Nehemiah 9:1-5, John 1:1

“The Word of the Lord…Thanks be to God”

 There is a bit of pressure on me this week to produce so that I don’t lose my job. Emily and Peter did such a good job and the Holy Spirit used them powerfully to get across a message that each of us was able to take and apply to our own personal life. What I love is the fact that the Scripture that they chose is going to stick with us. We will remember to praise the Lord and that all things are possible with God.

 When I was in seminary, on Sunday evenings we would all gather together and tell stories of how our days went at our respective churches where we were interning. They tended to be pretty fun evenings and we would laugh and laugh at the things that would happen. Much of the time it involved people reading Scripture. There was the time that my brother John who was asked to read Paul’s letter to the Philippians.

 It was at Baskin Ridge Presbyterian Church in New Jersey and they have one of those winding tall pulpits that by the time he got up there he was out of breath. He saw to his horror that the Bible had not been marked. You need to know my brother is the greatest guy in the world. He spent his entire life getting me out of trouble, but at this stage in his life he didn’t know the difference between Philippians and Deuteronomy as far as where it was located in the Bible. It was one of those huge pulpit Bibles and so he began to stall as he frantically turned the enormous pages looking down at the congregation.

 Each time that he turned the page it would make a sweeping sound as it hit the microphone making a terrible sound. So today’s reading, (terrible sound) if you would open your Bibles you will find Paul’s letter to the Philippines. He knew it didn’t sound right but couldn’t figure out what was wrong with it, so he stuck with it. Chapter 2 of the Philippines, and then he found the book of the Bible.

 He made it through the reading drenched in nervous sweat by the. He wanted to end it confidently. So he had brought up his own Bible and he held it up and said: The word of the Lord. He must have been sweating more than he thought because as he flung his arms wide high above the perch over the congregation, he lost hold of the Bible, and it fluttered down down right before the front pew. The woman sitting there looked up and said: Thanks be to God.

 The Gospel of John is without a doubt the Word of the Lord. You know there are 4 Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and they each speak about the life of our Savior. The first three of these Gospels are seen as a unit and are called the synoptic Gospels because so much of their material is similar. John, well, it’s unique. You read it and it sticks out, it is my favorite. It speaks in no uncertain terms about the power and the majesty of our Savior. It is the only Gospel that has an eyewitness call Jesus my Lord and my God. Well, today we are only going to read 1 verse from this powerful, life altering Gospel. But this one verse contains all that we need to know about our faith.

 **READ**

It has been significant these past couple of weeks that we have been giving out quite a few Bibles around here. What a great sign of appreciation and a symbol of progress in the receiving of the most important authority from God. Today we are beginning a series, a long series that will probably take us a couple of years to complete. We are going to methodically make our way through the Gospel of John.

 A little background. One of the most meaningful trips that Stacy and I took together as a couple was a Pastor’s conference in Turkey where we were able to see a number of churches that Paul started. The most significant one for me was the church in Ephesus. Apparently Ephesus was where John the disciple of Jesus, the son of Zebedee, the one Jesus loved the most, whom many of us believe wrote this Gospel, and Revelation, and I, II, and III John. Apparently he is buried there.

 It literally took my breath away to stand in the ruins of this ancient church and look at a place where the bones of John the disciple were buried. It was incredible. John’s writing is unique, and his uniqueness comes out right at the beginning of this Gospel, even in this first verse. There is no birth narrative, there is instead this 18 verse poem which sets up the nature and person of Jesus.

 Our verse for today, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Well, it can seem a bit confusing. Even Goethe in his work Faust has the protagonist so lost in this verse that he decided to change the word Word, for deed or act. It is a very well known verse even in the secular world. On Thursday morning the suggestion was to replace the word Word with Jesus. Let’s see if that works. In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God and Jesus was God. Yes, actually that does work quite well.

 But let’s look at Word and try to figure out what exactly the author is trying to teach us in this first verse. When I say the words: “In the beginning…” what comes to mind? I know that it is baseball season, but surely not the first baseball game in the Bible does it? You know, in the big inning… Okay, that was bad. Genesis should come to mind, the creation account. So let’s look at how God creates. God said davar, let there be light, and there was. God said let there be night and day, and there was. God said… It is through God’s speech and His Word is sufficient for creation to take place. We will look at that more closely next week.

 Here when it says Word the literal word is Logos. We use that even in our everyday language. Think of the disciplines that we study: biology, psychology, anthropology, all of those final terms come from the same word that we find in John 1. In the beginning, at creation and even before creation, John tells us, the Word existed.

 That word was with God. It worked in unison with God. There was no separation between God and the Word. Then finally the Word was God. This Word was God. We had this sermon before, didn’t we? Look at verse 14 and we read: The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Who is that? That’s right, our Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus was God, or as Thomas said: My Lord and my God.

 From the very beginning of it all John wants to set this foundation down. Last Advent we preached a sermon on the first 5 verses of John and we looked at the Divinity of Christ. We aren’t going to rehash that today, but this is a sermon that can go on and on as we look at the word Word to describe Jesus. We already covered that aspect of these verses, now let’s look at another.

 When I say the Word of God what comes to mind? You are supposed to say Jesus because of verse 14 in John. But normally when we talk about the Word of God we are talking about Scripture. If you look at our Nehemiah Scripture where Nehemiah the governor calls the people together and it says that for a fourth part of the day they read the book of the Law. For 6 hours they read Scripture as a community, together. Can you imagine if we did that, just set up a sign up sheet and we read the Bible from beginning to end. How long do you think that would take us?

 When we had our faith 101 series we talked about the Bible and we called it not just another best seller. That is so true. We believe that the Bible is more authoritative than any other book, or message, or app that we have. We believe that when you interpret the Bible you are trying to discern God’s desires and wishes for your life.

 I think it is fair that as a church you get an understanding for how you pastor reads and understands the authority of Scripture. I kind of joke with you about turning to the Bible when I’m reading it and part of that is banter, but there is an aspect that I honestly and truly want you to become so familiar and conversant with what is in this book, that we call authoritative and the Word of God.

 Now we believe, that who Jesus is and his nature is reflected in this Word. The Word of God, Jesus, provides insight, guidance, and salvation through the teachings of this Word. There may be times in life when what you read in the Bible could contradict what you experience in life. For example: If I met the love of my life and we decide to start living together unmarried. As time progresses I’ve never been happier in my life, our relationship is going great, we are active in our community together. My experience would tell me that it is a good thing to have an intimate sexual and relational experience outside of marriage. The example I have experienced could be good in my understanding.

 But if Scripture is consistent in telling me that this is not the will of God, then I have a choice to make. Am I going to listen to my experience, or am I going to listen to the Word of God. It isn’t an easy choice because I’ve seen a different way that potentially works. But just so you know, your pastor, as much as he is capable and in spite of the sinfulness that permeates me and who I am, will choose Scripture over experience every time. Every single time that there is a tension between what the world or what my experience has taught me and what the Bible teaches, I’ll take the Bible.

 I say this fully cognizant that this places me in a camp that sees Scripture as the Word of God and believes that it is fully inspired by God and that it contains infallible truths. Now, I also know that the Bible is not perfect, and it is not God. There are pieces of the Bible that are not translateable simply because we don’t have a single copy of the original manuscript of the Bible and they are only fragments and shards that we are trying to piece together.

 I had the honor of studying at Princeton under James Charlesworth, one of the leading experts on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Do you realize that before the 1940’s our oldest original OT document was from the 11th century? An Isaiah scroll was found in the dead sea scrolls that dates back nearly 1,000 years before that manuscript that we had. Guess what? Even though 1,000 years had passed the translation was just about the same, if not identical.

 The Word of the Lord has to be our foundation as we try to discern God’s will in our life. Within here you will find that Jesus is the perfect manifestation of God. I would love it if was we begin our study of John that this church, each one of you individually would take it upon yourselves to read the Gospel of John as you prepare on a weekly basis to hear God’s Word. Wouldn’t it be great to read the Bible through at one time from beginning to end. If any of you want to do it, it should take us about 78 hours. I need 78 people who want to read through the Bible, out loud, here in this sanctuary.

 If you are interested let me know. But your interest in reading the Scripture, whether we do it together her in this Sanctuary or you do it by yourself is absolutely crucial to have a relationship that truly reflects you love for your Savior. Amen.