

2016_10_30 Reformation
Holy Trinity Ev. Luth. Church, West Columbia, SC
Pastor David Pfeiffer

Continue In What You Have Learned

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

INI

We pray, Lord grant us your Holy Spirit for Jesus sake. Amen.

This week in the school's morning devotions, the teacher asked the children to share their favorite Bible passage. He asked them to write it down and hand it in to him. Many of them gave rather blank stares. They had never thought of this before. What was their favorite passage?

What was more, he didn't just ask them to pick their favorite passage, but to also write down why. He wanted them to think. And this got me to think. What they were doing is one of the fundamental principles of the reformation. These two things underlie all that we are as Christians: firstly, to know the Scriptures, and secondly, to know why. The teacher wanted them to not only pick a passage, but listen to it; not just know a Scripture, but know the Word. This is what we as Christians and as Lutherans continue to do generation after generation. Know the Scriptures and know what they mean. In today's sermon this Reformation day, we will do those two things. We will **continue in the things that we have learned: 1) by knowing the Scriptures and (2) by listening to the Word.**

That word which God has prepared for us today comes from

2 Timothy 3:14–4:5 (ESV)

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

1 I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. 5 As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

This is God's good and holy word which has been spoken to each of you

today.

1. By knowing the Scriptures

In 1528, Martin Luther began making visits to all of the congregations in Germany. He went from church to church to get a sense of how the pastors and people were doing in Germany. But as he made his rounds, he began to discover a rather troubling situation. He says, “the conditions are deplorable.” But not because of war, not because of famine, rather it was because the people didn't know the Scriptures. They didn't know the ten commandments. They didn't know the Creed. They didn't know meaning of the Lord's prayer. The problem was that the people were too far removed from the Scriptures. They heard it in church, but never took it home. So in response, he set out to write the catechism. He published this small book of Christian teaching in 1529, and wrote it in the language of the German people. The reformation was all about putting the Scriptures into the hands of the people. The ten commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer—the catechism is a small book of Scripture.

Luther also wanted to be sure there was a set form for learning what the Scriptures teach. He writes that they should “follow the text Word for Word, avoid any changes or variations so that young people may repeat these after and retain them in their memory.” He wanted them to know the Scriptures by memorizing them. This way the Scriptures were not only to be found in church, but would be with the people every day. It was so basic, he called these simple but profound teachings the ABC's of faith.

So Paul also writes: “from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings (that is the Scriptures), which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (3:15). The word for childhood which Paul uses means from infancy. He is saying that from the time you were just a baby you have known the Holy Scriptures. From childhood you have been learning your ABC's.

Do you remember learning your ABC's? Maybe a song, a rhyme, a rhythm? The ABC are fundamental to us learning how to spell, learning how to write, learning words. And the way we learn them is by repetition. We hear it from our parents from little on, and we learn to recite them back. That is how we begin to learn; by copying and mimicking.

From infancy you have been learning to mimic and repeat. And what we put in front of us is what we will learn to repeat. TV, internet, arguments—these are the things that so easily shape us into who we are. Memorization is so important then, because it shapes us into something different. We then have the Scriptures in front of us all the time and not just when we are in church. We have the breath of God, spoken to us and for us, breathed into us. All Scripture is breathed out by God, namely, “inspired.” And that is how God breathes his Spirit

into us.

Continue in what you have learned: firstly, by knowing the Scriptures.

2. By listening to the Word

But of course it's not just enough just to know Bible passages. It is not enough just to get 100% on a Bible passage quiz. Just because you have the Scriptures does not mean you know the Word. After all, the Bible is the best-selling book of all time. It has sold more copies worldwide than any other book ever written. That means that basically everyone you know has come into contact with a Bible at one time or another. And much of this was thanks to an invention that was introduced at the time of Luther. The Gutenberg printing press changed the way people were able to share information. It's movable type printing made it possible to replicate copy after copy of a single work. And now with the internet, it has escalated to unbelievable proportions.

But Luther didn't write the catechism, just to sell books. The catechism wasn't written just so that the people would touch the Scriptures, but so that the Word would touch them. The catechism was not just written to be a book of doctrine. It was written to be a book of prayer. It is a devotional book, something to be by your bedside or at your dinner table. The ten commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, these are things meant to be prayed about. Luther didn't just want the people to have the Scriptures in their hands, but to have the Word in their hearts.

The problem he faced at the time was that the people were just going through the motions. They were being taught that as long as they comply outwardly, they will be ok with God. They had learned to do what they were supposed to, but they didn't know why. It's not just about having a favorite passage, but knowing why it's your favorite passage. In each part of the catechism, it asks, "what does this mean?" That is to say, "what does it mean for you?"

"For the time is coming," Paul writes, "when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths." (4:3,4)

Just walk into a Christian book store or down the "inspirational" section of your local library. Aisle after aisle, book upon book: best-selling authors, self-help gurus, church growth experts, inspirational writers, TV evangelists—one after another—but what are they all saying. On just about any religious topic, there is someone out there who is ready to tell you what you want to hear. And what happens when you scratch that itch? It itches more and more.

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We don't learn our ABC's for the sake of repeating them back. We don't memorize them just so we can recite them, but so that we can use them. So that we can put them together and make words. “Preach the Word!” Paul writes. “In season—when it suits you—and out of season—when it is not so favorable.” It is often true that when we hear the thing we don't want to hear, its what we need to listen to the most.

Every church has a Bible, but not every church speaks the Word. Learn to listen. Know your ABCs and use them. Know how to spell and know how to listen to what's being spelled. And what word should we be expecting our pastor to spell for us?

It goes like this: C-H-R-I-S-T-I-A-N. What does that spell? It spells this: I have C-H-R-I-S-T in my H-E-A-R-T. Christ is the center of all that we know and learn and say and preach as Christians. He is at the center of everything. He is at the center of my heart. The ABC's are meant to spell a word, and this is the Word spoken by God to us; a word nailed to the door of that Wittenberg church so long ago; a word nailed to the wooden cross so very long ago; a word risen and living, that is now being spoken to you today. C-H-R-I-S-T is at the center of it all. Learn to listen for Him. So Luther finishes by saying “after the people have become familiar with the text, then what it means.”

Continue in what you have learned. Know your favorite Bible passages, and then learn to listen and know why. Amen.