

+*Jesu Juva*+

Continuing in the Spirit's Word

II Timothy 3:14-17

Jesus said to His disciples “If you **continue** in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31/RSV). Now Paul writes to his apprentice, young Timothy: “But as for you, **continue** in what you have learned, and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it.” Seminarians and deaconess students, summer Greek students, and Christ Academy students, you are all here to continue in what you have already learned. You are here to continue in Jesus’ word.

You are here to continue what was already started. Who was it for you? Faithful parents or perhaps grandparents who told you the stories of the Bible and brought you to the services of God’s house? Persistent pastors who instructed you in the Catechism? For Timothy it was a faithful mother, Eunice and grandmother, Lois who first taught him the Scriptures. From childhood, Timothy had learned the Holy Scriptures, those writings that made him wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Paul himself was Timothy’s teacher in faith, tutoring him in the workmanship of rightly dividing the Word of truth. Now Paul exhorts Timothy to continue in what he has learned.

Several years ago, the German theologian, Helmut Thielicke wrote a little book reflective of his long experience with teaching future pastors entitled *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*. It is still a good read. One of the maladies that Thielicke diagnoses in theological rookies is the tendency toward novelty as he tells of the first-year seminarian who goes back home at Christmas break equipped with “the latest results of critical scholarship” and ready to set straight the mere “Catechism faith” of the members of his congregation. The Apostle shows a more excellent way. Theological education is not about moving beyond what you learned from those who faithfully taught you God’s Word but by growing deeper into the Scriptures.

Seminary exists to immerse you in the Holy Scriptures because the Scriptures are breathed out by God. They are inspired by His Spirit. They are His Word with the power to make you wise to salvation through faith in Christ alone. They are profitable for teaching for they impart knowledge of the ways and will of God centered in Jesus Himself, the Word made flesh, crucified for our sins and raised again for our justification. They laid open the mind and heart of God for you, declaring that He is for you in Christ. They function to correct and reprove, drawing us away from our self-chosen and dead-ended paths to the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. They provide our competency for every good work born of faith and directed in love to the need of the neighbor.

It is fitting on this second week after Pentecost that the lectionary provides us with a text that we have come to know as the *sedes doctrinae*, the “seat of the doctrine” of the inspiration of the Bible for God’s Spirit will not be separated from His Word. The Spirit who spoke by the prophets continues to speak by and through His Scriptures. We do not look behind or above the Scriptures to find the Spirit but rather we listen to the Spirit who speaks to us in Christ Jesus and there is no other Jesus than the One proclaimed by the prophets and the apostles. A nineteenth century hymn of non-Lutheran origin says “Beyond the sacred page I seek you, Lord” (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, 235). Believers do not look beyond the sacred page of the Scriptures to find the Lord. The Lord Jesus is wrapped up in the words of the Holy Scripture. To hear their words is to hear Him for He is the very heart and core of the Bible. “The Holy Scriptures therefore are nothing less than the on-going Pentecost miracle” said one theologian (M.Kahler). That is then why we are gathered here at this time and this place, to continue in what we have learned. Or to use the words of that sturdy old prayer, we implore God who has caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning that we may “hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them that by the patience and comfort of His Word we may embrace and ever hold fast the hope of everlasting life. Amen.

-Prof. John T. Pless