

Sunday August 18, 2024

FIRST LESSON: 1 Peter 2:2–3

GOSPEL READING: John 6: 51–58

Sermon Series: Read the Story: The Fine Print

Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

- **We are continuing** our 12-week journey through the sermon series "Read the Story," focusing on the profound lessons found in the first epistle of Peter, tying in new gospel lessons each week and we are continuing with the gospel of John.
- This week we are reading the story with the emphasis of making sure we read **The Fine Print too!**
- For yes I am already making an assumption based off of my own lived experience that this is something a lot of us may be guilty of, **not taking the time to read the fine print of most things.**
- In fact, let me take a moment and poll the congregation with a show of hands, "How many

of you have made the choice not to read the fine print on contracts, lease agreements, mortgage agreements, medications and the list goes on and on?

- I am recalling the time when Stephen and I closed on our home together, and admittedly when it came to signing all of the documents to make the sale final, I can attest that **not only did we not read all of the fine print**, Stephen and I did take the time to basically read any of the agreement....that closely at all!
- For starters Stephen had a close relationship with our real estate agent.... so we trust him!
- Secondly, we were so excited that we were approved for our home, for it was the nicest home both he and I ever lived in!
- Thirdly, we relied on our real estate agent to walk us briskly through each page of the agreement and summarize it as succinctly as possible— which leads to the fourth and final reason why we did not read the agreement in

its entirety including the fine print is because
“Nobody has time for all of that!”

- To read roughly 50 pages of an agreement where a person would need roughly a couple of hours or more to digest it all —along with a magnifier to be able to see it all—along with someone who can take the time to interpret it all for us—the legal jargon of it all—the corporate clauses of it all—I’ll say it again, “Nobody’s time for all of that!”
- In fact the only contract that I made sure to read word for word ever in my life admittedly was my divorce decree, because well if any of us have lived more than 5 minutes long, you know why!
- This is a long way of my naming that I am reasonably confident to proclaim that it is in most of our human nature **not to read the fine print of most things;**
- Hence, the main hope of our conversation today is that it might plant a mustard seed of

consideration in all of us that perhaps this is not a best practice to keep, not reading the fine print, if we wish to understand the full story that is before us.

- Reading the fine print isn't just about contracts or agreements; it's also a valuable lesson for our everyday lives and relationships.
- Just like with a contract, our relationships come with unspoken rules and expectations. By being mindful of these nuances—like how often we check in with friends or the effort we put into family gatherings—we can better understand what others expect from us and what we can expect in return.
- In any relationship, there might be things left unsaid or overlooked. Just as fine print can reveal hidden fees, in friendships or partnerships, it's important to pay attention to signs of stress or dissatisfaction. This helps us address problems before they escalate.

- Just like legal terms can outline our rights, understanding boundaries in relationships is crucial. Knowing what we're comfortable with and communicating those boundaries helps us protect our emotional well-being.
- Finally, when reading the Bible and all of its stories and events, I would suggest that reading the fine print is important as well.
- What is the fine print of the Bible?
- The "fine print" of the Bible involves delving into the intricate details that often go unnoticed in a casual reading but are vital for a deeper understanding of its message.
- Just like in any contract or document, the fine print of the Bible requires careful attention to grasp the full meaning and implications of the text.
- This metaphorical fine print includes the cultural and historical context in which the stories were told, as well as the layers of meaning that can

be uncovered through critical methods of interpretation.

- The reason why my dissertation project that focuses on putting the book of Nehemiah and Dr. King's non-violence principles into conversation with one another, has taken so long for me to complete is because of this very thing we have been talking about—how to communicate the fine print of it all!
- To fully engage with the fine print of my dissertation project for example, one of my tasks is to employ various critical methods that allows me to read in, behind, and through the text with the task of explaining and defending this to a board of biblical scholars and faculty.
- **Reading In the Text** involves a close reading of the text itself, paying attention to the language, structure, and literary devices used by the authors.
- **Reading Behind the Text** involves examining the historical and cultural context in which the

text was written. By understanding the socio-political circumstances, religious practices, and worldviews of the original audience, we can gain insight into why certain stories were told the way they were.

- **Reading Through the Text** is an approach that looks at how the text has been interpreted and applied throughout history, considering how different communities have understood and lived out the biblical message. It is also where the fine print of tradition, interpretation, and application comes into play.
- Furthermore, it is important to understand the fine print of scripture simply because if a person chooses not to, this is how droves and droves of people will continue to be excluded from God's love and story!
- In reflecting on the ways in how misunderstand the "fine print" has led to the neglect of both people and creation reveals the profound

consequences of misinterpreting or overlooking critical aspects of the text.

- Throughout history, socio-economic groups have often suffered, and the environment has been exploited, due to readings of Scripture that miss its deeper ethical and theological implications.
- These misinterpretations have frequently stemmed from a failure to consider the cultural, historical, and literary contexts of biblical passages, leading to actions and attitudes that contradict the core values of justice, compassion, and stewardship.
- The Bible contains numerous passages that advocate for the care of the poor and call for economic justice, such as in the prophetic literature and the teachings of Jesus. Yet in **misreading the fine print**, these teachings have often been overshadowed by a prosperity theology that suggests material wealth is a sign of divine favor.

- **Misreading the fine print** of certain biblical passages has also contributed to the justification of slavery and racial discrimination.
- Throughout history **misreading the fine print** has contributed to women being marginalized based on readings of Scripture that emphasize certain passages while ignoring others that affirm the dignity and equality of women.
- **Misreading and misunderstanding the fine print** of the Bible has also contributed to the neglect and exploitation of creation. In Genesis 1:28 as a brief example, humanity is given dominion over the earth, has often been interpreted as a license for unchecked exploitation of natural resources.
- **So in light of this conversation, what then is the fine print that we are supposed to glean from John 6: 51-58 in which we are now about two thirds through this chapter?**
- At the surface level, John 6:51-58 presents Jesus speaking about Himself as the "living

bread" and inviting His listeners to eat His flesh and drink His blood to gain eternal life.

- This imagery is striking and even unsettling, leading many in Jesus' audience to misunderstand or reject His message outright.
- **Reading in the text itself**, the language of "eating" and "drinking" is more than metaphorical; it points to a deep, intimate participation in the life of Christ.
- Jesus is not merely offering physical sustenance but is speaking of a spiritual reality where to "consume" Him is to fully embrace His life, teachings, sacrifice, and resurrection.
- The "fine print" here reveals that Jesus is inviting His followers into a relationship that is life-giving and transformative, one that sustains them in the here and now and leads to eternal life.
- To grasp the fine print more fully, in **reading behind the text**, we need to consider the cultural and theological context of this passage.

- Jesus' discourse on being the "living bread" comes immediately after the feeding of the 5,000, a miraculous sign that would have evoked memories of God providing manna to the Israelites in the wilderness. The manna was bread from heaven, a divine provision that sustained the Israelites physically but was temporary and limited.
- Finally in **reading through the text**, the fine print of this passage becomes even richer when we consider how it has been understood and lived out in the life of the Church.
- Throughout Christian history, this passage has been closely associated with the Eucharist, the sacrament of Communion.
- The act of eating the bread and drinking the wine in the Eucharist is seen as a participation in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.
- It is a means of grace, a way in which we are nourished and sustained by Christ's presence in their lives.

- The fine print here is that the living bread and the promise of eternal life are not just future hopes but present realities.
- When we participate in the Eucharist, we are not only remembering Christ's sacrifice but also experiencing His life within us.
- The promise of eternal life is not just something that begins after death but is something we enter into now, as we live in communion with Christ and in communion with one another.
- Thereby making the ultimate fine print that I leave with us all for our consideration is to focus on **how to be the living bread now**—towards one another and to ourselves.
- The hint of how we do this I propose is contained in the weekly themes of the sermon series we have been focused on—
- Becoming the living bread in my mind involves a holistic approach to how we approach our narratives and understand our story.

- We read the preface, we take our time, we read the footnotes, we turn the page, we stay with it, and read the fine print too;
- In the upcoming weeks, we will discuss in our story the themes of going deeper and getting closer, all with the main purpose of hopefully understanding our story both individually and collectively— which will hopefully aid us in appreciating each element of our stories both individually and collectively until you and I become like newborn babies, craving pure spiritual milk— so that we might grow into a full experience of salvation.
- In the name of the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, let this Beloved Community say Amen!