

“Continue – Learn – Believe – Know – Be Wise”

2 Timothy 3:14-15¹

4th Sunday after Easter – Confirmation Sunday

May 15, 2011

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S1 – Text

The text selected for today, the day on which six young people will confirm their faith, is a small portion of St. Paul’s second letter to a young man named Timothy: ***“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”***

S2 – Five Key Words

This small text has five key words on which we want to focus our thought for a few moments. But first, let’s take a moment for prayer: *Lord of the Church, God of our salvation, send Your Holy Spirit among us now, that as we hear we may grow in faith and in service to You. In Your most holy name we pray. Amen.*

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S2a – Continue

Paul writes: ***“But as for you, continue in what you have learned ...”*** There is probably no greater temptation we face, when it comes to our spiritual lives, than the temptation to complacency. Complacency causes a person to think there is no need to be active, growing, renewing, or building up their faith life. Complacency says, “I believe, that’s enough.” “I don’t need to challenge or grow my faith, at least not now.”

The word “continue” in our text implies action. You cannot stand still and be continuing to do much of anything. Imagine the baseball game where the umpire says, “Continue playing,” and everyone just stands there. Imagine the football game and the star athlete is running with the ball. Everyone yells, “Keep going,” why? The only way to win is to “continue.”

That’s true in sports, and in life. The person who sets his or her goal to grow their faith-life every day continues in what they have learned. They will follow the advice of the Psalmist who said: ***“Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”***² That person continues ... learning.

² Psalm 37:4 [Chelsea Hawkin’s verse]

S2b - Learn

Our text says it this way: “ *[continue in] what you have learned and have firmly believed, ...*”

At the time when Paul wrote these words there was a tremendous danger facing Timothy. Paul had been Timothy’s mentor, he had helped him grow in the faith. But now, it was apparent that Paul would soon be put to death for that faith. In fact, Second Timothy is probably the last letter St. Paul ever wrote.

He realized the danger facing Timothy. Young people, like Timothy, are especially prone to consider alternatives to what they have learned throughout their lives.

This is a great problem in today’s world. Our state-run educational system prides itself in challenging students to consider every option before making a decision. In theory that sounds like a good idea. The problem is, it does not really help the student to make wise decisions, in fact, it encourages treating bad and good decisions as equal. For example: the student is taught to consider all options when it comes to their sexual identity. Those who choose a path or lifestyle that the Bible tells us is not right or pleasing to God are praised by the educational establishment. They are said to have made bold choices. In reality, all they have done is chosen a path that ultimately leads to hell and destruction.

Listen to what God, through David says: ***“Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways!”***³

One of the reasons for Confirmation class is to do exactly as the Psalmist declared, to teach you to walk in the ways of the Lord. Continue – learn – and St. Paul says – believe.

S2c – Believe

“[you] have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings,”

The question is, what are we to believe? Our society today tells us, “Believe in yourself.” Again, that sounds good on the surface, but it can only work if you are able to consistently make good, wise, positive, well thought out, decisions. There is a little problem with that, it’s a problem called sin. Sin is our innate ability to do wrong, to make poor choices, to hurt other and ourselves. Sin is our ability to set God’s will aside, to declare our own ideas, our own wants, our own feelings, as more important than anyone or anything else. The technical term for this is “narcissism.”

The reality is, it is sin, and sin separates a person from God. No one, no matter their age, is exempt from making poor and even ungodly choices.

³ Psalm 128:1 [Rachel Kobernat’s verse]

Paul's advice is God's advice. You know the truth, which is found in the pages of Holy Scripture, follow, walk in that truth. Follow the example set for you.

The Apostle speaks of it as that faith which you have had from childhood. The reason for our Confirmation program is to build up and give a firm foundation, to set the stage for a life of faithfulness. With Isaiah of old, we teach: ***“Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.”***⁴

Continue – learn – and believe the truth.

S2d – Know

Next Paul adds, “Know and be wise.” ***“[The Bible is able to make you] wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”***

Interesting, it doesn't say, “We are able to make ourselves wise...” Only the Word of God can give true wisdom. If I focus on me and my brilliance, I'm going to end up in a self-indulgent mess. If I focus on me and my, one of the things I will lose is my ability to love. Real love always concerns itself with others. Real love finds its basis in the Bible. St. John put it very succinctly when he wrote: ***“We love because He first loved us.”***⁵

⁴ Isaiah 12:2 [Luke Anderson's verse]

⁵ 1 John 4:19 [Joey Riggotti's verse]

As we look intently, continuously, learning and believing the truth of the Bible, two things will happen. Our selfishness will diminish – a very good thing. Our ability to demonstrate Godly love, care and concern for others will increase, and that is also a very good thing. That means, our faith will grow, and there is nothing we can have that is more powerful than a growing faith.

Jesus said: ... ***“if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.”***⁶

S2e – Be Wise

As we continue in this faith, learning the truth, believe the Word, knowing the will of God, Godly wisdom is evident in your life. His Word is ... ***able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.***”

Today [tomorrow], six of our young people will give answer to this question: “Will you continue steadfast in this true, Christian faith, and suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it.” They have been asked to give this serious thought. Lord willing, their answer will be, “I do, by the grace of God.” The only way they (or we) can continue in this faith is by the grace of God.

⁶ Matthew 17:20 [Kylie Anderson’s verse]

God graciously promises to walk with us, to strengthen us, to enable us, as we seek His will and grow in His Word. David said as much in Psalm 102: ***“Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress! Incline your ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call!”***⁷

S3 – Flow Chart / Conclusion

As we follow the advice of the Apostle Paul, the advice consistently given in the Bible, we will grow in this positive cycle of faith. Continue, learn, believe, know, and we will be wise, and God will enable us to continue in this faith, even to life everlasting. Amen.

⁷ Psalm 102:2 [Megan Clarida's verse]