

“Open Minds”
Grove Presbyterian Church
November 7, 2010

Old Testament Lesson -- Numbers 22: 21-30

Love this fable. Folktales with talking animals come from all cultures.

King Balak wants Balaam the soothsayer to say a few nasty sooths against Israel. Have curse will travel. A spiritual hit man.

God isn't keen on the idea and sends an angel to warn him. Balaam wears the blinders rather than his donkey. Donkey gets the message and three times tries to turn aside, only to be beaten by Balaam for his troubles, for being more perceptive than this spiritually superior guy riding her.

True ignorance is to stand aloof from those who think differently.

Which is why it is far easier to write opinion columns or blogs than news articles.

The narrow-minded person is like a narrow necked bottle – the less they have in them the more noise they make on pouring it out.
-- Alexander Pope

Opinions don't require verifying facts from two credible sources. Journalists have to ask: is it innuendo, rumor, propaganda, half-truth, out of context? Real disinterested, impartial journalists practice the discipline of verification. Truth or fiction?.

Beware the man of one book
-- Thomas Aquinas

Similar to Bible reading. We want exegesis, which means drawing meaning from the text. We reject isogesis, which means reading into the text your own meaning, prejudices, expectations, presumptions.

When we eager, 'wannabe' pastors entered Seminary, we each were convinced we were brilliant whiz-kids about faith and the Bible. Until we went to class. The Fundamentalists among us had their world rocked by what they learnt. The Liberals among us had their tidy truths shattered. We all got broken down. And they go tumbling down.

How to keep an open mind? Here are 8 elements of an open mind.

1. **O**wn up that you can be wrong.
2. **P**oints of view of others are worth hearing. For example, listen to BBC news, watch Al Jazeera News Network, read newspapers from around the world. What do they say that I need to hear?
3. **E**motions need to be controlled. Did you drink and dial? Write the hot email but wait a day to see if you really want to send it. Avoid taking criticism personally.
4. **N**urture a climate where you and others feel free to disagree.
5. **M**ind what you mind. If you're going to evaluate other positions, it helps to know where you stand. Know what you believe, your core values.
6. **I**magine what it is like for them. Walk around in their skin a while.
7. **N**ever jump to conclusions.
8. **D**ispute all assumptions. Asking the right questions is the best way to move toward a sound conclusion.

Born to shiver in the draft of the open mind

Anything less, anyone so fixated on his or her own myopic ideas, well now, then you're Balaam and your Donkey is smarter and more faithful than you. Good Donkey. Who now is the real donkey?

Letting go of dead ideas is like the autumn tree letting go of dead leaves, making way for new growth (Andre Gide).

Listen: Matthew 7; 1-6