



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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September 10, 2006
14th Sunday after Pentecost
John 14:23-24
Pastor Roger Schultz

First Lesson: Joshua 24:1,2a, 14-18
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 71
Second Lesson: Ephesians 5:21-31
Gospel: John 6:60-69

A House or a Home?

A family moved to a different city because the father's company had transferred him. Well, needless to say this meant a new school and a new teacher for their little daughter, Susan. But fortunately for Susan, her new teacher was very experienced and she understood Susan's difficult situation. On the very first day of school, her new teacher spent a fair amount of time talking with Susan about her previous school and previous home. She introduced her to her new classmates and showed her around the school building. But after awhile, her new teacher turned to Susan and said, "Susan, I noticed that your address is actually the motel just down from the school. Don't you have a home yet?" "Oh, yes!" Susan replied. "We have a home. We just haven't found a house to put it in."

The little girl was right, wasn't she? You know as well as I do that a house does not automatically make a home. In fact, there are people in this country who have large houses with beautiful furnishings and every convenience, but because they lack the warmth of love, really the only thing they have is a large house with beautiful furnishings and every convenience. On the other hand, there are also people in this country who own little of earthly value. But because of the love, the laughter and the togetherness that they share, their dwelling is truly a home.

In American society today, because of the breakdown of the traditional family, American homes are at risk. In the majority of families today, both mothers and fathers work outside the home thereby requiring that their children are cared for by others. And according to the last census, in more than 50% of our nation's homes it is single parents who are called upon to provide a home for themselves and their children. The task of providing a home for these single parents—that task of providing a home that is going to keep them and their children free and safe from destructive influences—it almost seems like something that is impossible to achieve.

Yet, not even that is the biggest challenge that confronts our homes in America today. The biggest challenge actually comes from inside the home itself. In a way, it is like dealing with the problem of termites. Here in the State of Wisconsin, termites in houses are not a great problem. But they certainly were when my family and I lived in the State of Nebraska. These tiny insects go undetected for the most part, that is until you start to look behind the drywall at

the studs or if you pick up floor boards and you look at the floor joints. You soon begin to see their handiwork.

I remember one time when we were remodeling a bathroom in our home on the first level. As we went to pick up the floor boards, we nearly ended up in the basement. The reason being there was a shell of a floor joist below but it had been hollowed out by the termites. These little insects can do a great deal of damage in a short period of time. In Nebraska it was a serious problem—so serious that often times people would use humor in order to deal with it.

I remember one time I was at a friend's house and he pointed to a wall and he said, "You know Pastor, the only thing holding up that wall over there is the fact that those little termites are holding hands." It was their way of trying to deal with a serious problem. Yet we know very well that if allowed to do their thing unchecked, these little insects can actually accomplish from within or inside the structure of a house what wind and rain and storm have not been able to accomplish from the outside.

So in the same way, we know that the threat to our homes is not so much the negative and evil factors outside our homes, whether it is drugs, violence, crime, immorality or whatever. Of greater concern is a lack of Jesus Christ and his Word inside our homes. For Jesus and his Word give our homes the strength and the security to make them strong to withstand those evils on the outside. So if we want our houses to be Christian homes, if we want our families to stand strong against the evil forces that surround it, then it really is these "spiritual termites" if you will that all of us need to be aware of as they threaten to eat away at the very structure and foundation of our home and family from within.

So we want to take a look at three ways in which we can build and maintain strong Christian homes and families.

First and foremost, we need to concentrate on that which makes our home truly Christian. In other words, we need to make a conscience effort to fill our homes with the presence of Jesus Christ and his Word—Jesus, that person who came to earth and kept God's law perfectly for all people, who then went on to suffer and die and rise again guaranteeing salvation for all people. Yes, Jesus really is the only one who can overcome and drive out the sin and evil that threatens to destroy our homes. What tremendous comfort and encouragement Jesus gives us when he says, "*My Father will love you, and we will come to you and make our home with you*" (John 14:23). It's a promise. Jesus never goes back on a promise. Jesus promises to live with us, to make our home strong and secure.

Jesus' blessing of a truly Christian home also comes from our loving him who loved us first and from our listening to and obeying his teachings. For the very next Words of Jesus are these, "*He who does not love me will not obey my teaching*" (John 14:24). In other words, Jesus and his Father are not going to

come and live with those people who do not love and obey them. When we put Jesus and his Word first and foremost in our homes, when we listen to that Word and obey it, then we have the assurance of this promise of Jesus that he and his Father are going to live with us and make our home Christian.

From my childhood I remember a plaque that my parents had on the living room wall of our farmhouse. The words on the plaque were these, "Christ is the head of this home, the unseen guest at every meal, the silent listener to every conversation." Those words made an impression on me at a very young age. In fact, they still do. I now have a plaque with those same words on it on my own living room wall. When you think about the words on that plaque, do they adequately describe the presence of Jesus Christ in your home? When people walk through your front door and they look around, is it immediately apparent to them by what they see on the walls and shelves that they are standing in a Christian home? Do we truly invite Jesus to be that unseen guest at every meal? Or are there just too many times that we get too busied or too hurried to invite him? Are we aware of Jesus, not only as the silent listener to all of the conversations that take place, but more so as the one who talks directly to us as we read and study his Word together?

When we fill our homes with the presence of Christ and his Word, then we hear these Words of Jesus, "*My Father will love you, and we will come to you and make our home with you*" (John 14:23). What a tremendous encouragement for all of us to know that Christ and his Father live with us.

Secondly, if we want our houses to be Christian homes, then we need to actively work at keeping out negative and evil influences. Having cable television and Dish Network today offers many opportunities for education, information and entertainment. TV today can literally bring the world into our homes. Unfortunately, that can be a mixed blessing. Much of TV's entertainment today is slanted toward the violent and the immoral and many times it directly attacks the Christian faith and Christian values.

Recently a talk show was discussing the rise of drive-by shootings and senseless violence in America. The question was asked of the participants, "Why is this happening at an increasing rate among our young people?" One of the participants responded. He said, "You need to remember that by the time our children reach age 13, most of them have seen about 250,000 acts of violence in one form or another on television." In other words, this gentleman was saying that our young people are being directly influenced by what they see on television.

Then, too, from a recent study done by Focus on the Family, we also know that young people today are watching a considerable amount of television. According to that study, it was noted that young people today spend nearly 1,000 hours per year in school, but believe it or not, nearly 1,500 hours watching television. Our

children, our young people are being influence by what they see on TV. God expects us as parents, Christian adults, and Christian grandparents to not only raise our children in his teachings and his ways, but he also expects us to help them fight temptation and to teach them how to fight temptation and win.

Parenting today is not easy, but then again, I don't think it ever has been. Yet, if we truly love our children and if we truly love our Lord, then we are going to set in place certain guidelines or boundaries as to what our children may or may not watch on television. At times it may mean turning the television off or saying "no, you may not watch that." As our children get older, perhaps we can have them figure out if this is something they should or should not be watching and actually have a conversation with them. God expects us who have been through this to help our young people fight temptation and win.

Then, too, what about music? If you have noticed, today people, young people in particular, are usually listening to music, whether it be an Ipod or a CD player or whatever. There is nothing wrong with listening to music, is there? In fact, I would guess most of us here this morning, regardless of our age, at one point in time in our lives listened to a lot of music. Maybe we still do. But usually that listening takes place when we are a teenager. Again, there is nothing wrong with listening to music, that is, as long as the music is good and wholesome. Much of the music today that reaches the top of the charts among the young people tends to glamorize rape, murder and drugs. You can well imagine that if our young people have a steady diet of that kind of music, again, it is going to have an impact on their thoughts and eventually on their words and eventually on their actions. Again, God expects us as Christian parents, grandparents and adults to help our children, to help them make wise choices in their lives.

It is difficult to stay one step ahead of our kids, especially in regard to music. There are so many different kinds and there are new songs coming out all the time. It is difficult. But there is a website available today to help parents in this regard. The website is sponsored by Focus on the Family and the address is: pluggedinonline.com. If you will go to that website, what they do is they review all of the music, every kind of music. They review all of the movies, past, present and those about to come out. They review all of the television shows and they go through all those things and they tell you what is good about it and what is bad about it and then they let you make the decision if you want to listen to that or if you want to go to that movie or if you want to buy that CD. It's up to you. It is a tremendous tool available to Christians today. It's a tremendous way when your children are old enough to teach them how to make God-pleasing choices in their lives. Let them do the review and the evaluating and let them report to you what their findings are and then see whether you agree with it or not. It is a tremendous way to teach our children how to make those choices on their own.

We could go on and on because there are so many areas today that influence and impact young people. We could talk about the internet and the fact that right

now on the internet 60% of all websites contain pornography. We could talk about video games and how there is horrific violence and sexual overtones in many of those games that are quite popular. The list goes on and on and on.

But as Christian parents, grandparents and adults, we need to not only train our children in the way of the Lord; we also need to help them make God-pleasing choices in their lives. When we will engage ourselves and put forth the time and effort to do that, we will reap great benefits and so will our children. Again, it's one more way in which we can build a truly Christian home and Christian family.

Finally, if we want our houses to be Christian homes, then we also need to work on making sure the things that happen outside our home don't negatively affect how we deal with our family members. A pastor told the story one time about a neighbor of his who would come home from work about the same time that the pastor came home for dinner. However, he noticed that his neighbor would do a rather peculiar thing. Often times he would go around to the back yard and he would actually grab hold of the branches of a willow tree. After awhile he would let go and then he would go inside his house and hug and kiss his wife and children.

This went on for some time until it got the best of the pastor's curiosity. So the pastor worked up enough nerve one day to ask his neighbor what he was doing with that tree in his back yard. His neighbor said, "That's my trouble tree. I can't avoid problems and troubles at work, but I don't want them negatively affecting how I deal with my family. So when I come home at night, I go to that tree and I hang my problems and troubles on that tree. Then I pick them up again the next morning. You know, the interesting thing is that they don't seem as many or as heavy as they were the night before."

A "trouble tree"—it's a rather interesting idea. Yet, as Christians, we already have a "trouble tree." We already have a tree where we can take all of our problems and troubles and concerns and leave them. You know it as well as I do. It is the tree of the cross. Jesus invites, in fact he commands us, to bring all our problems and troubles to him every day and give them to him. The problem for you and me, though, is often times we feel that we can handle them on our own or we can solve them on our own and so we don't take them to the Lord. How foolish we are and how much stress and anxiety we add to our lives simply because we will not trust the Lord and give him our problems. Again, he promises in his Word to not just hear about those problems and troubles, he promises to help. So we need to use that "trouble tree," our tree of the cross, every day.

One day a little boy was rather bored so he asked his mom for something to do. She happened to have a magazine nearby. She started paging through it, found a map of the United States of America on one page and tore it out of her magazine. She then cut it up into all kinds of smaller pieces like a jigsaw puzzle.

She gave the pieces, along with some tape, to her son and told him to put that together. She figured it would keep him busy for a long time. She was wrong. In a very short period of time he came back and he had the whole map taped together correctly. She just couldn't believe it. She asked him, "How in the world did you get that done so quickly?" He said, "Well, mom, I noticed when you tore it out of your magazine that there was a picture of a family on the other side. So I turned all those pieces over and you know when I got that family together, the whole country turned out right." Pretty interesting, isn't it?

I don't think there is a person here this morning that doesn't want a country that turns out right. We all want a military system that is strong enough to defend us. We want a judicial system that is fair and impartial. We want an economy that is going to provide an adequate living for everyone. And we want social programs that will help the truly needy. But really, when you think about all those different areas of our lives, for the most part you and I are dependent on the efforts of others outside our homes to accomplish those things. What we need to remember that is more important than any of these factors in building a strong healthy nation is the health and well-being of our own homes and our own families. So, if we really want our country to turn out right, then we really need to work as hard as we can and put our families together as best as we can in Jesus Christ and his Word.

You see, when we work to make the houses we live in Christian homes, then God promises not only to bless us but also to make us a blessing to others. Really, that is the mission of Calvary Academy—to restore Christian homes so that once again parents and children can live together in peace and harmony. Our motto at the Academy is **HOPE FOR HURTING FAMILIES**. You know as well as I do that the only true hope there is is Jesus Christ and his Word.

So, at the Academy we give our students a heavy dose of God's Word every day. We are firmly convinced that the Holy Spirit working through that Word will change these children's lives and the lives of their families. That is where there is hope—in Jesus and his Word.

So in conclusion, let me ask you a question. Do you have a house or do you have a Christian home? Is Jesus Christ and his Word truly present in your home? Are you actively working at keeping out negative and evil influences? Are you using your "trouble tree"—that is the tree of the cross—every day? For when you do, then you will hear these words of Jesus ringing in your mind, "*My father will love you, and we will come to you and make our home with you*" (John 14:23). It is a promise that you can count on.