

Sermon Reading: 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

**Sermon Theme: The More Things Change the More They Stay the Same**

“What is the most important thing we need to teach children today?” I can’t remember the exact wording that she used, but this was basically the question from the lawyer. A couple of weeks ago I was called up for jury duty. My name never was selected but I was able to sit and listen to the two lawyers try and weed out who they wanted to be on the jury in the upcoming trial. It was really an intriguing process to watch. I can’t remember the exact context, but when this question came up and it’s responses it really stuck with me: “What is the most important thing we need to teach our children today?” The answers were all along the lines of we need to teach them to be good citizens, hard workers, know what’s right and wrong, what it means to be a good person and treat everyone with respect. Good things, right? But what was never mentioned—which isn’t all that surprising—was what actually is the most important thing to teach our children.

Right before our reading Paul warns Timothy that for God’s people, there will be difficult times, struggles, and persecution. He warns that *evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived*. The world isn’t going to be improving, but getting worse. But as for you, Paul is saying to Timothy, be different. Don’t be like the world around you getting caught up with the lies and deceptions this world offers. Instead, Paul says “*continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of.*” Notice when Timothy first learned these things; verse 15 says, “*from infancy you have know.*” This word “infancy” can be used for really small children, infants, toddlers or even talking about babies who are still in the womb. Paul’s point is what you already learned at that early age, whether you fully comprehended it or not at that time does not matter, continue learning it. In this ever-changing world hold onto the ever consistent and effective Scriptures that teaches babies and never stops teaching.

These Holy Scriptures are unique. They are written things. But they aren’t just random thoughts and wise words recorded by old men. It’s not just a collection of neat stories to teach us about life and how to live. These are words breathed out of the mouth of God and recorded in written form that do something for you on an individual level. *All Scripture is God-breathed*. And these holy words, spoken by God, make you wise for salvation. No other place gives us this knowledge than God’s Word being spoken or read.

Not only does God’s Word—the Bible, Holy Scriptures—make us wise for salvation, it also makes us wise for how to live as ones who have salvation. *It is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness*. In fact it is so useful Paul goes on to explain that, *the servant of God is thoroughly equipped for every good work*. When an individual is taught the truth of God’s Word and faith is created, is made wise for salvation, God’s Word teaches

them how to live to God's glory and to care for those around them. This gives our lives meaning and purpose: to know God, be brought to faith, and then share that faith.

But we have a hard time seeing how useful it can always be or how useful it is to take time to study God's Word. All too often it's not high enough on our priority list, but gets downgraded to whenever we have some free time—if there is any. So that bible stays on the shelf like so many other books that just collect dust. It's treated like a magazine that's been gone through a few times, thinking you already know enough of the stories, have a good idea of what it says, you studied it in Catechism class so that should be good enough, right? Or it's even treated like a book that only certain people who have gone to certain schooling should be expected or even able to read; otherwise, it's felt like it's too difficult to understand. So many say it, "I really should study the Bible more," and that's where it stops.

Why do we do this? Well, once we get past all of the excuses and reasons, it's because we doubt, question, or don't understand that God's Word is actually useful and able to do something. This happens because unless you are a pastor, knowing the Bible and using it isn't going to pay the bills. It's not going to give you the silver bullet to kill the conflict and fighting in your relationships. It's not going to make you more popular or get you that job promotion. It's not going to take away the pain and sickness. But even if you do have more money, the job promotion, healthy life, better relationships, they don't last forever. When you die God isn't going to ask you for the total in your bank account, how many friends you had, how healthy of a life you lived. He is going to look into your heart, and if faith is not there, then you will be sent to eternal torture and pain in hell.

That is why God's Word and your relationship with God is the most important thing for your lives and for the lives of your children. In a simple way that can reach all people, God comes and speaks to you on a personal level. It's through that Word—being spoken and being read—that God shows you his Son Jesus who came and died for you to give you a new life with him. It's by that same Word that God creates faith in your heart that not only knows that Jesus forgives all your sins, but trusts that truth is yours, and holds onto God's promise and makes it your own. God doesn't wait until you are a certain age to share this with you. He doesn't wait for you to reach a certain maturity or education level. No, from infancy a child is able to know the holy Scriptures and is made wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

It's because of the need and importance of God's Word that a special meeting took place on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1943. The motion was made and seconded, "*Since we, Zions Lutheran Church of Valentine, sincerely desire a parochial school in our midst, we hereby petition the Nebraska District Mission Board for a teacher who will care for the education of our children. We are unable to pay the salary of the teacher, but we will furnish the necessary equipment.*" And later on July 4<sup>th</sup> of that year it was moved and seconded, "*We go ahead with the plans of parochial school.*" So much has changed since May 1943. It was right in the middle of World

War 2. The economy was still struggling after the Great Depression. They couldn't afford to pay for the teacher. But for the sake of their children to grow in God's Word that group of God's people wanted a school. The more things change the more they stay the same. God's people want children to grow in God's Word.

The instructions Paul gives to Pastor Timothy is the same that he gives to us today and why it is so important for us to have this school. Preach the word, Paul says—share it. Be prepared, ready in season and out of season—in other words: when it's convenient for you and even when it isn't convenient. Correct, rebuke, and encourage. Correct those who are in the wrong in their teaching of God's Word. Rebuke those who are stuck in a sin. Encourage each other when you are weak. Do this with great patience and careful understanding out of love for the individual.

*For the time will come, Paul says, when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. <sup>4</sup>They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.*

That time is now. For one reason or another, people do not put up with the correct teachings of God's Word. Sometimes it's because it makes them uncomfortable, it shows them the fact that how they are living, acting, or what they believe is not according to God's will and desire. It bothers their conscience, so they don't want anything to do with it. Or, what God's Word says is too hard to believe, doesn't give all the answers, or doesn't make perfect sense to our human minds. Instead of listening and believing by faith they bend and twist God's Word to make it fit their personal agenda. And then what happens? They surround themselves with people who will agree with them, who will say what they want to hear, who won't argue with them, but instead, agree-to-disagree on certain points for the sake of getting along and increasing numbers.

There is that very real temptation that with the changing world the message needs to change also. What can we do to make it more appealing? What can we do to bring more in? As if something I do or say can make God's own words more powerful and effective. But if we start changing the message, picking-and-choosing what to believe and share, we are back to where we were before in treating God's Word as just another ordinary book that might have some good stories and teaches you some good life lessons.

But God's Word is so much more than that. We want to be connected to God's Word so that we know what to look out for and are ready for the temptations. We want to use God's Word because in a world that is ever-changing, when there are so many questions of what is true and what is false, we have something to hold onto and anchor us in the whirlwind of this world.

By his Word God creates faith and it's by that Word that God strengthens and protects that faith. It's by that Word that you are reassured and given the forgiveness of your sins won for you by Jesus. It's through that Word that God continues to show you that you have peace with him because all your sins have been removed from you. It's by that Word that God shows you that he declares you to be his child and he is your Father. It's in that Word and by that Word that God created faith in your heart that knows, believe, trusts, and is convinced salvation is yours—saved from sins, saved from the devil, saved from this sinful world, saved from eternal death having a home in heaven with him. The only way you know this information is because God's Word was shared with you.

By God's grace we have this school. We have this preschool. And by God's grace this message has been shared and at the center of what is taught for 75 years in that school. It's there where children are being prepared with God's Word, learning the truth that God's Word is part of every aspect of your life. Why this school was worth it 75 years ago, why it is still worth it today is because the most important thing that is taught is God's Word. It's worth it because children are growing in the Word and being made wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. They are given tools to use God's Word for the rest of their lives. The times have changed. The people have changed. But the message, God's Word, stays the same. Amen.