

The Seventeenth Sunday of Pentecost

September 11, 2016

Prayer of the Day: Almighty God, you have committed to your Church the task of making disciples of all nations. Enlighten with your wisdom those who teach and those who learn, that, rejoicing in the knowledge of your truth, they may worship and serve you from generation to generation, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encourage of Scriptures we might have hope. Alleluia! (Romans 15:4)

Sermon Text: Psalm 78:1-7

The results are staggering. In 2015 a poll was taken of our current religious landscape in America. The survey revealed that one out of every three Americans under the age of 35 claim to have no religious affiliation (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/13/a-closer-look-at-americas-rapidly-growing-religious-nones/>). Let's put it another way: 33 percent of people born between 1981 and 1996, do not have a church home. That means one out of every three people under age 35 do not call themselves Lutheran or Catholic or Methodist or Baptist or non-denominational. So that means 33 percent of people under age 35 are not seriously concerned about how they stand before God.

Maybe those figures do not surprise you. Perhaps one out of three people in your family do not have an active worship life. Maybe 33 percent of your confirmation class no longer cares about importance of the Bible teachings they were taught. Maybe you notice that people over the age of 35 tend to make up the majority of your congregation— and not just your congregation, but congregations in every denomination all across America (<http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>).

Those are sobering statistics. I assume that you see the problem. That is good. So, how do you fix it? I mean, we can share our own examples of how we see these results play out before our very eyes. We can lament how we desperately want the next

Psalm 78:1-7

- 1 O my people, hear my teaching;
listen to the words of my mouth.
- 2 I will open my mouth in parables,
I will utter hidden things, things from of
old—
- 3 what we have heard and known,
what our fathers have told us.
- 4 We will not hide them from their children;
we will tell the next generation
the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,
his power, and the wonders he has done.
- 5 He decreed statutes for Jacob
and established the law in Israel,
which he commanded our forefathers
to teach their children,
- 6 so the next generation would know them,
even the children yet to be born,
and they in turn would tell their children.
- 7 Then they would put their trust in God
and would not forget his deeds
but would keep his commands.

generation to worship beside us. Yet, simply talking about or growing irritated over these results is not going to reverse the trend. You see the problem and you want the answer. So, where do you begin?

If you desire for people to have a relationship with God, then turn to the Word God gives you. By using the Word **WE WILL TELL THE NEXT GENERATION!** *the things our fathers taught us, so that they put their trust in God.*

Our psalm this morning simply asks you: How are people going to hear about God? I know, that sounds like a very basic question, but our psalm is stressing that point. The words for *hearing* and *telling* appear eight times. So, if the next generation is to do the *hearing*, then who is doing the *telling*? Listen to our psalm again: **O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old— what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us.**

Did you catch how the next generation will *hear* the praiseworthy acts of God? People open their mouth and simply tell them. That is how the author of our psalm heard God's serious plan to send a Savior. His father and mother and grandparents and ancestors passed this message down. He pictures people standing in long line. The person at the back of the line hears how God intends to bring them to heaven. That person in the back of the line then leans forward and shares this good news with the generation in front of him.

If you are troubled by the staggering statistics of people who stay out of worship, then where do you start? It starts with you, right? Understand what I mean. The first step is not to think of ways you can **TELL THE NEXT GENERATION** what God has done. The first step is for you to treasure and bask in what God has done for you.

So often, we are tempted to forget that. We can consider Sunday School as some tradition in which we enroll our children. We may think of catechism as a "rite of passage"—and that after your teen is confirmed, we can allow them to decide what they want to believe. Maybe you consider worship as some empty-minded habit— as something you just "do" because you have nothing else to do on Sunday mornings.

Sometimes it is good to remember the reason we are here in the first place. You have a God who was determined to work powerful and wonderful deeds for you. He worked outside the laws of nature and gave his Son to a virgin mother. Every miracle Jesus did, every healing, every request answered demonstrated that this God-man is your Substitute for sin. Then, the LORD accomplished something truly praiseworthy. He put Jesus in your place to bear your punishment for sin so that you are forgiven. God asked for no repayment. He does not need you to earn it. He sent Jesus to die and remove your guilt and shame and disobedience. He did this for you, so that you could know beyond any doubt that heaven is your home.

You know this truth because *your fathers taught* it to you. Look at your church building. 134 years ago (in Clare) /// 44 years ago (in Harrison), a group of believers made the effort to form this congregation. They gave money and lumber and their own

hands to construct this building. I do not know every single motive that went through the minds of those living in 1882 (or 1972). I would safely assume that they built this congregation because they wanted to hear God's Word spoken rightly. They wanted a place to dig deeper into the Bible and take those words in context and apply those words to their lives. They made sure that they stayed in the Word.

Even 134 years ago, they were thinking about you. Their dream was not that this building would only last one generation. Some of those who started this congregation are your fathers and mothers and grandfathers and grandmothers and great-grandparents. They constructed this house of worship so that it could be a place for their family to hear the same saving message they heard. They were thinking of you. They brought you to know their God. Your *fathers taught you* the praiseworthy things God did for you!

For others of you, those who built this church-building are not your relatives. Maybe your family did not pass down the Word of God. Yet, a spiritual father— a family member, a friend, a neighbor, a stranger— took it upon himself to tell you that only Jesus makes you ready for eternal life.

Those are *the things your fathers taught you*. Now you stand in a new generation— with children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren and friends and neighbors and strangers. You know something precious. Open your mouth. Do the speaking, so that they can do the hearing. **WE WILL TELL THE NEXT GENERATION** *the things our fathers taught us, so that they put their trust in God.*

Listen again to what Asaph writes: **He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.** What is the main reason for sharing your faith? *So that they would put their trust in God.* More than that, so that you and your children trust God with all your heart.

That may include more telling than you ever did before. People under the age of 35— my generation— are entering an ever-changing world. Technology changes the way people talk to each other. You can fact-check any Bible question on the internet in just seconds. Politicians and television shows push the boundaries on sex and marriage, relationships and friendships. While education is improving, some learning takes place under the assumption that God does not exist.

This has led some secular philosophers to wonder if we now live in a “post-Christian” world. A “post-Christian” world means that your society does not get its morals from the Bible. People turn away from the Bible and look at their own feelings in order to determine what is right and wrong. If it sounds like I am overstating the case, then listen to the responses given by those age 35 and younger as to why they have no church home: *“Lack of any sort of scientific or specific evidence of a Creator.” “I just realized along the line that I didn't really believe it.” “I'm doing a lot more learning, studying, and kind of make*

decisions myself rather than listening to someone else.” (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/24/why-americas-nones-left-religion-behind/>).

Is it any wonder those under age 35 struggle with regular worship? They are facing moral problems by not looking to see what God has to say! If they do not saturate themselves with the Word, they will stop *putting their trust in God*.

As a congregation, you are not tasked with solving a national problem. God simply instructs you to **TELL THE NEXT GENERATION!** It starts with you. Maybe you are uncertain how Christians address a certain life-issue. What better place to address those questions than in Bible class? Yes, you may never have been a “Bible-class-kind of family.” Yet, to stay out of class because you have never done it before might not be the best reason to stay away from class. Start a new habit and start joining your fellow Christians in Bible class.

If you are a parent with teens, continue nurturing their faith. I mean, after your child is confirmed, can you stop caring for their spiritual welfare? That you will let them decide for themselves what is truth? If that you believe that, then what are you telling them about your beliefs? You are telling them that what you believe is not really important. You brought your teen through catechism instruction. Continue being a parent and bring them to hear their God speak to them. Our congregation will start up a new teen class Sunday mornings beginning in October. Yes, it is something new. Yes, you may never have been in a teen class before. Yet, you hear the statistics about what your teenager is going to face in life. So, provide them with the opportunity to handle challenges through God’s Word. Start a new habit and bring them to teen class.

If your kids are out of the house and you are in your retirement years, you still have work to do! Encourage the little ones here. Ask them what they learned in Sunday School. As young adults and teenagers what they are doing in school, at work, in life. Let them know that you are there to answer any questions they may have when it comes to life-problems and faith.

The results are staggering. 33 percent of people under age 35 are not seriously concerned about how they stand before God. Do not grow frustrated or irritated at those figures. This is why. Because God has equipped you with his Word to tell the next generation!

You start by using that Word on yourself. As you apply God’s Word to your many different aspects of life, you will grow in your appreciation of God’s loving mercy to you. Then moved by the Word, you will make the effort to bring your children— the next generation— to this house of God so that they can put their trust in God.

That is where you begin. If you desire for people to have a relationship with God, then the place to start is with the Word God gives you. By using the Word **WE WILL TELL THE NEXT GENERATION!** *the things our fathers taught us, so that they put their trust in God.*