

- The Bible Gives Us 1) the hope of eternal life
2) endurance and encouragement for this life
3) and the mindset of Christ toward each other.

⁴For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

⁵May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's Christian Education week here at Mount Olive; it's an important and exciting week, and not just for the kids to talk about during the week at Mount Olive Lutheran school. It's an important week for us all—from young to old, whether you're in MO school, Sunday school, public school, catechism, high school, college, or the school of hard knocks that makes up the rest of your life after school—it's important for us all to focus on learning the Word of God for ourselves and teaching those truths to the next generation—to our children and the young people that make up not only the future but also the present of the Church. **It's important for all of us because you can never really graduate from the school of Jesus Christ**, at least until the day you die. On that day, I guess you could say we graduate, when believers go to be with Jesus. In that sense, lately we've had a number of our dear brothers and sisters in Christ "graduate" from this life to heaven, most recently our long time principal and the man who was called to start Mount Olive School, Mr. Ken Kolander. In heaven, they shall see him face to face, and they shall know him fully and be fully known, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13.

Until the day we die and go to heaven, we only know in part, we only see a little bit with our eyes, we're just scratching the surface, dipping our toe into the Mariana Trench of the **"depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God."** (Romans 11:33). And so during our time of grace here on earth, our blessed Lord God long ago charged us to have what modern educators now call a "growth mindset"—to constantly be learning and growing and stretching our minds toward progress. But more than just self-help and self-improvement and focusing inward, God wants us to learn and grow and stretch toward Him, and His Son, His Holy Spirit, like a plant toward the sun. We're told to **"Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."** (2 Peter 2:18). It's a verse like that which inspires our Mount Olive Motto- *A Family Growing in Christ*.

Our sermon text today gives us both the "content" or the "textbook", you might say, for what God wants us to grow in and learn, and also what the content, the Word, does for us. It's really the "why" or "to what end" of what God wants to accomplish in us through a life of growth. Paul tells us in Romans 15:4, **"Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us..."** (Romans 15:4a). First, what does that mean? (Everything that was written in the past). Does that mean all the books and literature that have ever been written? Literacy (reading and writing) is the subject theme this year for Christian Ed week at school. Should the kids read every book they can possibly get their hands on? Well no, there's been countless pages of ink spilled that are not worth the paper their printed on, or even worse, are things that will lead them away from God. No, Paul clarifies in the next part of the text he's talking about everything that's been written **"in the Scriptures"**—the "Writings," which is the Bible's way of referring to itself.

So the "what", the content, the textbook, is the Holy Scriptures, every word that came from the mouth of God that he wanted written down by his prophets and poets and apostles. We call it *the Bible*, the book of books or writings. We heard in Pastor Gawel's sermon text last week and we heard it again in our opening dialogue today that **"All Scripture is God breathed"** (2 Timothy 3:14) and it's no small feat of the Holy Spirit for us to believe that very thing—that all of the Bible is God's true inspired word.

Then Paul goes on to tell us what it does, and what *the Bible gives us*. **“Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope. (15:4)** Let’s talk first about the ultimate goal of that sentence—that we might have hope. The Scriptures were written to teach us so that we might have hope. Well, hope for what? “I hope the Chiefs don’t win again?” No! And this hope is not talking about just like a nice optimistic outlook on life, like “I’ve got hope for the future, that things are going to be okay.” Paul has already defined the hope he’s talking about in Romans as that which we know is going to come true for us in the future, we’re just waiting for it to happen with the certainty of faith. **“We wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved, but...who hopes for what they already have?” (Romans 8:23).**

So we wait patiently, with hope, because the Holy Scriptures have made us wise for salvation, and so we know and trust that we will receive the inheritance that comes to the children of God. We just don’t have it in hand yet. We’re not in heaven yet, but by God’s grace and preservation, we will be! That hope makes everything in life better, easier to endure. It may be bad now, but I can wait because I know God will work it out for good. We may not understand what or why God is allowing us to endure something now, but we know the day is coming when he will make it all new and perfect again. *The Bible gives us 1) the hope of eternal life*, and that in turn, along with every word and story, every promise, and prophesy, and fulfillment—everything that was written in the past—*gives us 2) endurance and encouragement for this life, so that we make it to the next life.*

Do you realize what we’re up against from now to then? It’s tough out there. There’s so much to endure—aches and heartaches, pain and sickness. Our little Josie gets done one week with pneumonia and barely the next then winds up right back in the hospital with RSV. You’ve all got struggles of your own. It seems like our congregation and our faculty has been going through a lot of late. Your loved one’s health fades away. Another dies unexpectedly. Bad test results come back. Hospitals and ventilators and funerals...and as painful and exhausting as all of it is, Paul says that’s not even ultimately what our struggle is against. **“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against... the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil.” (Ephesians 6:12).**

Our struggle is against the massive onslaught of temptation and sin that the devil and all his evil angels have been launching against us since the Garden of Eden, where he murdered our first parents Adam and Eve, which is what he would like to do to you, and your family, and your children. **He is a murderer intent on your spiritual death, whether that’s to torment you in the midst of your flesh and blood struggles so that you curse God, forsake the faith, die and go to hell, or whether he makes it a long con and lulls you into spiritual slumber and death with a steady stream of Netflix, children’s sports, and work, and then you die and go to hell. Either one is “mission accomplished” for the Devil.**

That is the war we are up against, a war that demands an incredible amount of endurance that we cannot summon from ourselves. We can try to dig down deep within ourselves we will surely find how dry that cistern is. And we can look for one more hit of dopamine from one more 8 second video, but why bother with what will never deliver, when there are springs of eternal life that flow from the pages of Scripture. They never run dry and they are what give you endurance and encouragement in this life to face every temptation and trial you face, with the help and promises of God.

It comes down to basically two approaches, one being, “Jesus loves me, this I know, and this is all I want to know,” and you can let your spiritual growth trail off into a stagnant swamp, or, by the Spirit’s leading, you can grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus, drinking from a steady stream of the words of eternal life. You can learn the stories of salvation and the heroes of faith who went before you—Abraham’s patience, and Job’s perseverance, and at the center of them all, the perfect life and innocent death of your Lord Jesus Christ for you.

Did you know there’s somewhere between like 600 and 800 stories in the Bible? It’s hard to put an exact number on it because it’s hard to tell where one story ends and the next begins. Whatever the number is, there’s more than enough for a whole lifetime of learning and committing them to mind and heart. And of course you can’t learn them all at once, any more than you can take a sip from a fire hose. But you can learn them a little at

a time, even from infancy like Pastor Timothy in the Bible learned the Scriptures from his mother and grandmother, which made him wise for salvation. My son Teddy's baby Bible has about 25 stories in it. Josie's preschooler Bible is up to about 100 stories. By the time the 8th graders are done with the Christ Light curriculum in school, it's about 200 Bible stories they've learned a little more in depth. Sometimes, when we're reading the Bible reading plan, it still feels like, "Man, I don't know if I knew that one." And you will never know which one is going to be the one that gives you the encouragement and endurance to make it through the next hardship that comes.

I think of the morning after the hardest night of my life, the night Josie was born, and I didn't even have to give birth. She needed to be transported from Appleton to Milwaukee in the Cadillac of Ambulances that they send up from Children's. At that point, we still didn't know hardly any of the extent of what her disabilities would be. On the ride down, I sat in the front seat of that ambulance with Josie in the back in the incubator and cried my eyes out under my sunglasses all the way to Milwaukee, and of all the stories in the Bible, the one verse that was in my brain turning over and over again the whole way was this verse, **"I will not let go until you bless me." (Genesis 32:26)**

It's from the story when Jacob wrestled the whole night with the man that turned out to be God. It was the night before Jacob was finally going to meet his brother Esau, and Jacob thought Esau was still angry and was going to kill them all. Jacob wrestled with God in prayer all through the night and at daybreak God tried to leave the wrestling match. He told Jacob to let go, and Jacob said, **"I will not let go until you bless me."** And God blessed him, just as he has done for Josie and Carissa and me and now Teddy, working everything for our good, no matter how awful it seems during any given stretch.

That's the prayer that eventually returns to my mind every time we go back for the next hospital stay, usually after some loud internal screaming. "I will not let go until you bless us, because you promised that this will work for our good." This is the encouragement and endurance that God has provided for me and for you in the Scriptures, to get us through this life safely to the next.

When God gives you this hope, and endurance, and encouragement, and not just you, but to others around you in a spiritual family, so that you all think and endure the same way, that's when you see people take on **3) the mindset of Christ toward each other**, and grow into a spiritual family, *A Family Growing in Christ*, you might even say. And "Oh, how good it is when the family of God dwells together in faith and unity." That's what we'll sing in our closing hymn today. It comes from Paul's prayer to close our text, and it's the way we'll close today, **"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."** Romans 15:5-6. **To him be glory forever and ever. Amen**

