

## Why does Christian Education Matter?

I have a special treat for you this morning. I want to show you a short clip from a movie. **[show clip here]** This scene is from the movie *Luther*. The man sitting on the throne in front, dressed in gold, was the Emperor Charles V. He ruled half of Europe and all of Spanish speaking Latin America. He was one of the most powerful men alive. The men who lined up looking like kings were the Lutheran princes. They were high ranking nobles. The year was 1530. Charles was sick and tired of the Lutheran Reformation and he came to Augsburg with the intention of putting an end to Luther's preaching and teaching. Luther himself couldn't come because he would've been arrested and killed. So these princes had to make a choice: stand up for the truth or roll over. These men were not pastors. They were not parochial school teachers. They were laymen, people like you, who could've paid a terrible price for standing up for their faith. The emperor demanded that they submit, that they deny their faith and outlaw the Bible. They refused. And then that one prince said, "Before I let anyone take from me the word of God and ask me to deny my faith, I will kneel and let him strike off my head." That's stirring stuff, isn't it? But what does it have to do with today? If you look on the cover of your bulletin, it says that today is Christian Education Sunday. Why I am showing you movies about the Reformation? Because this scene answers the question I want to talk about today: **why does Christian education matter?**

Well, what do you think? When you watch that scene, a number of issues may come to mind and you might phrase your answer differently than I did. But here's my answer: **It matters because we have to live here.** Most of us don't go to heaven on the day we become believers. In my ministry, I have done a handful of deathbed baptisms. I thank God that he made those people believers before their time here was done. But most Christians live for decades after they come to faith. And they live here. In this sinful world. They live in a place where the devil never stops fighting against us. They live in a world where most people don't believe. Jesus said, **"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."** So we're always going to be in the minority, no matter how much we wish that our country would really become a Christian nation. We humans don't like the minority. We don't like standing out in a crowd. So we always feel pressure to conform to what everybody else is doing and saying and even thinking and feeling. That's just human nature.

But Jesus said something even worse: **"If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."** So we're just like those men in 1530 who had to make a choice whether they were going to stand up for the truth or roll over. As long as we live in this sinful world, we will be attacked for our faith. Now, some days will be worse than others. Some days here in America, we might almost forget what Jesus told us. But the wrath of unbelievers never really goes away. And they will always have an ally in our own hearts. Each of us was born an unbeliever. Even though God has given us faith, that sinful nature is still hiding in our hearts, waging a guerrilla war against our faith, hoping the day will come when we give up on Jesus and live for pleasure.

Sounds pretty grim, huh? But even that isn't all. Jesus told us to take up our cross and follow him. What does he mean? The cross is everything in this world that threatens our trust in our Savior. So the cross can be medical procedures and health issues and doctors' appointments. The cross can take the form of financial issues: all the struggles to pay our mortgages and our car payments and our insurance premiums. The cross can take the form of family problems and damaged relationships. It can be all the things that cause you to toss and turn at night – stress at work, attacks by people who dislike you, the car breaking down on the highway. If these things challenge your trust in Christ, they are the cross. We have to live under the cross here.

That's why we need Christian Education. What made those men at Augsburg willing to kneel and have their heads cut off rather than lose the gospel? They had a strong and committed faith. They knew what they believed and they were willing to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away. How did that happen? Christian education. How will you have that same faith? How will you stand up spiritually when health problems lay your body flat on its back? How will you trust in Christ when you lose your job, your house, your savings? How will you remain steadfast in God's Word when our society tries to convince you to go along to get along? How will you resist the natural human urge to conform? How will you stand up to persecution? Through faith strengthened by Christian Education.

But is it too late for you? Some of us here today are a little long in the tooth to enroll at Peace Lutheran School. But Christian education is not just our Lutheran elementary school. Christian education is teaching God's people to know the word of God. It's taking what Christ did and said and laying it out so that we understand it and trust it. That needs to happen for every age group in our congregation, from cradle to grave. So Sunday School is a part of Christian education. But so is the cradle roll. And so is adult Bible class on Sunday mornings and the Bible studies we offer on Mondays and Thursdays. The efforts you make in your house to study the word of God alone and as a family are also Christian education. So is catechism class and the *Christlight* classes in our Lutheran Elementary School and Jesus time in our preschool and the religion classes at HVL and MLS.

But all those things are about more than just listing facts. Christian education is about more than being able to win a game of Bible Trivia Pursuit. It's about more than being able to recite our synod's doctrinal positions. In Christian education, God teaches us what Jesus did and why. When he does that, he reaches into our hearts and he strengthens us to stand. If you think it's too late for you, then think about the video clip I showed you. All those men learned to know the gospel as adults. It's true, they were raised as Christians. But they were not raised in a church that pointed them to Christ. Once God gave them that gospel, once he taught them to know and trust it, they were willing to lay down their lives for it. No matter how little attention you have given to this in the past, as long as you live here, you still have time to grow. Come and learn. And take the word home and study it with your family.

But maybe you're wondering if it's too early to start. It's never too early. Our kids have faith and it needs to be fed, because they face challenges already now. The devil doesn't give them a pass just because they're young. And you know what? Right now, we're laying the foundation for a life of faith. That's what God tells us when he says, "**Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.**" What we teach them now will stay with them forever. If you're my age or older, think about the Oscar Mayer Weiner song. That little ditty hasn't been on television for what? 25 years? Yet, we all know it by heart. In fact, when we're old and senile and we don't recognize our kids anymore, we'll still be able to sing that song. Well, if it works that way with something that silly, imagine what we can do when we have the power of God built into the gospel! Imagine the truths our children can learn! And imagine the work God will do in their hearts as we teach them about his love.

That love really is what Christian education is all about. There's one more cross that I didn't mention before: guilt. Guilt is a terrible force in our lives. You probably feel a little guilty right now as I exhort you to be faithful in hearing the word and teaching the word to your children. We all know that we should be doing a better job at that than we are. That's guilt. And most of us have much more serious guilt issues to wrestle with. Many of us have memories that come at the most inconvenient times of things that we wish we had never said or done. It hurts just to think about them. All of us have sins that we wish we could be free of but we fall into them again and again. Then we border on despair. And despair is a tool of the devil. It's giving up and believing that we will never get to heaven because we're just so sinful.

That temptation is there for all of us. But God teaches us that all our guilt is paid for. Jesus died and paid for all those words and actions that we wish we could forget. He died and he paid for all the times we should've been more faithful in studying his word and all the times we failed to teach that word to our children. He died and he paid for every sin that torments us. And then he rose and said that all that sin is gone forever. Christian education is about growing trust in that promise. It's about teaching Christians to know that Jesus is our Savior and it's about laying a foundation to trust, to repent when we sin, to live a life that gives glory to God and to fight against sin and temptation. To do all that, Christian education is about the gospel. It's about hearing that Jesus is our Savior and exploring the breadth and depth of his love for us.

And that's not just for our lives here. It's for the life to come. If we die in despair, we die without faith. And we will go to hell. If the devil or the world or our sinful flesh succeeds in killing our faith, we will spend eternity suffering with no hope of deliverance. If we drift away from God and his word and let our faith die, we will be separated from his love forever, drifting in darkness and hurt. The only way to avoid all that is to renew our faith through the gospel. In times of crisis, our pastor comes to us with that message and strengthens us. He's like a doctor or a mechanic fixing something that's broken. But Christian Education is about regular, preventive maintenance for our faith. Before any crisis comes, God is working through the word to strengthen our trust so that when the crisis comes we trust in him. And when all the crises of this life are over and these

bodies lie in the grave, we will live with Jesus in heaven. And when Christ returns, he will raise these bodies and we will live with him forever. Christian education is about giving us that eternal life. **Why does it matter? Because we have to die here.**

So today, we're stopping and giving thanks for what God has given us here at Peace. He's given us his word and sacraments. He's given us the pastoral ministry to teach and preach and counsel and comfort. He's given us a preschool and an elementary school and a high school to integrate the study of God's word into our children's study life. He's given us a Sunday school and Bible studies and a youth group to continue to explore his Word. He's given us the Word in our own printed Bibles which we can study at home alone and together. And in all that gospel, he has given us the Holy Spirit to make us wise for salvation and to strengthen us to live for him and give a good confession while we wait for the day of salvation. My friends, give thanks to God for that good news, proclaimed in so many ways here. Take advantage of those opportunities and grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Support that work with your time and your efforts and your financial gifts. And pray that God would bless the Christian education done in our congregation and use it to strengthen the faith of many. Amen.