

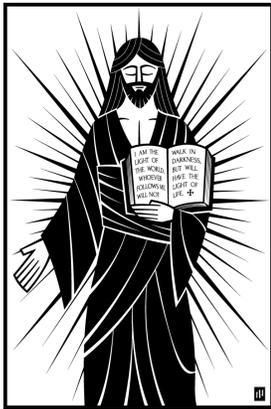
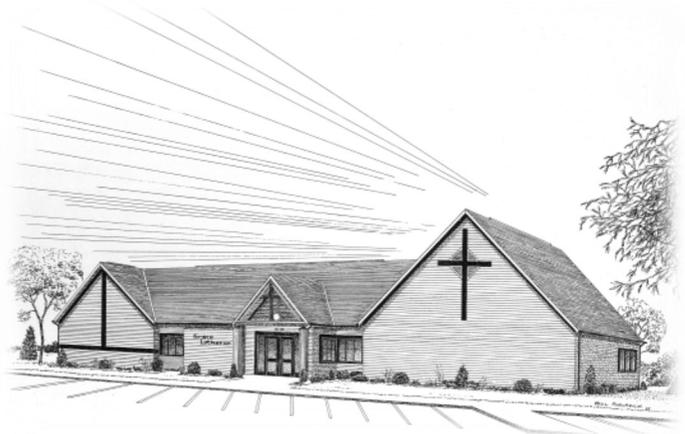


The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
August 10, 2014

Pastor Daniel Naumann

Psalm 1

WHY CHURCH?— TO TEACH YOURSELF



Why Church? Why belong to a church? What's our church's purpose? These are the questions we're hoping to answer during our 4 week study on *Why Church?* What we expect to find may not seem all that earth shattering at first. But when we look at ourselves and at our lives we just might be surprised at what we see.

We're going to start at the heart of the matter. As our Psalmist might say this morning, we're going to start at the root. You see, when we think of a church and its purpose, we might think of educating our children. We might think of spreading the Word of God to others. We might think of offerings and budgets and buildings and bible classes. When we think of church, we think of a place to come on Sunday mornings. But before we think about any of that—before we look at the function of a church or of our own congregation—we have to do some individual soul searching within ourselves. We have to get a little selfish and think about me. As strange as that sounds, that is the place we need to start before we can look at those other purposes of a church.

To put it in different terms, before we can teach others about our church and make sure they are getting the Word of God—whether “they” are our family, our children, our fellow members of this congregation, or our neighbors and those around us who don't know the Word yet—before we can teach any of them we need to teach ourselves. We need to be in the Word. We need to recognize its importance and significance for us. Because if we don't think it's an important priority for ourselves, then the truth is that no matter how hard we work on the other things we will never really do an adequate job of teaching that Word to others and making it a priority for them.

The Psalmist this morning would say the same thing.

The first Psalm of the book of Psalms, is an important one. The book of Psalms is like a personal prayer book for the believer. It speaks in language that we find so familiar to our own feelings and thoughts toward God. The Psalms show us how to talk to God—even wrestling with him through the really tough questions. And this Psalm, Psalm 1, sets the tone for all the others. Psalm 1 shows us two different paths, the path of the wicked and the path of the righteous. The last verse says, “For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” In other words this is the difference between a believer and an unbeliever.

When we read these words as believers, recognize that we are on the path of the righteous. Our delight is in the law of the LORD. We strive to walk in his ways. We know that the path of righteousness is really talking about Christ's righteousness for us. We try to please God not to get into heaven because of our own righteousness, but to say thank you for the righteousness he has given us in Christ. But even we, the righteous or the believer, can stray from that path. In fact, the Psalmist makes it sound very easy to do.

Verse 1 says, “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.” In verse 1 you see a gradual progression taking place. You see, straying from the path of the believer and onto the path of the unbeliever doesn't happen overnight. Christians don't usually wake up one day and decide to become non-Christians. But very often it can happen gradually. First you stray from the path a little bit and you start doing something you know you shouldn't. You take one peek at something you're not supposed to, or you take something insignificant that doesn't belong to you, or you put a job or an event ahead of God and your church just once. And that's how it starts. That's walking in the counsel of the wicked. And perhaps you get straight back onto that path of the righteous, or of the believer. But then the next time the

temptation to do the same thing comes lurking, instead of just taking a detour onto the wrong path you stay a little while. You stand in the way of sinners. You start turning a one-time bad decision into a habit that you make repeatedly. Before you even realize what has happened, you have made your home among mockers, among those who scorn God and despise his Word.

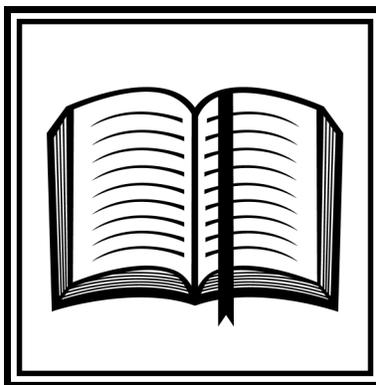
It sounds almost too simple, as though that could never happen to me. I have my priorities straight, so I'm not going to fall into such bad habits. But make no mistake, Satan is cunning and relentless with his temptations. He knows exactly what buttons to push to get you to stray just a little from the path of the righteous. And what's even worse is that it seems like all the odds are against us. Not only does Satan tempt us, but the world tempts us to do things that are not pleasing to God, to make other things in life more important than God—even a job or family. And worse yet, your own sinful nature keeps crawling back to tempt you from within to do these things too.

If this seems like it can't happen to you, I ask you to look at our society and then look at your life. Could you honestly see yourself giving up your job for your God? Could you honestly see yourself putting church attendance before a family event or vacation? Would you really consider your God and your faith to be more important than your child or even your spouse? I don't ask these questions lightly, and neither should you. But rest assured—our God knows our temptations. He knows our situation. He knows how difficult it can be to stay firmly planted by the streams of water that are his life-giving Word. And he does not leave us without hope or help.

In fact, God calls you blessed. This isn't a blessing like we usually think of it. At the end of the service I speak a blessing. I ask God to bless you, wishing you well. But this is different in Psalm 1. Here the Psalmist is simply recognizing the blessing that you already have when you are firmly planted in God's Word. Use the word *happy* instead of *blessed*. "Happy is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." This is a description of what your life is in Christ. You are a believer. And as a believer, who has faith in his living Savior Jesus, you have a contentment and a happiness that the world can't give you, no matter

how much they might strive after happiness through other things. God blesses his children, his believers. He blesses us with promises that he will always provide for us, through this job or that job. He promises that he will bless the family that puts him first, even if putting him first may strain a relationship. He promises that when we come to him in his Word he gives us a peace of mind in knowing our Savior that we couldn't find even on the most relaxing vacation. His peace is a peace from God that transcends our human understanding. It's a peace with God, a peace you can find nowhere else, and peace that releases your eternal soul and places it firmly in the hands of your Savior.

And how do we know that these promises are real and valid? We know that God will keep every one of those promises because he sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. He didn't spare his one and only Son whom he loved because he loves us just as much. And where do you find these promises? How do you get reassured of them again? Where do you find Christ and the true love of God and what it drove him to do? We find all of



these things in his Word. The Holy Spirit reassures us of all of them when we plant ourselves firmly by the streams of his holy Word. The Holy Spirit is working on our faith as we meditate on his law all day long. It's the first place we go when we wake up, and the last place we turn before we fall asleep, and it fills our days and changes our lives. It's a habit that we get into, a habit that once formed is hard to break. Just like getting out of God's Word can happen by forming a

habit, so also getting into God's Word can happen by forming a habit. And every time you do it you are strengthened in your faith, your roots grow deeper, and you see a new way that God loves you. And you are blessed when that happens. You are blessed and you are happy.

That's how we are reassured of God's love for us in Christ. We see it in his Word. So why church? That's where we go to learn how to teach ourselves about God's Word. And that's where we have to start. We start with making God's Word and his promises a priority for ourselves. Then, we are ready to teach it to others. Amen.