

November 20 Adult Spiritual Growth Class Synopsis

Let There Be Light: A Study of FPC Stained-Glass Windows – William Tyndale

First Presbyterian Church has been blessed with parishioner memorial gifts of 15 beautiful stained-glass windows over the years, as summarized in the wonderful guide put together by Virginia Wiley in 1990, as part of the 175 year anniversary celebration of the church. The window of focus is William Tyndale, located in the left back side of the sanctuary, facing the chancel, and framed in the lower medallion.

In the window, we see the Christian martyr, William Tyndale, imprisoned in a dark, cold prison cell near Brussels, awaiting his eventual execution for translating and publishing the New Testament and parts of the Old Testament from Greek into English.

Tyndale was a brilliantly gifted scholar and linguist, who was a leading figure in the Protestant Reformation in the years leading up to his execution. Tyndale was a contemporary of John Calvin, John Knox and in particular, Martin Luther, whose works greatly influenced him. We recall that the Protestant reformers such as Tyndale were anchored to the four 'solas' of the Reformation¹ founded in Scripture: *Sola Fidas* (Faith Alone), *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone), *Sola Gratia* (Grace Alone), and *Sola Christus* (Christ Alone). Contrary to the teachings and will of the Catholic Church at the time, the Reformists were faithfully and publicly committed to the truth of Scripture, even against personal persecution and death as with Tyndale. Based on Scripture, salvation comes from faith by grace alone and that legitimate faith produces works. The only merit that will save is the work of Jesus alone. Every Christian has the right and responsibility to interpret the Scriptures. There is no priest needed to have access to Jesus. He alone is the High Priest, and He is accessible to every believer.

The four emphases of the Reformation¹ included: 1) sources over tradition, noting that *"in the beginning was the Word and the Word was God"*, and signifying the importance of Biblical translations into common languages for the common people based on the original Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament) texts; 2) conscience over authority such that all Christians must be convinced through the testimony of Scripture made available to them in their common language; 3) productive over slave labor where all Christians doing what God calls them to do brings reverence to all work being done in God's name; 4) universal education of all people such that all Christians can read and interpret Scripture for themselves. It was in the realm of the 'solas' and "emphases" of the Reformation that Tyndale lived his faith and call even unto death.

Born in 1494, Tyndale's childhood was spent in Gloucestershire in southwest England, very close to the port of Bristol. He went to a very good school at a young age and studied Latin, which was the language of scholars and the church. Tyndale went to Oxford when he was twelve years old where he studied for 10 years. There he became an extremely gifted linguist, being fluent in eight different languages, including Greek and Hebrew. He was passionately interested in the Scriptures, and started studying theology but the Oxford official course did not include a systematic study of Scripture. As Tyndale later complained: "They have ordained that no man shall look on the Scripture until he is modeled in heathen learning eight or nine years and armed with false principles, with which he is clean shut out of the understanding of the Scripture." Between 1517 and 1521, Tyndale extended his study of language at the University of Cambridge where Erasmus, a leading Dutch philosopher and Catholic theologian had been the leading teacher of Greek from August 1511 to January 1512.

In 1516, Erasmus, published the Greek New Testament. These texts flooded Europe, and strongly impacted the life of Tyndale. The Greek New Testament offered Tyndale the opportunity to translate Scripture into English, which he began to pursue with great passion and personal risk. Even though this

work was against the law and could bring severe punishment, he discerned that his call from God was to make sure that all could read Scripture in the English language.

Tyndale left Cambridge in 1521 and became a chaplain at the home of Sir John Walsh, tutoring their young children, while translating, and preaching. His opinions proved controversial to fellow clergymen, and the next year he was summoned before John Bell, the Chancellor of the Diocese of Worcester, and other church leaders. Although no formal charges were made at the time, Tyndale had an argument with them where Bell allegedly asserted: "We had better be without God's laws than the Pope's", to which Tyndale responded: "I defy the Pope and all his laws; and if God spares my life, ere many years, I will cause the boy that drives the plow to know more of the Scriptures than you do!"

Tyndale later sought Bishop Tunstall in London, who was a scholar and a great admirer of Erasmus. Tunstall would not agree to support Tyndale in his translating work. Tyndale pursued a permit on several occasions from the Catholic church for a translation but was denied as were a multitude of requests made over the previous 100 years by others!

Henry Monmouth, a wealthy cloth merchant, gave Tyndale the financial backing to do this translation. Because of the persecution rising around him and concern for the safety of the Walsh family, Tyndale sailed for Hamburg, Germany. He met friends of Martin Luther who helped him finish the books of Matthew and Mark, and had them printed. Tyndale sent the first of these books to Monmouth in 1524, which were smuggled into the English port hidden in the shipment of cloth. In April of 1525, they went to Cologne to seek out better printing advantages. He was able to arrange for 3,000 copies of these texts to be printed, prior to escaping a raid on the print shop by the church authorities and saving the print block and manuscripts.

At the close of 1525 Tyndale had finished 6,000 copies from Worms, Germany. Five sea merchants from Germany smuggled the Bibles into England to Thomas Garrett who sold them to the common people of England. As people read the words of Scripture in their own language, their desire to know more increased.

Many who helped spread Tyndale's Bibles were arrested and thrown into prison. Henry VIII had a warrant issued for Tyndale's arrest, and the leaders of the church were searching for Tyndale for heresy. He had moved to a safe house in Antwerp, Belgium, belonging to Thomas Poyntz, a relative of Lady Walsh. There Tyndale began translating the Old Testament from the original Hebrew into English. The Pentateuch was issued in Marburg in 1530, with each of the five books being separately published and circulated. Tyndale continued to work on the Old Testament translation but was captured in Antwerp before it was completed.

By 1534, Anne Bolyne, Queen of England and the wife of Henry the VIII, started to persuade her husband to favor the Reformed party. She possessed and treasured a Bible that was written in English. The King started to change his mind about the English Bible, however he did not rescind Tyndale's warrant.

A man named Henry Phillips, broke from gambling depots, was secretly working for Catholic Church authorities, who had placed a bounty on Tyndale. Philips deceitfully befriended Tyndale and coaxed him out of the safety of the Poyntz House. The waiting authorities immediately arrested Tyndale and imprisoned him in the castle of Vilvoorde near Brussels on May 24, 1535, where he remained in isolation for 18 months in the cold dark cell.

On Friday, October 6, 1536, Tyndale was brought to the cross in the middle of the town square and given a chance to recant before the local church officials, which he refused. Condemned for heresy, Tyndale was executed by strangulation and then burned at the stake. Given a moment to pray prior to his execution, Tyndale's last words were, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes!"

Within two years of Tyndale's death, Henry VIII allowed publication of Tyndale's Bible. An English bishop was quoted saying to the English clergy of the day: "The common people now know the Holy Scripture better than most of us." Tyndale's Bible never carried his name but was named the Matthew Bible, which included the New Testament and the historical books of the Old Testament through Second Chronicles. Tyndale's Bible translation was used for subsequent English translations, including the Great Bible and the Bishop's Bible, authorized by the Church of England. In 1611, after seven years of work, the 47 scholars who produced the King James Version drew extensively from Tyndale's original work and other translations that descended from his work. In 1947, modern scholars who assembled for the Revised Standard Version edition, attributed 85% of the New Testament and 76% of the Old Testament (of the books translated by Tyndale) of the King James Bible to Tyndale's Bible,

At the time of Tyndale's death, 18,000 copies of his New Testament had been printed; however, only two complete volumes and a fragment remain today, at London's British Library.

William Tyndale once spoke, "The Church is the one institution that exists for those outside it." As Christ followers, may our business always be one of bringing the Good News to the world, no matter the sacrifice, that we might all receive adoption as children of God.

A song to reflect and pray on:

[\(1072\) Let The Words Of My Mouth \(Psalm 19:14, Phillipians 4:8\) - YouTube](#)

¹ [\(1072\) 22. The Effects of the Reformation and William Tyndale - YouTube](#)

Looking ahead – Sunday January 8

Sunday School classes will be replaced by special Advent services starting November 27 through the New Year with classes restarting on January 8. The next lesson will be the fourth sanctuary window located at the back right side of the sanctuary facing the altar with the upper medallion of Christ healing the blind man.