

St. Peter Lutheran Church - Modesto, CA

✠ Christian Education Sunday ✠

September 10, 2006

Sermon by Pastor Johann Caauwe

“But as for you, 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.”

(2 Timothy 3:14-15 NIV)

I recently read that people today change careers more often than their parents changed jobs. I don't know if that statement is true or not, but it makes the point that for many people, their jobs, their careers don't stay the same for very long. It's not common for a person to work for the same company for 40 plus years. If they do, they're certainly not doing the same thing they were forty years ago.

The point is that in today's job market, continuing education is an absolute necessity. If you can't keep learning new skills, they'll find someone who already has those skills to take your place or maybe they'll find a computer program to do it instead. Continuing education is important.

You know, that's really no different for pastors. Already at the Seminary, future pastors are encouraged to take every opportunity to keep learning and growing – by reading, seminars, or extra classes. The point is not to avoid being replaced or so that pastors can “get ahead” and climb some kind of ecclesiastical ladder. The point is that pastors need to keep learning and growing in the faith and Word they are proclaiming.

This is exactly the kind of encouragement we read in this sermon text. It is encouragement from veteran pastor Paul to the rookie pastor Timothy. Paul tells Timothy to keep learning. He tells him to make sure, to make absolutely sure that **CHRISTIAN EDUCATION CONTINUES**. And if Christian education is to continue, it will continue through **people** who teach, through the **power** of the Word, and through the **present** and into the future.

Paul was thinking about the future, but as he was writing this letter, I think his mind was also on the past. This second letter that Paul wrote to Timothy is the very last letter of Paul that we have recorded. He wrote this letter while he was in prison for the last time in Rome. He was probably chained in some sort of cell or dungeon and he knew that his life was nearly over. So his mind was on the past. Even as he instructs Timothy how to carry out his future ministry, he tells him to think about where he came from. **“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it.”**

Don't you remember, Timothy, how you grew up? Paul says, “I do.” In chapter one of this letter, Paul also wrote, **“I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.”** Don't you remember, Timothy, how your Mom and Grandma taught you about Jesus, even though your Gentile Dad didn't really want to have anything to do with it? You know those from whom you learned it, **“and [Paul continues] how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”** Your mother

and grandmother taught you – and now look at you. Now that faith is in you. Now you are wise for salvation.

But go back. Go back earlier. Because you weren't always that way. That's not the way you were born. You were born with all the sinful characteristics of your Mom and Dad. You were wise, for sure, but not for salvation. No one had to teach baby Timothy true selfishness: how to say "mine" and really mean it. No one had to teach you to be a naughty boy. And as you got older, no one had to show you how to lie; or how to want what feels good right now. And even as an adult, you didn't need any lessons on filling your mind with greed or lust or envy. That's just the way you were. And sin came naturally.

But to know Jesus – someone had to teach you that. To know and believe that *Jesus your Savior washed away all that you've done wrong today* – someone taught you that. Someone had to teach you that because Jesus has covered the filth of your sin with the robe of his righteousness – well, now you can show your thanks by doing what God wants. Those things had to be taught.

For Timothy it was his mother and grandmother. Who was it for you? Was it Mom or Dad, or Grandma or Grandpa who folded your tiny toddler hands and taught you to pray? Or was it the Sunday School teacher who used flannel board and had a knack for telling stories in a way that you could understand them? Or was it a pastor who patiently led you through the ABCs of the Christian faith in the lessons of a Bible Information Class?

They may not have been great scholars or master teachers. It wasn't easy work or glorious work or high-paying work. In fact, it might have seemed (at the time) to be doing no good at all. Someone might have even said that the work was not worth the time or money.

But in order for you to come to faith or to grow in your faith and knowledge of the Word of God – that work was absolutely essential. If Christian education is to continue, there must be people to teach it. And since "you know those from whom you learn it", you know that those people aren't that much different than you. Perhaps you could be the teacher.

But if it were all up to the teachers, Christian education would not, could not continue. All of the educational theory and practice in the world, all of the money or the staff or the facilities we could dream up wouldn't do us any good in the task of Christian education. You see, that's because we're not just talking the impartation of information here. We're talking about the eternal welfare of souls. And because these souls are by nature doomed to hell; they're dead in sin and blind to the truth and enemies of Almighty God. Well, then, we need something that can bring the dead to life and make the blind see and bring about reconciliation with God.

"from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." God's Holy Word is the only the thing that is able to do that. And Paul reminded Timothy that those are the letters, the words that he grew up with. And those words save you.

God's Word is powerful to convert the heart of an unbeliever. It is powerful enough to change a fool who says there is no God into one who wisely says, "The Lord is God and there is no other."

God's Word is powerful enough to work in the hearts of people who feel they already know what God's Word says and so they don't need to learn any more. God's Word is able to open their eyes and see new, wonderful things in the Word that they never knew before, never even imagined that they could find when they just opened up and studied his Word.

God's Word is powerful enough to to work even in the hearts of children and infants. We know that God uses that power to work in infant Baptism, when God takes a spiritually dead child

and breathes new spiritual life into his new creation. But that same power is at work every time his Word is used. In baptism, all we see is the water. With the Word, all we hear are the sounds. But there, Christian education is continuing, not with measurable results or visible effects, but through the power of God's Word. **"From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."**

And so after he leads him on a trip down memory lane, Paul brings Timothy right back to the present. **"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and become convinced of."** Keep your Christian education going; continue in what you learned from Mom and Grandma; continue in what the power of God's Word has worked in you.

Keep going, because there's more. You can never completely master the Scriptures. You can never plumb the depths of God's love for you, shown in his masterful plan for your salvation. You can never exhaust the riches of Christ's mercy, in whatever situation you find yourself in life.

There is always more. There is more forgiveness, more comfort. There is more power to strengthen your trust and confidence in time of trial and need, or to strengthen you to fight against the devil's constant temptations. So Paul tells Timothy to continue in his Christian education, keep going, right through the present.

When I read this, I feel like I can really identify with Timothy. Here I am, a young pastor (just like Timothy) and I can look back and remember my mom carrying a frightened little boy into his first Sunday School class. And I watched my Grandfather (not a pastor, but a farmer) remain a student of God's Word right up to the day of his death. And I, too, was encouraged by a veteran pastor and professor to continue my own Christian education through a personal devotional life. I thank God that I can say with Timothy that by the power of God from infancy I have known the Holy Scriptures and because of that I know that Christian education must continue – in me, in you – through the present and into the future.

But if Christian education is to continue into the future, it has to start in the present. If it is to continue to our children it must continue with us. Because we are their teachers. All of us, whether we are parents or not, are God's instruments to make known the Scriptures to the infants, the toddlers, the boys and girls, the teenagers. Even if you are not their Sunday School teacher, you teach them every Sunday when you come to worship your Savior. They hear you singing and praying. You teach them when you give your first-fruits to support the ministry of the congregation. They're watching and learning – not just for your example. But your gifts help to provide for things like cradle roll, Sunday School, or a Lutheran Elementary School, where God's powerful Word is proclaimed to the next generation. You teach them when you continue your Christian education through Bible study. They're noticing that learning about Jesus doesn't end when Sunday School stops or when confirmation is complete. Christian Education Continues – not just through parents; not just through pastors and teachers, but through all of us.

Today marks a new year of Sunday School and a brand-new round of Bible classes here at St. Peter. Perhaps this is a good time to refocus our attention on our Christian education. So let's look back. Let's remember how God used the people in our lives to teach us about Jesus. Let's remember how he used his powerful Word to work the miracle of faith in our hearts. But then let's look forward; let's continue: in what we have learned and become convinced of. Let's let Christian education continue – in us and in our children; through the present and into the future. Amen.