

Speaking 'Scripture'

We need our own language to talk of faith

I can't cite chapter and verse. If you ask me where to find the story of Jesus' temptation, I would answer, "the First Sunday in Lent" because I remember Scripture by when I hear it read in worship. A friend reads Hebrew and Greek effortlessly and looks confused when I ask about the implications of some biblical word for our lives as Christians. So what does it mean for us to do as the Book of Faith initiative suggests and become "fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture?"

Everything in life—from countries to families, professions to hobbies, the simplest tasks to the most complex technologies—has its own speech, jargon or "language." The language we use frames the way we experience, perceive and evaluate our lives and the world. Some suggest that the frame society uses today is the language of economics or the marketplace. We live according to words like "bottom line," "growth and loss," "target audience" and "measurable results."

Yet, in baptism, God draws us into the biblical story of salvation. As Christians and as a church, we understand ourselves in biblical terms and we experience, perceive and evaluate our lives and the world using the language of the Bible.

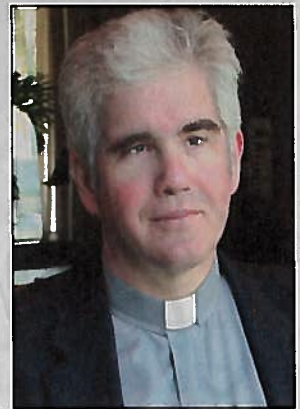
To become "fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture" is, first and foremost, to consciously cultivate the characters, images and stories of the Bible as the way we frame our lives and the world.

We might begin by allowing the language of Scripture, rather than the language of economics, to frame our congregational decision-making. How might our congregation's budget change if we understood our weekly offerings in terms of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-16) instead of a profit-and-loss statement?

Beyond studying Scripture, we cultivate fluency by using biblical images and stories as part of our regular conversation, at least in church. We might say, "I feel like I'm running as fast as Jonah" (Jonah 1:3). Or, "Maybe we can understand him as our prodigal son" (Luke 15:11-32). Using the language of Scripture will change how we understand and respond to others because God will be our explicit frame of reference. After we grow accustomed to talking this way at church, we might try it at home and, once in awhile, even at school or work.

Of course, if we've learned one thing, it's that our book of faith is often a mystery. As we study Scripture, we frequently discover that a given passage can't be reduced to a single, airtight meaning. We often find ourselves selecting from a number of interpretations or even maintaining more than one. Some of us read the Bible as history. Others approach it as an answer

book. Still others read the Bible for inspiration rather than information, or as models of how God interacts with the world and us. We might read Scripture as a testimony to God's saving activity, a conversation partner or as a conversation itself.



Regardless of how we read it, we agree that the Bible is God's word and that Scripture is meaningful and important for our lives. And what we agree on about the Bible far exceeds that about which we may disagree.

We also learned that we need each other to truly understand the Bible. As the book of Acts indicates, the Spirit works best in a group. We need to share our biblical insights and connections, even when to do so is scary.

As the Christian community becomes increasingly fluent in the language of Scripture, we hear God speaking in the voices around us and even in our own. It's what Peter did at Pentecost—connected the sounds of the rush of a violent wind with the words of the prophet Joel and Jesus' story with words attributed to David (Acts 2:1-36). The world heard the gospel, and the church was born. May we so fluently speak the language of Scripture that the church is born anew for a world that needs to hear the gospel. □

*Satterlee teaches preaching at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (<http://craigasatterlee.com>). Among his books is *When God Speaks Through You: How Faith Convictions Shape Preaching and Mission* (Alban Institute, 2007).*

www.bookoffaith.org

... is where you can learn more about the Book of Faith Initiative, including *Leading in Faith*, an online and DVD library to help Book of Faith leaders with study methods and with strategies for beginning small groups. Webinars also will be offered.

As we study Scripture together, we frequently discover that a given passage can't be reduced to a single airtight meaning.