  
makes sense of that prophetic pronouncement:

“I will put enmity  
    between you and the woman,  
    and between your offspring and hers;  
he will crush your head,  
    and you will strike his heel.” Genesis 3:15

Even as Jesus’ story makes sense of  
Scripture “that great, untidy, all-over-the-place story which...  
Pointed to what was to come...”  
(NT Wright The Early Christian Letters for Everyone 106)  
Peter draws a contrast between the origin of the Bible’s message  
And the stories of heretical teachers.  
He notes how the ancient prophets were led by the Holy Spirit,  
While those present day ‘prophets’ were being  
Led by their greed and their vice.

All this gives reason for Peter’s readers to continue to be faithful;  
confident in what they have received.

As Peter encourages them further on in his letter:  
“I have written... to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.  
I want you to recall the words spoken in the past

By the holy prophets and the command given  
By our Lord and Savior through your apostles.” (2 Peter 3:1-2)  
Peter is assured that when they do this,  
When we do this,  
we will have confidence  
in the Lord’s triumphant return.

PAUSE

Peter gives us a defence of the reliability of Scripture,  
And then he tells us to pay attention to it  
“as to a light shining in a dark place,  
Until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

So what does it mean to pay attention to Scripture?  
This might include singing hymns and spiritual songs  
That remind us of God’s promises.  
This might include personal devotional readings and group Bible studies  
That unpack the treasures God has given us.  
This might include magnets on your fridge  
That retell what God has done.  
This might include... you fill in the blank.

Peter acknowledges that the church  
often finds itself in a place of darkness.  
Peter reminds us that Scripture is like a lamp in the dark.  
It won’t remove every shadow right now,  
but it gives us enough light to walk in hope until the dawn comes...

A new day will be dawning, when that light of Scripture,  
Will be eclipsed by the presence of the morning star, Jesus Christ.  
Then there will be no more need to go to Bible studies  
Or memorize Scripture—we will see Jesus face-to-face.

But even as we wait for that day let us hold on to the light  
That we have been given. Amen.