

Sermon Reading: 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Sermon Theme: It always has been and will continue to be the Word

“What’s the most important thing that we need to teach our children?” I had been called up for jury duty and was sitting, watching, and listening to these two lawyers vetting those who names had been already called. And during this whole process I hear that question: “What’s the most important thing we need to teach our children?” One would say to be good workers. Another wanted them to be taught to be upstanding citizens and not a burden on society. Still another simply said we need to teach them what is right and what is wrong. What’s the most important thing we need to teach our children? Those answers and others that were given weren’t wrong. But we are here celebrating today the one thing that always has been and will continue to be the most important thing we teach not just our children but ourselves. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:14-17:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,¹⁵ and how 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, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,¹⁷ so that the servant of God^p may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

You hear a little child—barely able to talk—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. I have the privilege of working with a grade school and preschool in Valentine, and when asked why they have a home in heaven, without skipping a beat these little three year old children quickly respond, “Jesus died for my sins.” Evidence of God’s Word working the hearts of children.

When Paul is writing to Pastor Timothy, you can almost say he wants Timothy to be thinking of such things. Paul tells Timothy, “Remember from whom you learned God’s Word; do you remember how you learned it 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 if that wasn’t bad enough, Paul also knows how very real the struggle is for us on a personal level too.

When we are honest with ourselves we know how we do not always treat God’s Word the way he 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?”

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. 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 valid. 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. We become complacent with a mindset almost of, "Jesus loves me this I know, and that's all I need to know." 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 and how he expects us to live. 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 and convince you that God is the enemy who is out to get you. When we are not in his Word we are easy targets to be led astray and he 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 and 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. 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," on that 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 in this Word that God assures you that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. There are no accusations that can be brought against you before God; Jesus claimed them on the cross so that you can live today guilt-free and sin-free. It's through this Word that you have freedom from sin, 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 through

faith that God works by means of this Word, this all becomes your own. Or, as Paul put it, this Word makes us wise for salvation.

And it's because of this Word working in God's people that a group of Christians chose to start a church here in Aberdeen, South Dakota. They knew the gift that God had given to them, they wanted to grow in it and they wanted to share it. They knew it wasn't something just for them and they wanted to pass it to their children. And so Trinity Lutheran School opens as a place where God's Word, the Word that is God-breathed and makes us for salvation, would be the heart and center of everything that would be taught. Yes, there have been frustrations during these years. There have been struggles that you are more aware of than me. And still God has used them for your God and God has blessed your work.

It has always been the Word and will continue to be the Word. Even in the constantly changing world around us, as the evil goes from bad to worse, there is continued need to be in and to use the Word. Especially so because the temptation will be to wonder how useful this Word really is. The temptation will be there to see that it isn't enough; that there should be more. When the outreach efforts don't bring in the numbers that you hope for, when those invitations to come are shot down, when sin seems to be running rampant in the world and in our lives, holding to just the Word seems almost foolish.

But remember this Word, the Bible is God-breathed and backed with God's promise. God's people don't have to resort to or rely on cutesy phrases on Facebook, Tweets, or the next flashy gimmick and embellishment. You have God's very own Words breathed into and through the writers to make you wise for salvation and to equip you for every good work. You have the exact tool that you need. You don't have to wait for the next book to become available on Amazon or the newest update to be ready for download. You don't have to wait for a vision to come in your dreams or look for the sign in nature. You have God's Word that God promises to work through and that it will not return to him empty without carrying out its work.

And so we use this Word to teach babies and adults so they are made wise for salvation. With the Word we rebuke so out of love for the straying we might bring them back to Jesus. We instruct so that our children and ourselves may grow in knowing what God's will is and his love for us. With the Word we train in righteousness as we daily put to death that sinful nature in repentance turning to the Lord for his love he showers on us every day.

This Word works. It works when used with the water creating saving faith in a heart assuring you that your sins will never be counted against you. The Word works when used with the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper so that you receive Jesus' promise of his very real body and blood shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins and strengthening of your faith. The Word continues to work as you hear Jesus' voice assuring you of his goodness and never-ending love. It's the Word spoken by you—parents to children, spouses to each other, teachers to students, pastors to flock, through the school and in the church—that brings lost souls to become wise for salvation. What's the most important thing we can teach our children? We continue to teach ourselves? To steal from another pastor, the single most important thing in our life is our relationship with God. And you have the one thing that gives you this relationship, maintains it,

and enables you to share it with others. It always has been and will continue to be the Word. We thank God for the years that he has blessed this church and school and look forward to how God will continue bless his people through his Word in the future. Amen.