

## Sermon Reading: 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 14-17

### Sermon Theme: God's Word is Still Useful...and You Need It

This last week I was able to attend classes at our area Lutheran High School, Nebraska Lutheran. As I sat there in class every now and then I would have this moment, "Hey, I know that!" But for every one of those there was another of, "I should know that."

When you think back to all that you were supposed to learn while in school, some things stick with you. There are many others that you quickly learn just to pass the test and quiz and just ask quickly forget when you are done. Other things you learned that were important to you at the time. But then as time went by, your interests change and you do not remember as much. Then there were others things that we couldn't figure out how we were going to use it in the real world. So, what's the point?

When we don't feel like something is important or that we need it, it's quickly forgotten. It might stick around for a while, but, with time, it fades away. It happened with much of what you learned in school. It happens with God's Word too. If someone doesn't see the need for God's Word, it's going to be left behind and replaced with something else. But recognizing the need for God's Word is more than just saying the words. It's going to be seen in how you use it.

Paul warns Timothy: **"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. <sup>2</sup> People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup> without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, <sup>4</sup> treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— <sup>5</sup> having a form of godliness but denying its power"** (vv.1-5).

That doesn't sound too different from the world we live in today, does it? So what are we supposed to do? One option could be wringing our hands in fear and bemoaning how terrible this world is getting. Have a defeatism attitude that it doesn't matter what you try and do, you are going to fail! A second option would be to join in. Don't fight it. It's too hard. Go along with it.

And, sadly, that's how we often react. Look at that list again and count how many you did just this last week. It's not just the world out there; we are part of the problem too! Understand correctly that sin is and has been always the same. The difference may be that you feel it is more acceptable and celebrated than what you were used to in the past. And it can be scary. It's hard to go against the tide of a changing culture and society. It's especially hard when that culture tells you what you believe is wrong and out-of-touch with reality. But whether it's allowing yourself to be paralyzed with fear so you do nothing or it's joining, neither are good options. One fails to trust God above all things; the other completely disregards God's will.

Paul gives us the best option: avoid it (v.5). He's not saying that we should hole up in our homes and have nothing to do with society. But do not associate with such people. But how do we avoid it? As long as we live in this world we are going to face these things. Jesus knew this. He prayed about it asking his Father to protect us. And so the Father does with the Word and Sacraments (Lord's Supper and Baptism). So Paul tells Timothy: **"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, <sup>15</sup> and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus"** (vv.14-15).

That's it! Our problem is we don't continue and remain in the Word. Part of it might be the busy life schedule and trying to find time to do it. Maybe it's the thought that you already learned it once. You struggle to feel the need for continual growth with personal bible study time or coming to Bible study after church; you did already put your time in this week by being here in church...It could be the thought that you are going to leave the studying up to the "professionals," the pastors, clergy, and book people. Maybe you feel like if you study God's Word, you won't be able to understand it or you might misinterpret something. Or, you aren't continuing in it because you don't like what it is telling you and how it makes you feel.

But why do we need it? Because without the Word, we have nothing when facing these violent and terrible times. Without it we would see nothing wrong with any of those actions. And if we do, the only motivation we have is because it doesn't serve our best interests. It doesn't care that continuing to willingly go against God's will means eternity in hell.

But Jesus doesn't leave you hopeless and helpless. He gives you his Word. And it's only that powerful Word that still works to turn hearts away from focus on self. That's what the whole problem is: we are too focused on self. Our "self" does not want to hear what it is doing is wrong. It only wants what is comfortable, best for me, and can serve me in some way. It was the problem for Adam and Eve when they first ate the fruit in the Garden of Eden: their attention was on self. We fall into the same trap. We are lovers of ourselves. We want to be able to have a form of godliness that looks good to other people and serves our personal agendas. But once it no longer serves me personally, we go chasing after the next thing that makes me feel better about me. But having a form or godliness—just going through the motions without your heart in it—has never been pleasing to God. It's still self-seeking, self-glorifying, and self-serving.

Thanks be to God he does not abandon us. He was thinking about you when he made the promise to send a Savior as the shadow and stain of sin engulfs His perfect creation. He was thinking about you as he worked through time and history so that the time was just right for when God would take on flesh and dwell among us. Jesus is more than a form of godliness; he is God in the flesh. All the fullness of God lives in bodily form in Jesus. Jesus is thinking about you as he avoids all temptation and sin. He is filled with joy with

what it is going to mean for you when he endures the cross. Jesus knows that he is the sacrifice that would give you peace with God. He knows that he is the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. So he willingly goes, claiming your sins, your selfishness, your excuses, your debt as his own and dies for you. For the joy of winning you a place with him for eternity, thinking of you, Jesus sheds his blood, pays the price, and saves you. We know Jesus did because God raises Jesus from the dead three days later on Easter Morning.

And God loves you so much he doesn't leave you to search out these answers for yourself. He reveals it to you right here in the Word. It's through these Words that you are made wise for salvation. It's through these Words that God creates faith so that you not only know what Jesus did but you trust, believe, and God saves you! Are there things in the Bible that are difficult to understand? Of course! But that's why we continue to learn and study. At the same time notice: it was from infancy that Timothy knew the Holy Scriptures. He learned it already when he was a little baby. God worked in his little infant heart, creating faith, convincing him through the same Word that this is most certainly true.

God does the same for you! He works through the water and the Word to create faith. It's that same Word that continues to convince us this is true. God doesn't give you an owner's manual that could be useful at some point, but until the part breaks it can sit in the random drawer with the other manuals. God's Word is useful right now for: **“teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”** (v.16-17).

More than one person has said, “I wish God would tell me what I should do.” He does. It's right here in the Bible. These words God breathes from his own mouth and records for us. No, these Words won't tell you how to get more money in the bank account. No, these Words won't tell you which job you must work. But that's not the purpose. The purpose of this book is to make us wise for salvation. It points you to the Lamb of God Jesus who takes away our sins. It shows you Jesus who lifts away that burden of guilt of not being good enough. Jesus forgives you! It shows you how we want to respond as forgiven children of God. So we use these Words to teach God's will for our lives. We use them to rebuke a brother or sister in the faith who is going against God's will so they might turn from the sin and back to the Lord. We use it for correcting when we are wrong; we use it to encourage when we fall. We use it for training so that we are thoroughly equipped for every good work. If a doctor would say to their patient, “Take these pills and the sickness would be held at bay and keep you safe,” you would think you would listen. God gives us the medicine of his Word to keep us safe in the one truth faith giving us the strength to resist sin and the devil.

But what about all those who have fallen? What about those who once were “good” Christians and have fallen away? You wouldn't tell your child to stop eating vegetables because it's in the family genes they will have diabetes. God gives us the tools with his

Word, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and promises it will work. There is no more powerful tool than the Spirit working through this Word. What else can take something dead and make it alive again? That's what the Holy Spirit does. By this Word the Holy Spirit takes my dead heart of sin and makes it alive with faith, making me wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. You know the world that we live in and things aren't getting better. You know the temptations that you wrestle with in your life. We feel the pressures from outside and from within. Don't we want to be as prepared as possible?

That's also why Christian Education is so important. It's used in our school where little three old students can tell you and with saving faith believe, Jesus died for my sins. At the center of our classrooms this Word influences ever subject that is taught. But we don't stop at 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Nebraska Lutheran High School is our school. You support it with your offerings. You support it with your prayers. Those students face the same challenges as the students who go to the public school. At the same time they also receive a well-rounded education that prepares them well for college and beyond. We want our children to be well-rounded, to be good citizens of society, and prepared to take on the world. At NELHS, they do that and more. Their top priority is equipping their students with God's Word because they recognize that without the foundation of Jesus, nothing else matters.

As we are well aware with our own school, Christian education is expensive. But, as you show in offerings here, you know it is invaluable. You can put a dollar amount on it, but you cannot put a price on Christian Education. God bless your selfless acts of support that keep it going here and at our area Lutheran high school. Prayerfully consider how you can continue to support our school, NELHS, with your offerings and most importantly your prayers. Prayerfully consider how you can encourage our own children in our congregation to make use of the blessings of our preschool, grade school, and also our high school.

Yes, are there things from your elementary, high school, even college days that you don't use today? Of course. But God's Word's still remains useful today for you. God bless us to see those blessings in our midst. Amen.