

First and Center
Pastor's Blog
March 12, 2019



Heresy of the Month

I used to have a column in a church newsletter by this title. These days I feel like I could call the column “heresy of the week” or sometimes “heresy of the day.” Of course, a “heresy” is in the eye of the beholder, and I am aware of the fraught history of that word, used to kill many people, women and men and children, throughout church history, often in the most horrific of ways.

This is not how I am using the word.

I call something a “heresy” when I feel that it demeans, trivializes, or boldly contradicts the gospel of Jesus. People can have good faith discussions or even disputes about matters of theology small and large, and agree to disagree. I’m talking about something that takes our faith and tosses it on the dung heap, so to speak.

So, this month’s heresy, or one of them anyway? Donald Trump visited the victims of the terrible tornadoes in Alabama last week. I affirm his effort to bring them comfort and assure them that their country would come to their aid. What happened next absolutely gobsmeared me. People brought him their Bibles, and he autographed them.

Huh?

Now when I was in seminary, we used to have an auction every year to benefit an African partner seminary to Princeton, and we would auction off what we called an “Autographed Bible.” The signature was that of one of our Bible professors who had been involved in the RSV translation of the Bible, so his name was on the title page as a translator. It was our little inside joke. No one thought Bruce Metzger was the savior, even if he gave them a good grade! What Trump did was not a joke. My first question was “Why would people ask him to sign their Bibles?” I assume it was not his idea. Many Evangelical Christians have somehow decided he is The Savior; indeed, some clergy have clearly said that God sent Donald Trump to be President. Therefore, whatever he does has God’s stamp of approval on it. The foundational heresy here, then, is for the clergy to proclaim, and Mr. Trump to accept the premise, that he is God’s foremost agent on earth, chosen; and therefore, every word and action of his comes straight from God.

Maybe I have to say it. Donald Trump is not Jesus. I say that with utter confidence. He may be right about some things and wrong about others; he is not the mouthpiece of God. He is a human being.

Put away your Bibles; they don’t need to be autographed. Listen for the word of Love, the Bread of Life. Then, instead of getting autographs on paper, maybe we all, including Mr. Trump, need to take out our Bibles and make more of an effort to read them.

~ The Rev. Shelly Stackhouse,
Transitional Minister