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*"Christ caring for People
through People"*

October 25, 2009

Greetings and Blessings,

Last week I took space and time to write to you about the need for modern translations. Please forgive me if I go one step further this week to write about the "value" of the same. One of the saddest things about our modern culture is how we have Bibles available in almost every home (indeed several copies in many homes) yet the Bible remains a closed book for many of us. There are many reasons for this: busyness, a multitude of distractions, and a sense of "I already know what is in it so why do I need to read it for myself," are just a few. Dare I reveal that this last reason, or excuse, is even used by some preachers and pastors. Yes, I've been guilty of this as well. Part of the delight that I find in Peterson's The Message is that it brings new life to familiar stories by expressing them in everyday words. (If it seems like I'm a salesman for this book, I really don't get a commission for all this advertising - chuckle.) This week I'd like to simply share a longer than usual quotation from this translation and let it speak for itself. Next week I promise I'll get back to more usual letter content.

"John (the Baptist) went all through the country around the Jordan River preaching a baptism of life-change leading to forgiveness of sins, as described in the words of Isaiah the prophet: 'Thunder in the desert! Prepare God's arrival! Make the road smooth and straight! Every ditch will be filled in, every bump smoothed out, the detours straightened out, all the ruts paved over. Everyone will be there to see the parade of God's salvation.'

When crowds of people came out for baptism because it was the popular thing to do, John exploded.

'Brood of snakes! What do you think you're doing slithering down here to the river? Do you think a little water on your snakeskins is going to deflect God's judgment? It's your life that must change, not your skin.'

... A bit later, speaking of Jesus, Peterson's version continues,

"He will ignite the kingdom life, a fire, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. He's going to clean house – make a clean sweep of your lives. He'll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he'll put out with the trash to be burned." There was a lot more of this – words that gave strength to the people, words that put heart in them. (Luke 3:3-18)

Strong, straightforward, can't you just hear the thunder? For me, and I hope for you, this translation makes the event come alive, so much so that I even catch the ironic, mocking, humour in John's words. ("a little water on your snakeskins") No punches pulled here. And what a wonderful conclusion, "words that gave strength to the people, words that put heart in them."

Amen.

(Rev.) John McGurrin