

Sermon Text: 2 Timothy 3:14-17

As for you, continue in the things you have learned and about which you have become convinced. You know from whom you learned them ¹⁵ and that from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be complete, well equipped for every good work.

Sermon Theme: Continue in the Word

You hear a little child hum the tune, “Jesus loves me this I know,” and I dare you to try and not feel something. Little Johnny is all dressed up with his little tie sitting next to little Suzie with her brand new dress and you hear them sing, “Away in the Manger” at the Christmas program...goosebumps thinking about it. Visit the classrooms of our school and when asked why they have a home in heaven, without skipping a beat those little three year old children quickly respond, “Jesus died for my sins.” Water used with the Word in Baptism to snatch another soul from the devil and makes another child of God. There’s a soft spot in our hearts especially when we see the Word working in the hearts of children. But then, by our actions, it can seem that we struggle to see the continued need for us and for our children to be in the Word.

When we look at Mary and Martha, Martha was doing a good thing. She’s doing what needs to be done and making sure that Jesus is being loved and cared for. But she allows these good things, great things, to distract her from the best. What about your life? It’s a good thing to want your child to exceed in sports, in school, to have those social interactions. It’s a great thing that you want your child to have those experiences. But is it keeping them from what is best for them? It’s a good thing to work; it’s an important thing to provide for yourself and family. But is it keeping you from what is best? Out of all the things that you need to do, are they keeping you from the one that is truly needed? Martha, Martha, the Lord says with loving concern. My dear brothers and sisters, my dear brothers and sisters, our loving Savior Jesus doesn’t just rebuke us this morning, he gives you this gospel invitation to come, be filled up with the one thing that is needful. Through the Apostle Paul he encourages you to continue in the Word.

Paul wants Timothy to remember when he says, “You know from whom you learned them.” He’s saying, “Don’t you remember how you learned God’s Word from mom? From grandma? Remember how you were in the Word and it worked in you already at that young age? Don’t stop! Remain and continue to be in God’s Word.”

He wants Timothy to remember because Paul knows how it is. He warns in the verses right before the reading about the pressures of the world around us that those who wish

to live godly lives will be persecuted. That makes it difficult enough to have the desire and the motivation to remain in the Word.

But Paul also knows how very real the struggle is from within. When we are honest with ourselves we know how we do not always treat God's Word the way God expects. Instead of regarding it as holy and perfect, one may look at it with skepticism and doubt, "Does God really say this? He can't really mean that, does he?" Too often instead of saying, "This is what God says," we downgrade it to, "This is what I think."

Instead of gladly hearing and learning it, it's a struggle to make it to church on Sunday morning when you've already had a busy week before and you have a busy one ahead of you. You just want one day to relax or you need that time to get some extra work done. It's so easy to say, "I know I should be in God's Word more, I know that I should read more of my Bible, I know that I'm not doing well enough" and then comes the "but" with the reasons that we convince ourselves are necessary and fair. One convinces themselves that I already know these stories, why would I need to hear them again? Another sees God's Word as important for the children, but maybe not as important for when you get older. One holds God's Word at arm's length because they are afraid they won't understand it. While another holds it at arm's length because they don't like what they hear.

God's Word isn't going to tell you, "Thou shalt be in the Bible for ____ minutes a day." Or, "You must read through it entirely every year." But the question we want to be asking ourselves is: am I gladly hearing and learning it? Am I remaining faithful?

Whatever the reason might be, the struggles you might have, when you are not continuing in the Word, when you are not remaining in it, you are doing exactly what the devil and your sinful nature hopes you would do. The last thing your sinful nature wants is for you to be in the Word because it kills it to hear what God demands from us, how he expects us to live, and about God's love. The last thing the devil wants is for you to be in the Word because he doesn't want you to hear about God's grace, his love. He wants to accuse you of your sins, bring up your past, and convince you that God is the enemy who is out to get you. When we are not in the Bible, with God's Word, we are easy targets to be led astray and the devil knows that as a plant without water eventually withers and dies, faith without the water of the Word eventually dies.

Paul knows this and so he reminds Pastor Timothy, remain in what you have learned and been convinced of. And so God reminds you today. These Words aren't just simple vowels and consonants arranged on a page; these Words are God-breathed. God in his perfect wisdom and goodness decided these were the things that he wants you to know, that you need to know, because it's only from this Word that you are made wise for salvation.

It's in these Words that God tells you to stop trying to be a better Christian or a better person, Jesus already lived perfectly for you. He regarded the Word as holy perfectly keeping God's Law and fulfilling all that was foretold about him in the Old Testament. Jesus gladly hears and learns it as he grows up going to the temple to discuss it, preaching at the synagogues to explain it, and opening his disciples' minds so that they would understand it clearly.

It's with this Word that God assures you that you don't need to try and make up for all the wrongs that you have done. No, when Jesus said, "It is finished," from the cross the work of your salvation was done. Forgiveness was won. And when he rose from the grave he guaranteed this is most certainly true.

It's through this Word that God creates saving faith in your heart that then receives this forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation, makes it your own, and sets you free. Freedom from sin so it does not control you, freedom from the devil, freedom from the Law, freedom from trying to be better and being enough, freedom to live to God's glory because Jesus did it all for me and for you and gives it to you without charge. Or, as Paul put it, this Word makes us wise for salvation.

And you believe this. Like Mary, you are sitting at your Savior's feet today hearing him speak to you through his called servant. But like Martha, the distractions are there and often pull us away from being with Jesus in his Word. Often it's important things that you need to do later on today or this week that might be pulling for your attention right now. It might be concern for the crying child that pulls at your focus, the thought that you need to make sure to talk to that person immediately after church, the good desire to make sure someone else feels welcome, other good things, great things, concern and love for others that you need to address. But is it keeping you from the one thing that is needed?

Part of the struggle comes from not only having misplaced priorities but also struggling to see how useful and needed God's Word is right now. That's especially so because we don't often get to see the Word actively working not just in other people's lives but in your own personal life too. Especially for people who know the need and importance of working with your hands, being hard workers, staying busy in the home, in the office, in the field, making sure to be there for family, it can be hard to see taking time to simply read and study God's Word as a good, worthwhile use of your time.

Did you hear what we prayed in the Prayer of the Day? *Grant us, Lord, the spirit to think and do what is right that we, who cannot do anything that is good without you, may by your help be enabled to live according to your will.* Unless you are filled up with the one thing that is needful—the Word and the Word working through the Sacraments—then you are not able to carry out the other God-pleasing work that he has

given to you to do. Then the good work becomes a burden. Then serving your neighbor seems unfair and asking too much. Then following God's Will feels restricting.

“My dear brothers my dear sisters,” Jesus says to you, “you are worried and upset about many things, many good things, many important things. But few things are needed—or really only one. And you have it. Continue in my Word and Sacraments—the only one thing that is needed. I know how it's hard; I know how you struggle. I know you have a lot of things that require your attention. And I also know how you haven't always been faithful to my Word. I forgive you for those sins and all your sin. I am not giving up on you but am going to keep calling out to through this same Word because you need it. This Word is powerful; it works in hearts stone-cold dead hearts of sin and makes them alive with faith, makes you wise for salvation, and then it fills and equips you to do this good work I've given you to do. Use it to rebuke, show love to those who are lost in sin and straying so that they might be brought back to me. Use it to instruct children and yourself so you know God's Will and how to prioritize your life. Use it for training in righteousness so you daily put to death that sinful nature in repentance and are raised to that new life of God's full and free forgiveness. I want you to be with me. And I want to be with you.”

So we come to God's house, to church, where Jesus comes to us and speaks to you through his Word. We come to the Lord's Supper where Jesus gives himself to you in Word used with bread and wine to forgive your sins, strengthen your faith, and to fill you up to do this good work he has called you to do. My dear brothers, my dear sisters, you have the one thing that is needed. Continue in the Word. Amen.