

How little faith we have in oral tradition. Think about Jesus in this Gospel today; He knew the scripture, he refers to the Exodus in today's gospel and if you were to read only the new testament you would wonder where He came up with the imagery of the serpents that he shows us here. We know that in Jesus day there were not a many books around to study from. Last week we heard about Jesus chasing the money changers out of the Temple. The temple was His place, his home with His Father, His place of worship. It also puts me in mind of the story of Jesus on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem with his parents. When they headed for home Jesus was missing and his parents had to search for him. They found him in the Temple. He was in a deep knowledgeable discussion with the priests when he was found. His reply to his parent's questioning his whereabouts was "did you not know I would be in my Father's house?" He is the Son of God. Yet he quotes the scripture found in the temple where ever he goes and He reads from the scrolls. This gives him a special authority with the people but also tells us that God does approve of and helps us understand that same scripture, Jesus expands on the scripture with His teaching. He gives us new understanding of the lessons that God is trying to tell us.

All that written scripture stems out of the tradition of telling stories. Each piece of the Holy word has been part of oral tradition. I have heard some authorities that do not put much faith in the idea of oral tradition as a factual basis for **anything**.

Oral tradition is something we think of as unreliable because it can change so easily from person to person. I did some research into oral tradition. The information ranged from using a parry game image to show how a message can change as it is told to a real explanation. " First, we have to distinguish between

oral “tradition” and oral “transmission.” The term *tradition* implies a long-held belief or practice that is not necessarily connected to any explicit facts or evidence. *Transmission* is a method of conveying information, knowledge other than folklore that has been **orally transmitted** and thus preserved in human **history**. "

Most Ancient cultures had no written word. They relied on people whose role it was to be the story keepers. It was their role to memorize what history was happening so they could repeat the stories and pass them on to the next historian of that tribe or culture. It was not just a story time, these people had the responsibility of being faithful to the truth. "One of the most striking features to emerge from (a)recent study (about the oral tradition of early Christians) is the "amazing consistency" of the history of the tradition "which gave birth to the NT" The printed word has superseded the role of the keepers of oral history. But I personally do not find that completely accurate all of the time. The history we read in books is based on fact, but sometimes omissions are as important as what is included in what we read.

In today's world many Muslims have memorized the Curran in its original language. I find that a task I could never master. Many Muslim authorities criticize our use of the Bible. They feel it has been translated and retranslated in many languages and not all of that translation is faithful to the original language. The Episcopal church has a list of authorized versions of the Bible suggested for our worship. (I have a list here if you would like to see it.)

The church has folks who study the different versions and try to authorize those that maintain a level of faithful translation without too much interpretation around it. There was a time I envied the folks who know Greek and could read much of the original text of the Bible. Then I tried to learn A language.....didn't work. I

like to think that I am reading scripture that is faithfully translated and that Jesus would recognize if he spoke English.

So back to today's story.....

The people wandering with Moses were complaining and grumbling. Then snakes started biting them and many were dying. "So Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD told Moses what to do, "So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live." So Jesus knew this story very well and takes this piece of scripture and expands it. " Jesus said, "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." God's love is on full display in all our readings today. We have mercy shown through God giving an image of the bronze serpent to help save the lives of God's people. Then we have the love of Christ that is akin to the bronze serpent; in Ephesians it says: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God- "

In the Psalm it says:

19 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, *
and he delivered them from their distress.

20 He sent forth his word and healed them *
and saved them from the grave.

God's great love is so broad and available. Jesus recounts a story that shows God's mercy and love and assures us that God's great love continues through Him.

So here we are in Lent, this time of reflection on our own relationship with God. We have the wonderful stories of God's love all laid out before us. What do we do with it? We can accept all this with praise and thanksgiving and go on with life as usual.

We can also take this affirmation and search our own lives for the evidence that God's love is there for each of us. Then we can pick out and give thanks for the very special gifts that God has personally given us. Then guess what we can do ... we can share this wonderful news. It also in our psalm today it says:

21 Let them give thanks to the LORD for his mercy *
and the wonders he does for his children.

22 Let them offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving *
and tell of his acts with shouts of joy.

Share it with your family, your children and grandchildren. Let it sit in your soul and you will feel loved and it will make you smile. Become a part of your own oral tradition.

The Episcopal Church has authorized the use of the following translations of the Bible:

King James or Authorized Version (the historic Bible of The Episcopal Church)

English Revision (1881)

American Revision (1901)

Revised Standard Version (1952)

Jerusalem Bible (1966)

New English Bible with the Apocrypha (1970)

Good News Bible / Today's English Version (1976)

New American Bible (1970)

Revised Standard Version, an Ecumenical Edition (1973)

New International Version (1978)

New Jerusalem Bible (1987)

Revised English Bible (1989)

New Revised Standard Version (1990)

Common English Bible (2012)