

**+ 2 Timothy 3:14-17 + Continue in What You Have Learned! +
+ 15th Sunday after Pentecost: Back to School Sunday + 13 September 2009 +**

Back in a little church in rural North Dakota, Janice served faithfully. She was very active in her congregation, but especially with Sunday School. Every year Mrs. Santanen, as she was known to her students, would take on the task of teaching the little ones about their Savior Jesus. She used to use an old flannelgraph to tell the stories. She seemed to know every Bible song under the sun. The kids loved having Mrs. Santanen as their teacher. Perhaps it was because she was barely five feet tall and closer to their height or maybe it was because she loved her students so much that she wanted to see each and every one of them in heaven. She wanted every student to learn how marvelous Jesus and his Word truly are. So week in and week out, year after year, she faithfully taught the little ones about their Savior Jesus. As they grew up she continued to encourage them in their Christian faith. By God's grace, her faithful service made an eternal impact on so many of her students, who like myself, still continue in Christ today.

It was with a similar spirit that St. Paul wrote his last letter to young Timothy, while awaiting execution in Rome. Paul knew the end of his life was near, but there was one thing that helped him remain through it all to the end—the good news of Christ Jesus. So Paul urged young Timothy to continue in what he learned about Christ from the faithful teaching of Holy Scripture. As we open a new school year today, he urges you and me to also **CONTINUE IN WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED.**

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of...” To continue in what you've learned, you need to remember what you've learned. That was true for Timothy. Paul knew that life for Timothy and the other Christians was going to get much more difficult. All around them people were plunging headlong into sin and death. A time was quickly coming when any Christian, who remained faithful to the Lord and his Word, would feel terrible repercussions because Christ and his Word ran contrary to the whims of society. There would also be some who would try to bring culture and the church together, but Paul describes them as ***“evil men and impostors who would go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”*** They would become tools of Satan used to ruin Christians living in an already hostile, anti-Christian society.

So Paul urged his dear friend, ***“Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”*** Paul reminded Timothy, as he reminds us, of those who taught Holy Scripture and to what they taught from Holy Scripture—truth that had convinced every one of them that Christ was really worth the struggle.

Earlier in the book, Paul thanked God for two faithful “teachers” in Timothy's life—his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. They had faithfully taught Timothy the basics of God's Word. It was common that a Jewish boy started studying the Old Testament at age 5. The Greek here indicates that they started far sooner. As they snuggled Timothy close as an infant, they rocked him to sleep with the Psalms of David. As he grew up, they daily spoke to young Timothy of the coming Messiah, who would save his people from their sins. From little on, these faithful women taught Timothy to look for the Christ. Then Paul came along and taught him the rest of the story.

Timothy was not only to remember who taught him, but what they taught him. You see, he hadn't blindly gone along with what his mom and grandma had taught. No, he had become convinced by the Word of God that what was promised in the Old Testament was true. When Paul showed up, Timothy learned how Jesus had fulfilled every one of those promises. As Micah had foretold, Jesus had come as the Son of David born a king in little Bethlehem, yet born in lowliness and poverty. As Isaiah had foretold, Jesus had come as the Suffering Servant enduring wounds and death to bear the sins of every human being who has ever lived. As David had foretold, the Lord did not let his Holy One see decay, but raised him from the dead on the third day. As Joel had foretold, the Lord then poured out the Holy Spirit as the Christian Church was born on Pentecost and the Gospel went out to the world. It was Holy Scripture that made Timothy ***“wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus”***.

Paul's words from 2000 years ago echo down to you and me today. Society is really no different around us as people gleefully plunge headlong into sin and death. Evil men and impostors continue with ear-pleasing messages and cheesy grins to be used as tools of Satan to ruin Christ's Church. Every passing week it seems being a conservative Christian in an increasingly anti-Christian society becomes all the more difficult as subtle persecution becomes bolder. It's not always easy to stand up for the lives of the unborn or the aged or stand up for God's institution of marriage that marriage is one man and one woman only or stand up for the fact that God created the universe in six normal days. Needless to say, we grow weary with the struggle and need to be daily reminded of what we've learned in the Word.

Remember who you learned from and what you have become convinced of. Perhaps it was that faithful Sunday School teacher who taught you the simple Word of God. Perhaps it was your God-fearing Mom and Dad who made

it a priority to get you to church regularly from little on and who taught you about Christ. Perhaps it was a faithful pastor who helped shepherd you through those years when you had a lot of questions and the world had a lot of bad answers. Whoever it was, you wouldn't be here if they hadn't taught you the Word of God, which makes **"you wise for salvation..."**

Sometimes those who taught you had hard things to tell you. "Guess what? You're a sinner. Not only did you disappoint me, but you disappointed Jesus by your actions. By your selfishness, your rebellion, your foolishness, you deserve more than a time-out or grounding. You deserve God's punishment in hell." Those were hard words we needed to hear and still need to hear, because by nature, you and I are still selfish, still rebellious, still foolish, and still deserve God's wrath, but not everything they had to say was hard.

"You are forgiven. You are delivered. You are rescued." Words like grace and peace and mercy...simple words we've all heard, yet words that bring healing to our hearts. God rescued you as Paul wrote in Ephesians 2, **"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace** (God's undeserved, self-sacrificing love for us) **you have been saved."** God loved you in spite of your disobedience of his will and embodied that love in his Son, Jesus, who lived a perfect life for you. God's love showed itself in the bloody and beaten sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. God's love showed itself when that same Jesus left his tomb empty. Through the good news of Jesus Christ you learned from faithful teachers, the Lord created faith in your heart convinced that Jesus is your only Savior.

Where do these hard and healing words come from? Paul answers that question too. **"All Scripture is God-breathed."** All Scripture – every single word of it is literally **"God-breathed"**. That means the source of every word comes from God himself. Yes, there were different writers with different styles who wrote over 4000 or so years, but as Peter wrote, **"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."** The Lord used the individual style of each writer to bring together these **"Holy Scriptures"**, that teach us about the One who came to deliver us—Jesus Christ—as John wrote, **"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."** With Holy Scripture, then, you can continue in what you have learned, but you're not done learning.

As those of you who have had me for Confirmation Class can attest, I always tell the students when the school year starts and when it ends, "Confirmation is not graduation." Confirmation Class is simply building on the foundation laid by those who faithfully taught you and preparing you to continue learning about your Savior as a teen and as an adult.

There really is no graduation for the believer being trained in the Word. Whether as a little one being taught by parents and grandparents or as an adult being taught by a Pastor, God wants us to keep on learning Holy Scripture and growing in the grace and knowledge of our Savior Jesus Christ. That learning starts **"from infancy"**. The Lord has given a great responsibility not only to us, his Church, but especially to parents to train your children in the ways of the Lord. It's also a God-given privilege to be able to witness to one who doesn't know the Savior, but whom the Lord has given to you. It is, therefore, not only your responsibility to bring your kids to the font to be baptized as children of God, but to keep on bringing them back to the Word regularly in worship and Sunday School, as well as at home through family devotions, family discussions, prayer, even through your example as you continue in what you have learned from the Word and continue learning in personal devotions and group Bible study. It's our responsibility as a congregation to keep supporting this training as every one of us continues to learn the Word of God.

When that happens, you soon realize that the Word matters in every aspect of life. Paul lists a few examples. **"All Scripture...is useful for teaching** (It's useful to provide instruction on the will of God & the way to salvation), **for rebuking** (It's useful to refute error, to point out sin and why it's sin), **correcting** (It's useful for correcting those errors and re-forming our very way of life so that even our behavior and habits are in line with God's will) **and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."** God wants us to be fully prepared and equipped for the tasks he has prepared for us, so he uses his Word to train us for a life of loving service to him.

Our learning will eventually come to an end. The faithful teaching of the Word we have received will, God-willing, have an eternal impact. As we study and learn the Word now, we're ultimately being prepared for eternal life in heaven with our Savior. So, then, **"Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."** Amen.