

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
June 5, 2016
Christian Education Sunday**

Psalm 78:1-7

Teach the Word

Hymns: 190 – 449 – 745

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

The light glows orange against the dark night sky. Down below, the fire burns fierce as onlookers gather, some in celebration and some in despair. The fuel by which this fire burns is not wood or coal or even fuel. Instead, the flames are stoked higher as books are thrown to feed the hungry flame.

Since wisdom and history have been recorded and kept with pen and paper, massive book burnings have been one way in which people have tried to keep knowledge, ideals, or beliefs from continuing on to the next generation.

And while these large book-burnings might find a place in history books, the fact that they are recorded in our history books shows with irony just how unsuccessful they have been in wiping people's memories. Why? Because the message isn't just on paper. It is recorded in people's minds and passed on not just through pen but also through speech. Even as books are burned, their contents are passed on by those who won't let the message flame out. Our ability to speak and to pass on and to teach is a powerful tool.

Since God first gave his Word to the people of this world, he has done so with a charge, "Don't keep this to yourself." In Deuteronomy, it came in the encouragement to post the Word on doorposts and speak about it in the morning and evening. From Jesus, it sounded in the command to go and teach all nations everything he had spoken to them. Through Peter, it was the assurance that the promise of God's Word was for those who heard it and their children and all that came after them.

And despite this constant charge from God to teach the Word, it has never been an easy endeavor. And that is because the Prince of this World, the Devil has worked in every generation and in every place and in every soul to try to silence the Word. And he uses the powers of this world to make that task of teaching the next generation the Word of God a challenging, even daunting one. Through world rulers that work to silence the Word to majorities that seek to drown out the Word to philosophies that try to disprove the Word, the Devil has often seemed to be successful in keeping God's Word from reaching as many ears and souls as God would like.

But we sit here today, thousands of years after God first spoke to his people and we have the Word of God, in its entirety, in all of its truth and purity. We have that word because prophets and apostles and missionaries and pastors and teachers and parents and friends have heeded the important directive given in Psalm 78:1-7:

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

We have the Word of God, because with resolve and determination given by God himself, we had someone in our lives who first shared the Word of God with us.

Today, another school year at Holy Trinity draws to a close, and what an opportunity it provides us to think about the charge that God has given to teach his Word.

May that opportunity first lead us to give thanks.

Give thanks for parents who take that challenge given by God to teach their children. Parents, you have many responsibilities when it comes to your children, but there is only one which is primary: giving your child the Word of God. Telling them the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power and the wonders he has done is your first job. And when a parent takes that responsibility to heart and gives their children the Word, it is reason for every single one of us to praise God and give thanks!

And while the home is where God wants the teaching of his Word to be primary, he has tasked the church with supporting that work. A church has many tasks to do under Christ's watch, yet just one priority: teaching the Word of God. And as those words from Psalm 78 show, God tells us that laying out his Word clearly to children is at the top of the list of what God wants his people to be doing.

And with many resources devoted to it, and also persevering through challenges to have it continue, Holy Trinity fulfills that command from Christ to teach the next generation in a special way when 140 children come daily to this place to receive a Christian education.

How easy it is for us to overlook the work that goes on here, in the rooms below our feet that we don't often see, on the days of the week when most of us are far away from this place! How tempting to focus on the cost of subsidizing Christian education and wonder whether all of those dollars are worth it!

But to give all these children the Word of God; to daily tell them the wonders of what God in his love has done for them; to show them a Savior that lived and died and rose to give them forgiveness; it is worth every penny; it is worth every sacrifice; it is worth every effort. Give thanks for a church that is dedicated to making known the wonders of God to the next generation.

Finally, give thanks for men and women who have made that work their focus. Specifically in this place, we have been blessed with teachers who work every day to point young hearts and

minds to the wonders of God's grace and work. Today, we take a moment to give thanks especially for Chris Poetter and Carol Cole. Your time teaching here at Holy Trinity has been filled by many accomplishments, but one stands above them all – with faith and joy, you have shared Jesus and his work with young hearts; you have followed God's command to teach his Word.

Today, we give thanks, for parents, for a church and its members, for workers who give the children of Holy Trinity something truly special. We have a school that offers something that the highest places of learning in this world cannot offer: the priceless gift of God's Word. And for that we give thanks to God!

But giving thanks is just one part of what we are encouraged by God to do here today.

As those who have received God's Word, may we also accept the challenge that remains before us. Students of Holy Trinity, you have just spent the past 9 months of your life listening and studying God's Word, and only one question remains to be answered: What will you do with that gift that your parents and this church and your teachers have done so much to give to you?

Will you allow Satan to come and snuff out what you have been given here? Make no mistake, he's waiting for you to leave this place, where God's Word fills your heart and mind every day; where you are surrounded by Christian friends; and he's looking for that opportunity to take what you have received and snatch it away.

Will you keep it to yourself? Perhaps that is easiest in a world that encourages you to speak freely unless you are speaking the Word of God. Rather than expose yourself and face scorn, you can be content that you have the Word for yourself and make it your goal to simply protect what you have.

Or will you take what you have been given, and give it to others? Will you make it your mission, like those who gave you the Word, to give the Word to those who come after you. From his Word taught in this place, you know all about Jesus your Savior and what he has done for you in his love. You have the greatest treasure, and now you also have the greatest opportunity: To share the message that you know!

That is the task that every one of us has been given. We each have the privilege and responsibility of not just holding onto the Word,

but sharing the Word. It is a message that is constantly trying to be thrown into the fire by the devil and the world. But be assured that it can't be done away with. By God's grace, it dwells in our hearts and it is able to be shared by our words. May God continue to bless our work of teaching the Word! Amen.