



# MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

February 2, 2025

Pastor James Enderle

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

First Lesson: [Jeremiah 1:4-10](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 71a CW

Second Lesson/ Sermon Text: [2 Timothy 3:14-4:5](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 4:38-44](#)

## EPIPHANY MOMENTS

### Popularity is Not Proof of Success

### REMAIN FAITHFUL TO THE FAITH GIVING WORD

1. \_\_\_\_\_ opinions don't equal \_\_\_\_\_
2. The Gospel \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_
3. The Gospel is \_\_\_\_\_... \_\_\_\_\_

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

The name Jack Doherty might not mean a lot to you but he is a guy who has YouTube and TikTok followers. He has over 15 million subscribers. He makes anywhere between \$500,000 and \$4,000,000 per year just for making videos. The way he got started was by pulling pranks on people, or as a teenager he would go places and be obnoxious. The reason he was in the news in the last few months though was because he was driving one of his \$300,000 sports cars and livestreaming himself driving it and he crashed it on the interstate. This became big news because in Florida, where he was, it's illegal to use your phone and drive and he was livestreaming it. So here he was recording this and not only crashed his car, but now he is actually facing legal challenges. He has issues with the police because of what he did.

Is this person popular? He has 15 million followers. Some of us here maybe have a few hundred Facebook friends, a couple thousand, or whatever, but 15 million people like to follow and watch that. Does that make it something good? Just because someone follows something, just because they are popular, does that make it good? We see that from the Kardashians and all the different famous people that seem to have influence, but does popularity mean it's a good thing? I think we have to look at that and then really wonder why this is an issue. Why popularity sometimes is an issue is because

what is popular at certain points in time changes. What is popular goes back and forth all the time.

What is the healthiest thing to eat? Are eggs good for you? It used to be that eggs were really good, now eggs are bad, or eggs are good again. Are carbs and bread good, or should you have a carnivore diet? The popular science on things really moves around. What about when we look at popular ideas in culture? Think about 150-200 years ago, what were some of the most popular thoughts in culture about what you could do with other people and the value of other people that were different than you? Just because it was popular, did that make it right? When we look at what today might be popular, what the world says is true and right, and we look at how the popularity of different ideas and different things have shifted, I think it's fair to say that *popular opinions don't equal truth*. The things that happen today don't make it good and right. We're going to see that the popular opinions don't equal truth and especially what that means for us in God's Word, but we'll really look at the thing that we should remain true to, the thing that doesn't change, to **remain faithful to the faith giving Word**.

This is what Paul is encouraging Timothy and us today—as popularity shifts, as things go back and forth, we can't trust what is popular. What can we trust? We can trust God's Word. So we look at the words of Paul to Timothy and see what he has to say to us in this letter that is quite personal. People think that this was the last letter that Paul wrote. He is in prison. Other times he had been in prison and he was released, but he was pretty sure that he was not going to be released this time. As he writes to Timothy, one who he worked with and Paul was a mentor to, but he was almost like a son to him, he writes these encouraging words to Timothy, who now was a church leader and was given the task to bring this Word to others in a difficult world, in a difficult situation, and to encourage him in things that he was going to face. For us today as well, as we go out into the world, it's what we should be encouraged about as we know the world doesn't always agree with God's Word. So we look at what he says about the popularity of things. He explains the good things about the Scriptures, but then he also speaks about what people will do with the Scriptures and preaching.

Looking at Verse 2 in Chapter 4, he says: ***Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.*** Why is this important? ***For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.*** Notice it's clear that as we preach and teach God's Word, it's not always going to be popular. Instead, it says that people will gather around teachers who say what their itching ears want to hear. So not only will there be those who don't want to hear it, but there will be teachers who teach what they want to hear.

Will this be a popular thing? Will it be popular that there are false teachings or people that don't want to hold to the truth; that don't want to hold to the Gospel? That's exactly what he says in Verse 4, that they will turn aside to myths instead of the truth. We see that this is what happens with our sinful nature. Even the thought to suit their own desires, that has more of a thought of harmful things—that they'll want to hear and teach things that hurt them, hurt their souls, that teach them to do the wrong thing, but they are happy with that because maybe it feels good for a short time. So we see that popularity certainly does not equal truth.

But what is the truth and what is God's Word good for? We heard what it is to preach the Word; that we can correct, rebuke and encourage—with patience and careful instruction, but then hear what Paul says about God's Word in Chapter 3: ***...and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*** What's a little fascinating is as he is speaking about the Scriptures, what Scriptures was he probably talking about at that time? Did they have the New Testament? The truth is that what he, what Timothy learned as a child, what helped him, when it says ***from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures***, what Scriptures are those? The Old Testament—all those prophecies, all those things pointing forward to the Savior, which said it was able to make him ***wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus***. It was to show him this Messiah, even in the Old Testament. How much greater it is that we have the New Testament and all the clear teachings about who Jesus is and what He has done.

So what does this Gospel message do? We see what it does. ***The Gospel saves, challenges, and equips.*** The Old Testament showed that this Messiah was coming, but what does the New Testament do for sure? It points us to who Jesus was and what He did for us—it saves us. How from infancy he knew.

We saw baptism several times in the last month. We see the joys of sharing faith with little ones. You can think about your grandkids, your kids, or you can think about when you were a child and who shared their faith with you and how from infancy you have known the truth, the simple truth that God loves you, that Jesus loves you, that you are Jesus' little lamb and that we're going to have a faith like a child to know that He is watching over and He has forgiven us. Sometimes we need that simple truth because we complicate it. God has forgiven you. You are loved and redeemed. Know that this is true. This is what the Gospel does—it saves you.

But it also challenges us. As we see it ***is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness***, or as he repeats later, to ***correct, rebuke and encourage—***

**with great patience and careful instruction.** God's Word is challenging to us as well. As we hear it as a simple child, we hear the simple truths, but it's not just Gospel. It's also Law. Are you challenged by what God's Word says to do and to not do? Do those Ten Commandments convict you to see where you haven't put God first, where you haven't honored Him, where you haven't given your time, talents and treasures to Him and made God a priority, or where you haven't honored the authorities? If you are a child or even an adult, where you have hated other people, had wrong sexual thoughts, lusted/desired things that weren't yours, cheated. The Scriptures convict us. The Law convicts us and shows that we can't save ourselves because every one of us falls short.

The good question to ask is—are you challenged by God's Word? When you read the Scriptures, do you say "That's talking about me," or do you brush by and say "Those people... God is really getting those other people..." or are you letting it convict you and see where you have fallen short? We need to let God's Word challenge us and point us to see where we have fallen short, otherwise we are making ourselves self-righteous and making it just how we can think that we can earn our way or show that we are better than other people. That's not what God's Word does.

So in the same way that God encourages Timothy with patience and careful instruction, he encourages us to look at God's Word. When has someone confronted you with God's Word and said "I don't know if this is the right thing that you are doing"? How do you react if someone confronts you with the Law, if you read a book or something that is talking about you, do you get angry and defensive? Or do you go to God for forgiveness and, as it says, to be trained in righteousness—to be corrected and say "God, help me," to help drown the old Adam and to help the new self come through out of love and thanks?

This is something that God has given to pastors and teachers to do, as he speaks to Timothy, but He has also equipped you as well. As it says **that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.** What good is God's Word? What is the main job of the pastor, but also to equip you; to equip you to use God's Word and to know Law and Gospel and to apply it to yourself and to share it with others; to live equipped and ready. Equipped to face the troubles in your life and to understand the hard things of Scripture, the easy things of Scripture, or if you have questions, to come and be equipped to look where to find answers or to come to people that have the answers. But I think more than anything, you are more equipped than you realize. Why is that? It's because you have the Word of God.

We have this Word of God in such a special way. It's in your pocket. It's everywhere. We can read it all the time. But the challenges are nothing new. We know that people are going to oppose it. As Paul says, **the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine.** Does that mean things are going to get worse for us, for you and for me, that a time is coming? Or did a time come for Timothy as well? Did a time come

for Jeremiah as well, because he said it was going to be hard for him to not fear? It's not saying for us there is for sure going to be a worse time but to be prepared.

Over and over again, because of the human nature, people don't want to deal with God's Word. They don't like what it says. Not only do they not like the Law, but they don't like Gospel as well. They don't like the Gospel that says everyone can be forgiven, even the worst of sinners, "even that person I hate that did that horrible thing!" They say "How can you forgive that person who did that heinous thing?!" That's why the Gospel is so important.

The Gospel is incredibly useful. The Gospel is so useful because it means eternal life. It means forgiveness for the worst of sinners. It means that when you're on your death bed, when your loved one is sitting there, you have that forgiveness and peace to know what is ahead for them. It's extremely useful. It gives answers to things that everyone is worried about and everyone is stressed about and that everyone is looking to find an answer for—a hope and a peace.

But there is one other thing that I want you to see that the Gospel is useful for. ***The Gospel is useful... even for this.*** What do I mean? Sometimes when you hear catechism students/teenagers confessing their faith and you say "What is the Gospel good for? What is your faith good for," they say "I'll be in heaven one day"—the end. Is that a great answer? Yes, but it's only part of the answer. If as a child/teenager the only thought you have is that the Gospel is good for me when I get to heaven, what about high school and college and being a parent and all the different things that you face in life? "If it's not useful, then I don't have to go to church. I'll come back when I'm older, when I'm facing the idea of my life ending." But the Gospel is useful for even more, even this. And what do I mean by that?

In my pastor coaching program called CrossTrain, we have a monthly webinar. This month we had the former President of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. He presented on a paper by Pastor/President/Professor Wendland (lots of names he's got there). This paper really talked about the truths of Lutheranism and how it's so important to stick to those amazing truths. What he ended talking about is this, which I think is something each of us can relate to. He said "The hardest thing for us to believe is that the Gospel has answers to the very thing that is troubling your heart right now." What is that thing on your mind? What is the thing that is causing you to have sleepless nights? What is the thing that isn't going away? What is the fear? What is the doubt? What is that very thing that isn't life or death, but that very thing that you are struggling so much about? Maybe it's a relationship. Maybe it's a doubt. Maybe it's a stress. We can say that God, the Gospel, the Bible, has given you peace and has answers for THAT very thing. Do you believe that?

I think sometimes it's hard to believe that and it's easy for us to go to other answers and say "I know the Gospel. I know I'm forgiven. But this has better answers" or "There is something new, something popular" or "This book or that idea"—that the Gospel isn't enough. My encouragement is that God tells us that Jesus has given us peace. He has left us with a hope and a peace, forgiveness and so many answers for your life, but sometimes we can toss that aside and say "It's not good enough." But God has given you that peace. Hold onto that.

See all the things that God has given you, how useful God's Word is—that it saves, it challenges, it equips you to know that most of all, this gives you a hope and salvation that nothing else can give. It forgives you for the doubts. It forgives you for the times when you've gone away, the times when you are worried, or if you grew up as an infant learning the Scriptures and then went away. God has that love for you and the Scriptures are still useful for you. It's the same, beautiful truth that does not change. It may not be the most popular thing, but God's Word is the truth. My prayer is that you see it's useful for you every day, but also into eternal life. Amen.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.