

**+ 2 Timothy 3:14-17 + Continue in What You Have Learned! +
+ 13th Sunday after Pentecost: Back to School Sunday + 7 September 2014 +**

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. 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 many of her students, who like myself, continue in Christ today.

It was with a similar spirit that the Apostle 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 through it all—the good news of Jesus. So Paul urged young Timothy to continue in what he had 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 HAVE LEARNED.**

To continue in what you have learned, you need to remember what you have learned. That was true for Timothy. Paul knew that life for Timothy and the other Christians was getting more difficult. All around them people were plunging headlong into sin and death. A time would quickly come when any Christian, who remained faithful to the Lord and his Word, would suffer because Christ and his Word ran contrary to the whims of society. There would be some who would try to mingle culture and the church, but they were ***“evil men and impostors who would go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”*** (2 Timothy 3:13) Satan would try to use them to ruin Christians living in an already hostile society.

With all this in mind, 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 of those who taught Holy Scripture and what they taught from Holy Scripture—the truth that had convinced them that Christ was really worth the struggle.

Earlier in the book, Paul had 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. Now it was common that a Jewish boy started studying the Old Testament at age 5. Lois and Eunice started much sooner. As they snuggled with Timothy as an infant, they rocked him to sleep with the Psalms of David. As he grew up, they daily reminded young Timothy of the coming Messiah, who would save his people from their sins. All his life these faithful women had taught Timothy to watch for the Christ. Later Paul came and gave him the rest of the story.

Timothy was not only to remember who taught him, but what they taught him. You see, he didn't blindly go along with what his mom and grandma had taught him. 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 foretold, Jesus had come as the Son of David born a king in little Bethlehem, yet born in lowliness and poverty. As Isaiah foretold, Jesus had come as the Suffering Servant enduring wounds and death to bear the sins of every human being. As David foretold, the Lord did not let his Holy One see decay, but raised him from the dead on the third day. As Joel 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 2,000 years ago are just as relevant today. Society is really no different as people around us gleefully plunge into sin and death. Evil men and impostors continue with ear-pleasing messages that Satan tries to use to ruin Christ's Church. Every passing week it becomes a little more difficult to be a confessional Christian in an increasingly anti-Christian society as subtle persecution becomes bolder. It's not always easy to stand up for the unborn or the aged or for God's institution of marriage or for the simple fact that God's Word is

truth. Needless to say, we grow weary with the struggle and need daily reminders of what we've learned in the Word.

Remember who you learned from and of what you have become convinced! Perhaps it was a faithful Sunday School teacher who taught you the simple Word of God. Perhaps it was a God-fearing parent or parents who made it a priority to get you to church regularly from little on and who taught you about Jesus. Perhaps it was a faithful pastor who didn't give up on you during that time 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 had not 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.

"Jesus forgives you! You are delivered. You are rescued." Words like grace and peace and mercy...simple words we've heard so often, yet words that bring healing to our hearts. Paul explains, **"...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 you have been saved."** (Ephesians 2:4)

God loved you in spite of your disobedience of his will and embodied that love in his Son, Jesus, who lived a perfect life of obedience 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."** Every single word of Scripture is literally **"God-breathed"**, from God himself. Yes, there were different writers with different styles who wrote over 4,000+ years, but **"...men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."** (2 Peter 1:21)

The Lord brought together these **"Holy Scriptures"**, that teach us about the One who came to deliver us, about our Savior Jesus, that **"you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."** (John 20:31) Now with Holy Scripture, 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 simply builds on the foundation laid by those who faithfully taught you and prepares you to continue learning.

The same is true for any 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 you to keep on learning Holy Scripture and growing in the grace and knowledge of our Savior Jesus.

That learning starts **"from infancy"**. The Lord has given a great responsibility not only to his Church, but especially to parents to train your children in the ways of the Lord. It is a God-given privilege to be able to witness to your own child about their Savior. Therefore, God wants us to bring our kids to the font to be baptized as children of God and to keep bringing them back to the Word regularly in worship and Sunday School. God wants us to point them to Jesus through family devotions, family discussions, prayer, even through our example as we continue in what we have learned from the Word and continue learning through the study of God's Word. God wants our congregation to support this training of young and old alike 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 your life. Paul gives a few examples. **"All Scripture...is useful for teaching** (to provide instruction on the will of God and the way to salvation), **for rebuking** (to refute error, to point out sin and why it is sin), **correcting** (to correct error and reform our 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 equipped for the tasks he has prepared for us, so he uses his Word to train us for a life of willing, loving service to him.

In the end, the faithful teaching of God's Word has an eternal impact. As we study the Word now, God prepares us 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.