

## *A Word from Pastor Preus*

Everyone knows that a childlike faith is best. Simple, honest trust in God. That's the kind of faith we want to have. That's the kind of faith Jesus tells us to have. He says, **“Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it”** (Luke 18:17). And so we see also that this childlike faith is the only faith that even saves at all.

But what do little children know? Little to nothing. The bare necessities, really. So is that the kind of faith that Jesus praises? Does Jesus praise a faith that is content to be ignorant of what He teaches? Or does Jesus praise the faith that holds onto His word in confidence that every syllable is true and beneficial? Obviously the latter. And certainly not the former!

Folks like to justify their disinterest in theology (i.e. learning what God's word says) by appealing to their “childlike” faith. *“I know and believe what I need to, and that's all I am concerned about.”* But Jesus compares us to children not as it relates to the ignorance of babies, but as it relates to their eagerness to be filled with more and more and more of the same. This means for us that to have a childlike faith is to desire more knowledge. Consider St. Peter's words as he writes by inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

**“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”** (1 Peter 2:1-3)

*That you may grow thereby.* That's why God has instilled in babies the natural desire to suckle – that they may grow! And then when they have tasted that it is good and beneficial, they want more. This is an important and essential desire for their health and survival. God our Creator is wise.

And so it is with the Spirit-wrought faith that saves guilty souls from sin and death: God graciously implants in us not only a firm trust in His word, but also the spiritual desire to increase in knowledge. We have tasted that it is good knowledge – *saving* knowledge! The same Spirit who works faith and gives good fruit to abound in His Christians also works the desire to keep tasting and learning.

Children hang on the words of their parents. Parents ought to know that they are their children's teachers whether they want to be or not. Children listen. Children repeat. Parents have to be careful. For sinful parents this might be an aggravating feature of kids. But to God who always speaks what is good and true, this characteristic of His children to listen and absorb with open ears and trusting hearts is exactly what Jesus encourages and even requires.

When children get older, it is really only then that they develop that loathsome, lazy, self-assured attitude toward further instruction, as though they have nothing more to learn from you. If left unchecked, this immaturity can last for the rest of their lives. And so we discipline our children when they begin to talk back or roll their eyes or ignore us. We teach them that it is wrong and harmful to behave in such a way. They still have much to learn from their father and mother even if they think that mom and dad are out of touch.

It is this characteristic of children that Jesus condemns – that is, when adults take this childish attitude toward Christian doctrine. St. Paul speaks for God when he writes:

**“Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.”** (1 Corinthians 14:20)

The older you get, the more discerning you ought to become. A baby is weaned from milk and introduced to different foods until he develops a taste for this and a distaste for that. So parents have to be careful what they feed their children. And we need to be careful how we feed our faith. We ought to identify what hurts faith and remain pure. We should have an attitude toward malice and other works of the flesh akin to the attitude a newborn has toward whiskey. Be innocent. Flee temptation. Remove yourself from lust. Hate what is impure. Be children.

But how can we have such an attitude? How can we revert to our childlike days of innocence? How do we resist what we have regretfully developed a taste for? There is only one way. We cling to the word of God, because it alone is pure milk. It alone teaches us who our gracious God is. It alone gives us the purity that we need.

As a child becomes stronger and more active, all the more he needs to graduate from milk to solid food. It's essentially the same thing. Milk has everything he needed. But now he needs to receive his nutrients in a more adult fashion. As temptations in life become stronger the further removed from infancy we are, the more we need to progress beyond the basic principles and learn to digest the deeper things of Holy Scripture as well (Hebrews 5:12-14). This requires that we be mature in understanding.

When we by God's grace come to faith in the Gospel, when we experience the joy and peace of sins forgiven on account of our Savior's death and resurrection, not only do we gain a new attitude toward God who loves and receives us. But naturally we gain a new attitude toward His written word. We do not squeeze the essential tidbits from the Bible in order to be saved and then ignore the rest of it – no more than we could remain on a diet of milk and then ignore the banquet set before us. Impossible!

No, we see in Scripture a treasure trove. We see a feast with more than our stomachs can hold. We see such a wealth of knowledge that we will never master or fully understand. But what a joy to begin. In heaven, the mysteries of Scripture will be opened to us. We will know God even as we are known (1 Corinthians 13:12).

The Holy Scripture are able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every word God speaks is profitable. That is, it's useful. It benefits you. Christian doctrine is relevant and interesting. It is through the hearing and reading and studying of God's sacred word that we are completed by God as His workmanship (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

I would like to cordially invite and urge everyone to take advantage of the opportunities during the week to continue to study and learn God's word. On Sunday mornings beginning September 8, we will have a Bible class going through the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as we find it in the Augsburg Confession of 1530. On Wednesday mornings, we are going through *Good News* magazine, an excellent publication that addresses a variety of important themes sure to be of interest to the Christian living in this world. Wednesday evenings will also provide an opportunity with Pastor Preus to study Bible stories that you may not have heard in a long time. Please consider making this a part of your week. And please invite and encourage others, in our congregation or other neighbors, to come hear what God's word teaches us.

– *Pastor John Christian Preus*