

Date: June 12, 2022

Texts: Psalm 119. 106-112 / II Timothy 3. 14-17

Title: "A Thorough Knowledge of the Bible..." - T. R.

## Intro -

cf. - we are pleased to welcome folks from the

Society of Presidential Descendants -

participating in a Gala Weekend at LIU Post -

and - venturing out to the local churches that happen to be

connected with Theodore Roosevelt

(more on that in a bit...)

as such - I thought it would be fitting if we consider T. R.'s legacy in our church

and - his thoughts on matters of faith

relate - two of those thoughts are found in the following quotes from -

our very own - Theodore Roosevelt:

"A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education."

(and - not to wade into anything even remotely resembling a political

controversy - this is knowledge that comes debt-free...)

and - "It is necessary for the welfare of the nation that men's lives be based on

the principles of the Bible. No man, educated or uneducated, can afford

to be ignorant of the Bible."

as one of his boyhood churches, I like to think that he came by these thoughts

... from here.

relate pre an article by Benjamin Wetzel of Taylor University:

where he states that "Roosevelt's lifelong engagement with Christianity

has lessons to teach believers today."

he grew up with connections to various Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed

congregations - ours among them...

in fact - I like to think that we could be considered "formative"

when it comes to his experience and embrace of the faith

(actual historians may differ on that...)

... but why let that intrude on a point I want to make...?)

Wetzel continues, and notes that - “Harvard proved to be the pinnacle of Roosevelt’s pious, doctrinally grounded faith... [he] continued his Sunday school teaching at Christ Episcopal Church in Cambridge (until he was discovered to be a Presbyterian and subsequently dismissed).

(note - we would probably have been a little more open-minded...)

“The depth of Roosevelt’s faith becomes especially evident after Theodore Sr. died of bowel cancer in 1878. Devastated, the young Roosevelt read passages of Scripture, copied a hymn in his diary, and confessed “nothing but my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ could have carried me through this, my terrible time of trial and sorrow.”

Wetzel asserts that “after 1884, Roosevelt’s religious life is harder to track.” now, I don’t want to read too much into that, and - no matter that during this time, he and his sister gave money to build our manse - it also coincided with his move across the street to Christ Episcopal...

(where religious life is often “harder to track...”)

but - from those “formative years” spent here, and - no doubt from the solace and comfort he found in the liturgical traditions of the Episcopalians - certain patterns... certain lessons... can be found

## **I) Connections**

Roosevelt had - and showed the importance of - strong connections to the church... - he knew... he felt...

the importance of being a part of the Body

cf. - a crucial aspect of our understanding of the faith for these days - especially these day - when our life together...

... has been so severely disrupted  
cf. - per Anne Lamott - a quirky Presbyterian writer - who shares a little story  
about the importance of the church:

"When [my pastor Veronica] was about 7, her best friend got lost one day.

The little girl ran up and down the streets of the big town where they lived,  
but she couldn't find a single landmark. She was very frightened.

Finally a policeman stopped to help her. He put her in the passenger seat of  
his car, and they drove around until finally she saw her church.

She pointed it out to the policeman, and then she told him firmly,

"You could let me out now. This is my church, and  
I can always find my way home from here."

Lamott then observes -

"And that is why I have stayed so close to mine -  
because no matter how bad I am feeling, how lost or lonely or frightened,  
when I see the faces of the people at my church, and hear their tawny voices,  
I can always find my way home."

(elsewhere...)

there is a chapter in Anne Lamott's book, *Traveling Mercies* - entitled:

"Why I Make Sam Go To Church." Her son Sam, then seven years old,  
is the only child among his group of friends who goes to church.

Sometimes he doesn't want to go, but she doesn't let him get away with that.  
Here's why: "I make him go because I can. I outweigh him by nearly 75 pounds.

But that is only part of it. The main reason is that I want to give him  
what I found in the world, which is to say a path and a little light to see by.

Most of the people I know who have what I want -- which is to say, purpose,

heart, balance, gratitude, joy -- are people... in community,

[people] who pray, or practice their faith --

people banding together to work on [something bigger than  
themselves...]

Roosevelt understood this, and -

lived in the reality of how the church -  
being connected in and through the church -  
gave body and form to this

## II) Knowledge

cf. - as reflected in the quotes I shared...

as the message found in the texts we read...

knowledge of the Bible is what provides

the foundation for our lives...

the framework for a worldview

that leads us to positive engagement...

it is -

worth more than a college education...

necessary for the welfare of the nation...

why...? how so...?

cf. - it offers us an unchanging... external...

standard... principles... guidelines...

for the building and the living of our lives

we could try and come up this on our own

(many do try...)

but we invariably find whatever we create

to be flawed... inadequate...

derivative - in that much of what we try...

comes from Biblical principles anyway...

so - why not go to the source?

consider even our U. S. Constitution

venerated around the world as the model to use

when trying to come up with something to use

in different settings...

and yet - how many amendments have we placed on it...?

how many are folks considering...? (probably - too many...)

now... - for practical matters of governance - is a good thing that  
we have this possibility, but...  
does it not also speak to the truth that this document... this constitution...  
is a product of human genius, and - human imperfections  
while the Bible still stands...  
eternal...  
offering a foundation and principles that - while we may  
find ourselves challenged and struggling at times to  
understand...  
never-the-less -  
have served humanity better than anything  
we have put on the plate  
which is not to say we always apply these teachings with  
wisdom and equanimity...  
and - there are many who disagreed with how TR used the Bible,  
but - none could contest how well he knew its contents...

### **III) Praxis**

which leads into the third pattern, or lesson:  
knowledge must result in praxis...  
in action... in doing...  
cf. - no surprise that “the man in the arena” would embody this lesson  
relate (per T. R.) -  
“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out  
how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds  
could have done them better.  
The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena,  
whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly;  
who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort  
without error and shortcoming;  
but who does actually strive to do the deeds...”

- and the deeds in question here have to do righteousness...  
and morality...

with knowledge that moves from head to heart to hands...

with an awareness of what the Apostle James meant when he said:

“Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you  
my faith by what I do... [because...]  
faith without deeds is useless...”

if ever there was a modern apostle for an active faith...

for “spending oneself in a worthy cause...”

- it is Roosevelt

who spent many of his formative years here...

in Oyster Bay

who was active in the arena of faith that found its form

in this place...

who held closely to the imperative of a life lived in such a way

that it honors God...

who was far from perfect in this pursuit, but, who -

“...at the best - knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and  
at the worst - if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly,  
so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who  
neither know victory nor defeat.”

in faith - we may struggle...

but by faith - we share in the triumph that is found

in Christ our Lord.