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II Timothy 3:14-4:5  
LISTEN TO THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

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The words of our text sound very familiar or do they? They are one of the readings this morning, but the 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost doesn't always come up each year. There is a very good chance that you learned these words in your confirmation class, but then again it may be a long time since your confirmation. They are used at a pastor's ordination or installation, but that may have been a long time ago as well. In truth the next time it will come up in readings for this particular Sunday is in the year 2040. I probably won't be around to preach it then, so I thought that I would preach it today.

We've been focusing the last few weeks on Paul's words to Timothy, a young pastor. Paul's words were written specifically to Timothy, but they are also written to every pastor, teacher, professor and missionary. And yes, they are written to you and every Christian. They describe very accurately the world in which we live and it's not very pretty. The world is not getting any better. I am convinced that we are living in the last days as every pastor must be.

There is a great falling away from faith. Our Lord Jesus describes the last days as similar to the days of Noah. Now what were the days of Noah like? They were godless days. Certainly there were some great sins and outward enemies of God. But I see them as days filled with plenty of apathy. People just didn't care about God and his Word. Anything and everything else was more important than God. The people viewed Noah as a nut case. God is consistent. He has constantly warned his people about their actions and his impending judgment. He did it with Noah. He did it with Sodom and Gomorrah. He did it time and time again with his Old Testament prophets and he does it today. God will not be mocked. Jesus will come again in judgment. Therefore it is so important for us to LISTEN TO THE HOLY SCRIPTURES!

Paul was writing from prison. Persecutions were coming. They would not just happen to Paul, but they would happen to any and all who followed Jesus. Therefore Timothy and all of us are urged, "Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you have learned it." We need strong convictions. But strong convictions in and of themselves may be good or bad. Paul himself had many strong convictions before he met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. He believed that he could get right with God on his own terms. He believed that Jesus was a hoax and a fraud. He believed that the best way to deal with Christianity was to kill all the followers of Jesus. Martin Luther had many strong and false convictions before he started the Reformation.

Timothy's strong convictions would come because he knew those from whom he learned them. That would include Paul himself. It would include his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. We are to remember our spiritual leaders: faithful pastors, teachers and professors. We are to remember our Christian parents and grandparents who taught us these precious truths.

They taught us the Holy Scriptures "which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." The Scriptures that Paul was talking about here were the Old Testament Scriptures. They pointed to Christ. He was the center of them. Before Paul became a Christian, he had the same Scriptures, but looked at them as a book of rules and regulations. He had to interpret them differently now. Our Lord Jesus said, "They testify of me!" Christianity was not a

new faith. It explained the Old Testament. Everything was there. And now we knew who the promised Messiah was: Jesus of Nazareth!

The Scriptures make us wise for salvation. We Lutherans speak of "Scripture alone." People say that they can worship God anywhere. That is true, isn't it? What a wonderful joy it is to walk along the shores of Lake Michigan or look down from the Smoky Mountains or see the fall colors. The problem with that is that it does not tell us who the true God is. Any religion can find the majesty of God in many places. Only the Scriptures tell us who the true God is: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and only the Scriptures tell us about our Savior from sin. Jesus is not one of many ways to heaven. He is the Way. Jesus is not one of many truths, all equally valid. He is the Truth and anything else is a lie. Satan is the prince of liars and will always try to lead us away from the truth.

We give a lot of lip service to the Scriptures. We praise them, but we neglect their use. We keep our Bibles in mint condition. Imagine a soldier in a foreign land. It has been months since he heard from his precious wife. Now he gets a letter. It's from her and he is overjoyed. It is written on beautiful stationery with lovely penmanship. It is perfumed and he even loves the stamp. What a treasure! He is so excited, yet he makes one mistake. He never opens the letter to read what his wife wrote to him. He misses the real treasure of her words of love. Do we treat our Bibles like that?

All scripture is God breathed. People will say that the Bible was written by men who made a lot of mistakes. True? The Bible was indeed written by men, all kinds of men. You had Moses and the prophets, kings, fishermen, a doctor and a Pharisee. They all had their unique styles. The Bible had many writers but it had only one Author and that is God himself. The Holy Spirit breathed the very words that he wanted to be recorded.

They are useful for teaching. We don't merely teach facts for knowledge. What do you do with those facts? How do they apply to your life? That is wisdom. They are useful for rebuking. They expose and convict of sin. A doctor must diagnose cancer before we are ready to do anything about it. We are all affected by the cancer of sin. It permeates our thoughts, our words and our actions. Who decides what is right and wrong? The world is constantly changing. We've certainly seen that in our lifetimes and especially in the past twenty years or so. God does not change. He is the one who determines what is right and wrong.

They are useful for correcting. When you have a child, you want the child to do what is right. You do so because you love him. You want him to be safe from dangers to his body and soul. They are useful for training in righteousness. We are justified by faith. Jesus has taken care of our greatest need. He has forgiven our sin and given us his holiness. What do we do now? How do we live our lives? There are always those constant temptations from Satan, the world and our own sinful flesh. Paul reminds us that the grace of God that brings salvation "teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age."

We are thoroughly equipped. We have everything that we need. The rich man in hell was told, "They have Moses and the Prophets," in other words the Scriptures. We don't need human reason; we don't need traditions; we don't need miracles. We have the Scriptures alone!

Now Timothy is encouraged to preach this Word! He is not to be a hero, but rather a herald. This is not his message; it is God's. We are to preach what man has done, how we are all corrupted by sin. It affects every aspect of our lives. In our hearts dwell those evil thoughts, lusts, envy, jealousy, selfishness, hatred, anger and contempt of God's Word. We cannot save ourselves. Our sin disqualifies us and we do not have the righteousness that God's Law demands. We have all fallen far short of perfection. The reaching of the Law convicts us.

But we must also and above all preach what Christ has done. In love the Father promised to send a Savior. In love Jesus came into this world, took on flesh and became one of us. In love Jesus took our place, standing with sinners, taking our sin into his own body and paying the ransom price for our sin. In love, Jesus gave us his own perfection. This was God's Great Exchange. Jesus took our sin and we received his righteousness. We are declared "Not guilty!" in God's sight because Jesus has removed all the evidence. And those who believe this have eternal life!

We are to be prepared to preach this in season and out of season. In season means where we might expect it: in the pulpits and classrooms of our schools, in the hospitals and with the shut-ins. Out of season means those places where we might not expect to give a witness, but God give us the opportunity to share his love with someone who desperately needs to hear it!

We are to do so "with great patience and careful instruction." We always want to see instantaneous results. Sometimes we may see them; other times not. Let the Holy Spirit work as only he can. Keep on sharing the same message.

Not everyone wants to hear it. We know that. "For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." Does this describe our nation today or what? Paul distinguishes between what people need to hear and what people want to hear. What we need to hear is "sound doctrine."

People don't want to hear sound doctrine. They don't want to hear about sin and they don't want to hear about a Savior. They don't want to hear about Jesus, at least what the Scriptures tell us about him. They don't want to hear about Judgment Day. They want to hear that they are good people. They want to hear that they are masters of their own fate, that everything they do is good, that they do not have to be held accountable for their words and actions.

And they will go to great lengths to find preachers to tell them what their itching ears want to hear. There are all kinds of preachers and services there to entertain people with jokes and skits. There is no place for a confession of sins. There is no place for absolution. There is no place for a continued remembering of our Baptism and a daily need for repentance. There is no Lord's Supper and there is no preaching of Christ. People love it. It's nothing new. People were the same way in Paul's day.

Don't fall for it! There is only one thing that saves. Jesus Christ, revealed in the sacred Scriptures as the very Son of God sent from heaven to save us. May the Holy Spirit enable us to separate fact from fiction! AMEN.