

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

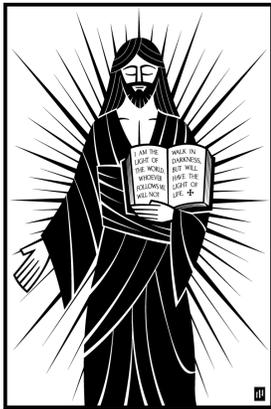
August 17, 2014

Pastor Daniel Naumann

Psalm 78:1-8

WHY CHURCH?—

TO TEACH YOUR FAMILY



Unless you happened to pull out a Bible of your own, you may not have realized that I cut this Psalm a bit short. Psalm 78 actually goes on for another 64 verses after what I quoted to you, although we're really only going to focus on the first 8. Psalm 78 is actually 72 verses long. Why was this Psalm so long? Well the theme of the Psalm is no secret from

the opening verses that I just read. It's a teaching Psalm. It's meant to teach. In fact, you may have noticed that I read at the beginning of verse one, "a *Maskil of Asaph*." A *maskil* is a song that imparts wisdom, or a song that teaches. It's a teaching Psalm. And that's exactly what Psalm 78 focuses on, it focuses on teaching. Why is it 72 verses long? Because it not only tells us the importance of teaching our children, but it actually does the teaching about the history of Israel for those who read it.

You probably are familiar with the hymn, *I Love to Tell the Story*. It's a hymn that proclaims how much we really like to talk about Jesus and everything that he has done for us. But oddly enough, it doesn't actually tell us the story of Jesus and his love. It's only 2 stanzas long, and if it did tell the story of Jesus, you would need more than two stanzas to tell it. Well that's what Psalm 78 is. It says that it will teach children about the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, and then it actually goes on for 64 verses to tell that story to teach those children.

Why go into such detail about the history of Israel in a Psalm? Well, if you read that history you would know why. Martin Luther once said, "We are always only one generation away from losing the Gospel." What Luther meant by that is that all it takes to forget God and his Word is to fail to teach it to your children for just one generation; because if you do, then there is no one who will be able to teach it anymore. It will be forgotten and left untaught for generations to

come.

When you go through Israel's history you begin to understand just how true that really is. Then you have to wonder: is it anything short of a miracle that the Word was taught to them long enough to produce children like King David, and faithful prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah? There were plenty of times in Israel's history when you would have thought that they had completely lost the promises that God had made to them. Times like their wandering in the desert for 40 years after they fled Egypt, when they grumbled against the Lord again and again. Or times like the days of the Judges when the people kept falling away and kept fleeing to other false gods and refusing to listen to the Word of the one true God. Or times like during the reigns of those wicked kings who set up altars to false gods and persecuted the prophets of the Lord. When you recount this history, like Asaph recounts it in Psalm 78, then you know without a doubt that the only reason the Word of the Lord remained in Israel so long was not because the people were so faithful, but because even despite their unfaithfulness God remained faithful to his promises to send a Savior through them.

Couldn't you say the very same thing to us today? Proper Christian education that teaches our children about the one true God is not an option in Scripture, it's a command. The Holy Spirit says to us through the apostle Paul in Ephesians 6, "Fathers...bring [your children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord." It isn't an option or an encouragement, it's a command. Do it, because the Holy Spirit works through the Word, and he hasn't promised to work through anything else. So if we withhold the Word of God from our children, then the Holy Spirit hasn't promised to create faith through any other means, or to bring salvation in any other magical or mysterious way to them. But the sad truth of the matter is that we have enough difficulty making God's Word a priority for ourselves that often times we do forget to impress upon our children the importance of remaining in God's Word.

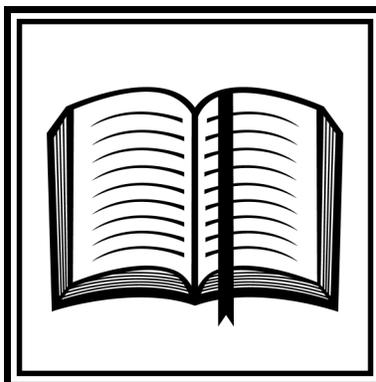
Or perhaps we think that because we don't have kids we're off the hook when it comes to teaching children. Maybe you think to yourself, "I don't have children to tell the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord to, so what does this Psalm say to me?" But that's where your church comes in. At a baptism we, the members of Grace Lutheran Church, make a promise to the parents and to the child before God that we will assist the family in teaching that child about God and the truths of his Word. The service which we normally use says, "Brothers and sisters in Christ, our Lord commands that we teach his precious truths to all who are baptized. Christian love, therefore, urges all of us to assist in whatever manner possible so that *this child* may remain a child of God until death. If you are willing to carry out this responsibility, then answer: Yes, and we ask God to help us." You may not have thought of yourselves as those who teach children about God, but we all have a role to play. Have we thought about that promise and taken it seriously, or have we shrugged it off as part of an old service that we do when we have a baptism and then we don't have to think about it anymore? We're always only one generation away from losing the Gospel, and when we take a look at the youth of Christianity today and at the youth even in our own church body in the WELS, we can see just how eerily true that statement is.

Despite our unfaithfulness in being true to God's Word, God is faithful to all of his promises. That's what Asaph wanted to show in this Psalm by recounting the history again for the children of his day. It's a history that we would do well to remember too, because the truth is it's our history as well. Yes it shows Israel's unfaithfulness and ours, but it also shows again and again the history of God's faithfulness. When Israel wandered through the desert and grumbled against God, he gave them food to eat and water to drink and a leader to point them to the Savior. When Israel fell away and followed false gods in the days of the Judges, God sent a leader to come and rescue them from the enemy and call them back to the Lord to save them. When the wicked kings set up altars to false gods in the days of the kings and the prophets, God always kept a remnant who was faithful to his Word, who faithfully taught it to their children and to their children's children all the way up until a mother and an earthly father taught that Word to "the" Word.

Yes, God was faithful to that promise too. He promised to send his own Son, Jesus Christ, to be born from that remnant of Israel, to take our place and to

learn God's Word for himself as a boy, before he would walk willingly to the cross to die for all of that unfaithfulness of Israel, and all of our unfaithfulness too. God was always faithful to his promises, and that's why we recount that history to our children again and again. Just like God was there to call straying Israel back from their path that led away from the Gospel of God's promises, so also God is still faithful to us and calls us back to that same Gospel of his promises today. He preserves that Word in a miraculous way so that there is never a doubt in our minds when we tell our children about God and his Word that we can say to them, "Thus says the Lord. It is his Word, and that's why we believe it." God has taught us that Word through faithful parents, or grandparents, or family members who have taught us that Word, and he has given us faithful pastors and teachers who proclaimed it to us and who took us through classes at church so that we could hear that faithfulness of our God again.

And we, in turn, tell it to our children. That's what we do as a family. We center ourselves around the



God who is faithful to his promises, who has forgiven our every sin in Christ, and who has promised to give us his Word again and again and to protect us through whatever may come in the future. And he has given us churches to assist in teaching that Word to our children. That's why church, because church is a place we go to teach our children about God. And everyone has a role to play in that teaching. Whether that role is by teaching Sunday School, or

ordering books for the library, or helping to maintain a building with classrooms to teach the children in and a place for families to go during the service where they can still hear God's Word and see the service. Or even if that role is something as simple as providing 2 rows in the back to be convenient and inviting for the families of our congregation, even that is a role to play in fulfilling that promise that we have made to assist in teaching the next generation about the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord.

And by God's miraculous power, his Word is always preserved. He promised to his disciples in Mathew 24: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." It is nothing short of a miracle that God kept that promise to us too, that his Word was proclaimed to us that we may believe and have eternal life. And now, we can teach it to our children. Amen.