

Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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May 21, 2006
140th School Anniversary
2 Timothy 3:14-17
Pastor Waldemar Loescher

First Lesson: Deuteronomy 11:1-7,16-21
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 78
Second Lesson: 2 Timothy 1:3-9a
Gospel: Matthew 7:24-27

Hang on to the Lessons of Jesus Which you Learned from Small On

An anniversary is like a birthday celebration. This is the 140th birthday of your school. It's a long life so far. Only four years less than the whole congregation. That reminds me of a birthday story of a six-year-old daughter who was sitting at the table where her parents had placed two gifts in front of her and said, "It's your birthday. Open them." The six-year-old daughter was excited. She took one of the gifts, gently shook it and wondered what might be in it. In the process, the bow on top fell off. The girl picked up the bow and put it on her head. She was happy as she turned to Mom and Dad and said, "Look! I am a gift." You may have heard this story before, but I thought it was fitting in context with this day and the text that is before us.

This is the 140th birthday of your school. On this day we note first of all that children are a gift indeed. The Bible states it clearly with the statement, *Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them* (Psalm 127:5)—meaning sons and daughters. So it is a good thing that you marked this Sunday to observe the 140th birthday of your school. But today we thank the Lord for the Christian education in your congregation, especially in light of the Word before us now, and which urges us to this day to continue to hang on to the lessons of Jesus that you all have learned from childhood on. First, as God's Word provides those lessons. Secondly, use them to stay the course. And thirdly, they are for your survival.

Our text begins, *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it* (2 Timothy 3:14). Our Scripture reading before that Pastor Ott read told us about those childhood days a little bit by calling attention to both the mother and grandmother of Timothy—grandmother, Lois, and mother, Eunice. Timothy probably could well remember as Paul was writing that, *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it* (2 Timothy 3:14). Timothy had learned that from his mom and his grandmother when he was a little child probably sitting on their laps. They would tell him about the stories of their people where both of them were Hebrews. They were Old Testament believers. They believed in God's promise of the Great One who would come, the Great Messiah. The mother and grandmother kept teaching Timothy about that.

The text continues, *and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures* (2 Timothy 3:15). This term, as I studied it a little bit further, literally says, "as you have known the holy letters"—like the ABCs—the letters of the alphabet, the letters that make up words, and the words which make up sentences and the sentences make up

paragraphs and the paragraphs make up stories. There were many of them in the Old Testament Scriptures that God had given through Moses and through the Prophets.

A little later the text goes on, *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful* (2 Timothy 3:16a). When you study the Catechism (the blue Catechism) you will find this passage almost at the beginning, where the Bible is discussed. On page 35 there is a diagram page under the title "VERBAL INSPIRATION." That diagram was based on this particular text that *All Scripture is God-breathed*. That is verbal inspiration and it was further showed in that diagram that "GOD gave or guided or reminded MEN WRITING thoughts and words." Below this sentence it further outlines, "GOD'S WORD" has "no errors, no unkept promises." And then the three commands are printed, "Don't Add! Don't subtract! Don't Change the Meaning!"

To the modern philosophers this teaching shouts out to this day, "Yes, there is absolute truth. God's Word is truth." (See John 17:17). This is God's Word that he breathed into His people whom he had chosen and trained specifically for this purpose—that they would relay his precise words in letters precisely given to his people. Today we apply that term then to all 66 books of the Holy Scriptures of which it is stated here, *...which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus* (2 Timothy 3:15b). The Bible is still reliable. It is the true guide for life. It offers the lessons about Jesus. That is what the Bible is about. Now we are told to hang on to these lessons about Jesus which you have received from childhood on. They are very important. They are the lessons that told how God could send His Son into this world, when and where, and just in what connection it would happen. What His Son would do—all of it was there in the Old Testament already. Precisely the teachings he would give, precisely the work he would do, the great miracles he would perform, and the fact had been taught already in the prophecies that he would die on a cross and he would rise again on the third day. All of that was there already. Timothy had learned those important truths in the form of prophecy until Paul came through his town. He stayed, evidently, at the home of Timothy. They were good friends because both Eunice and Lois were people who believed God's Word. Timothy was being brought up that way. They decided that Timothy could go along with Paul on his second mission expedition. He went along and he kept on learning from Paul because evidently Timothy wanted to be a carrier of the Gospel of Christ. He wanted to be like Paul—like Paul, who was preaching the Word to many people. Now it is told to Timothy by Paul at a later time—Timothy being a pastor now in the Ephesus area, and Paul stuck away in a prison cell in Rome, but Paul still allowed to write letters. He writes also this letter to him and bids him to stay the course and continue in what he has learned.

Friends in Christ, it is a pleasure for me to be here once more in this pulpit and speak to you one more time. If this were the last time—who knows, maybe it will be—that I will speak to you from this pulpit, no better advice could be given than that I reaffirm this very basic truth—hang on to those teachings that you have learned from childhood on and continue in them and stay the course: like a ship that is on course to a harbor and it is out on the lake and perhaps stormy weather is coming along and that ship makes a straight line for the harbor. So we have a harbor that has been given to us and that harbor is heaven and we are to stay on that course through the things that we have learned from childhood on. But I am speaking this to you now once more, very

privileged, but who am I? I am just another sinner like all of you. I have the same kind of scheming mind many times in my life, the same kind of foul tongue, and the same kind of dirty hands like all of you as a sinner.

Idolatry, curses and downright laziness toward God's Word, neglecting it and pursuing other thoughts in life is a part of my identity as my old Adam always wants to gain the upper hand again. And no better advice can be given in view of this. We look to Paul and we see how he carried that Gospel of Christ. He told Timothy in his first letter, *Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst* (1 Timothy 1:15). Not only was he a sinner by way of his former Phariseeism in which he stood, but he was a sinner every day again as he saw that ugly beast, sin, rising again in his mind and in his life and in his person. Paul tells us in this letter then that he is absolutely sure that he will be executed soon. Word has trickled down and evidently Paul knew that his time was marked.

Did you by chance watch some of the episodes of Prison Break which is currently being shown on Monday evenings on Channel 11? I watched a couple episodes of that show. It shows what life is like in a prison—for those of you who might not have watched it. It shows us that it is a matter of survival in a prison. It tells about a man who has been framed and who is to be executed in an electric chair. He is given seven days. During those last seven days, he is really sweating it out. He knows where he is going to be. He is going to be sitting in that chair and he knows there is going to be a high voltage of electricity going through his body and he is going to die. He is scared—scared as can be. He tries not to show it, but he is an example, in a way, of how people in this world want to also survive.

The apostle Paul was in that situation. He knew he was going to be executed. There was no way out. How did he take it? He took it entirely different than a child of this world. He took it as a child of God. He writes in the next chapter, *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing* (2 Timothy 4:7-8). Paul is looking forward to being executed because he is a child of God. He knows why he is in prison. He is there because he has promised allegiance with Jesus Christ as his Lord and as his God and as his King. That did not sit well with the mighty Caesar of Rome. He didn't care for that kind of talk in his kingdom. So these Christians had to be taken care of, especially their leader, Paul, who was their main leader. Paul stayed the course by the grace of God. He still had that persuasion in himself and writes this as a last bit of advice like his last testament to his close friends, young Timothy, the pastor of Ephesus. He tells him to stay the course to continue in what he had learned, the precious truth, and the stories about Jesus that he learned from childhood on.

Remember how I began this sermon with the story about that six-year-old little girl that put that bow on her head and said, "Look Dad and Mom! I am a gift!"? It is as though Jesus to this day, with the truth and the story about his death on the cross, is appealing to the whole world and to each one of us as he is saying to us, "Look everyone who is living on this earth! It is I, a gift from your God who created you, your God in heaven.

So that you don't have to go to hell, I am a gift to you that you can have eternal life." Friends in Christ, that is what you want to hang on to. That is the center of the teaching of the Scripture.

That brings me to the third part that we wanted to briefly comment on, which is under the words, *...holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus* (2 Timothy 3:15). That word "salvation" we have heard many times and sometimes maybe it trickles in one ear and trickles out the other ear right away because we are so well acquainted with it. Let me put it just a little different way for the moment. Let me put it this way by asking you, "Do you want to survive?" I mean really survive even after this earthly life? Do you want to survive? Or do you think you are just here for a good time now? Of course, I know what your answer is. We want to survive. That is my answer. We want to survive—all of us.

If we were told there was a special bulletin coming out of Washington, through our astronomy department, that there was a huge asteroid heading for earth about 100 miles in circumference and they know exactly when and where it is going to hit. It is going to hit a week from now and it is going to hit in the middle of Wisconsin. We know what that would do. That would shatter the whole state. What would we do if we were definitely sure about that? We would get all of our belongings together. We would head for either one of the coasts, wouldn't we? Or maybe we would head for the North Pole. We have that desire that we want to survive for a little while longer in this life, too. We are not going to rush our physical death though we do look forward to being with Jesus. We want to survive, but what about after that? Will we survive after that?

I remember it wasn't long ago when another pastor was serving here as a guest preacher, one who was taking care of institutions, a prison institution in Northern Wisconsin, Pastor Elwood Habermann. I don't know if you remember it, but I remember his sermon. He was preaching about the most important lesson that you have to learn in life. He said that the most important lesson is that you have to ask the most important question and then you have to listen to the most important answer that is provided. He preached about that event that Timothy witnessed, when Paul and Silas and the mission team were in Philippi and Paul had evicted an evil spirit out of a slave girl. He was really in big trouble because the people in the community got so upset because he had destroyed their means of revenue. The people who owned that slave girl and those owners riled up the city so bad that Paul and Silas ended up in prison because of that. Timothy saw that. He knew what happened that night. He was a part of the witness, no doubt. He was with Paul. What happened that night was that the most important lesson was taught, Pastor Habermann told us about it, and the most important question that was asked was, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" (Acts 16:30). And the answer, the only true answer to that question that Paul gave to the jailor was, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household*" (Acts 16:31). Timothy had witnessed that.

Do you know what Pastor Habermann said when he came out of the pulpit that day? I am going to share that with you. He came out and I was in the sacristy and he said, "Boy, I was really hitting the corners today." I understood what he meant. I believe he used to be a baseball pitcher. A baseball pitcher, in order to strike out the batters, has

to have perfect control of that ball and he has to hit those corners of the plate just right. If he does, he gets the players out and gets many strikeouts. Pastor Habermann used that expression not as though he was throwing balls at you. He was delivering a message to you and he felt that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he was really into the Word and he had your attention and he was able to preach to you. That is the truth that he was delivering and that is the truth that we need to continue to hear. The most important question is the most important answer to learn the most important lesson in our lives. That is, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. And continue to hang on to that.

Continue to hang on as you are celebrating 140 years of God's grace in the building just across the campus from here, in the school. It is a wonderful thing that the forefathers did, isn't it? They made sure that the children, the next generation, would be brought up in the truth. You have maintained that school. May God bless you as you continue and strive under that truth of the Word of God. Keep on hanging on to those very important lessons about Jesus, your Savior, your Savior from sin. You have learned them from small on. You have learned them from the reliable source of God's own Word. Stay on course as you go through this earthly life with those lessons living in your heart, carrying them with you. They are for your survival. You can depend on them. You will be with the Savior in heaven through faith in Christ and no other way.

May God bless you in that truth and so make it truly a good 140th birthday celebration. I am going to look forward to what you are going to do after dinner today, all you children. Keep on learning those lessons. They are important.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).