

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, May 28, 2024
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“The Faith and Theology”

READING: I Timothy 6:11-14, 20-21 – But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ... Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. Grace be with you.

Last week I spoke to you about my philosophy of preaching. I talked about “The Faith” as the main course of a meal and “Theology” as the hefty dessert to top it off. It is my firm understanding that doing things the other way around results in preaching that leaves most lay people without something to hang on to as they exit the church on Sunday. Today I’m going to make a statement about which some pastors might argue with me. Nevertheless, this is my statement: “The Faith and Theology are not the same.”

I understand “The Faith” to be the application of our knowledge of Jesus and his Gospel and the trust we put in him in our everyday walk as Christians. It is our desire to serve his kingdom and to love others as Jesus loved us. It is our daily struggle to live as He would want us to in a broken, messy, fallen world. It is his grace and the Holy Spirit’s urging that we rely on to proclaim Jesus’ lordship in our lives and in our living.

I look at it this way: “The Faith” is the muscle, the sinew, the blood and guts of Christian life lived in the midst of an increasingly godless, non-Christian society. Our Faith does the daily heavy lifting and work of being (to paraphrase St. Paul in our lesson) “righteous, godly, faithful, loving, enduring, and gentle men and women of God.”

Our “Theology” is the skeleton, the framework on which hangs all of “The Faith”. It supports, shapes, and articulates the work of “The Faith”. It provides the basis for and the impetus to our faithful living. It helps us stand up against the “outrageous winds of fortune” and the slings and arrows of the ungodly. It helps us to stand firm in “The Faith” even as “The Faith” does the work our Lord has called us to. As is true in nature, if a part of our “Theology” is broken, the Christian’s walk is hampered, and if enough of it is broken, “The Faith” itself becomes ineffective and crippled.

St. Paul warns Timothy (and us) to hold on to his “good confession” and to “guard what has been entrusted to your care”. “The Faith” will not achieve God’s calling if the “Theology” is false or misdirected. The “Theology” is of little use if “The Faith” is allowed to atrophy and be fruitless. Both are essential, just as our body requires both our skeleton and our soft tissues to work in harmony. It’s an interesting fact of physiology: the more the muscles and sinews are used and exercised, the stronger the bones of the skeleton are. The stronger the skeleton, the more work the muscles and sinews can perform. Each strengthens the other.

One more observation: our “Theology” is meant to be an “endoskeleton” – an internal skeleton like our own. It’s not meant to be an “exoskeleton” - an external skeleton like that of a lobster or beetle. There are church groups and sects that use their theology to shield them and ward off contact with other people. The Amish are an example. They have turned inward and use their Theology to shun others and “protect”

themselves from contact with the world. That appears to me to fail in Jesus' Great Commission to "Go, make disciples of all nations..." Their exoskeleton protects them from the thorns out there in the world, but you can't find the lost if you don't get into the brambles. Jesus did not avoid the scratches and the thorns. On the contrary...

St. Paul's charge to Timothy also speaks to us. We need sound doctrine and godly understanding of the Scriptures to undergird what we, "believe, teach, and confess." We also need "The Faith" to put those doctrines and understanding to work for the Kingdom. Both are essential. Both are gifts from God. If you and I are going to "fight the good fight" then we want to build up our "Theology" by increasing our knowledge of the Scriptures and their meaning. At the same time we want to build up "Our Faith" by putting it into practice by pursuing a Christ-like life. May the grace of God be with you as together we serve the Lord with gladness! Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- 1) Pastor Woods will be on a much needed and well-deserved vacation this week, May 27-June 3. He has begun preparations for V.B.S. and so can use our help. He will be in the gym most Tuesday and Wednesday evenings. Come give him your help in whatever time you are able.
- 2) GOLDEN SAINTS LUNCHEON: Next Thursday, June 6, there will be a luncheon after the Thursday Saints Bible Class. You are invited to sign up at the office, then bring a dish to pass. I will provide the meat, the table service, and the beverages. Come, have a good meal and enjoy the fellowship of others of a "Golden Hue"!