

“God-breathed”

Meditation on 2 Timothy 3:10-4:5

Oct. 16, 2016

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

10 Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ¹¹my persecutions, and my suffering the things that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured! Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. ¹²Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. ¹³But wicked people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived. ¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. ⁴In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: ²proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. ³For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. ⁵As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

The 4-year olds smiled as they filed into our activities room one Tuesday morning not long ago. They sat down criss-cross applesauce on the rug. Cheryl Carson and I had eagerly anticipated the arrival of the two VPK classes from the MIPC Preschool and Child Care Center. It was our second “chapel” worship of the school year. At the first chapel, Cheryl, our Faith Formation Ministries Director, and I had introduced the song--“Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelujah! Praise Ye the Lord!” After our greeting at the second chapel, one little girl--Sophia or Reina-- called out, “Aren’t we going to sing a song???” It was a perfect segue. “Yes, let’s

sing!” we said. This time, Cheryl taught them the motions to “Hallelu, Hallelu” while I played the piano. One side of the room stood up when we sang, “Hallelu, Hallelujah.” The other side stood up at “Praise Ye the Lord!” Even Nico, who didn’t want to sing at first, fell in love with the song when he got to jump up and down. “Let’s do it again!” he said, giggling. Then, Cheryl read the Creation story from a children’s Bible storybook. The children joined in when Cheryl read, “And God saw that it was good.” When we got to the creation of the animals, Sophia asked, “What about the people???” “Yes, they come next,” Cheryl said. She told them about God creating human beings in His image and breathed life into them. Cheryl led them in a simple prayer in which they echoed the words.

We ended both chapel services by leading the children to make a “prayer train” that began with the words, “We pray for...” Then the children, one at a time, would stand up and call the name of another child. Soon everyone, including the adults, had been prayed for and were on the “train” that carried them back to their classrooms. Along the way, we passed Miss Dolly and her little “bus” of 1-year-olds exploring God’s great world.

It’s hard to leave the children once we’re there. They want hugs. They want us to stay and play. I always spend a little time talking with them. It’s good for them to get to know “Pastor Karen,” though they probably don’t know what a pastor is! It’s also a blessing for me just to be with them. And this is one of the many reasons I knew God was calling me to serve this church when I began to serve here a year ago--because of MIPC’s ministries for children and our desire to serve more families. I

am uplifted when I see the young children's joy for God's Word and their enthusiasm to sing God's praise! But the way they understand and accept God's love and parts of the Bible that adults sometimes question, such as the story of Creation, is a mystery to me! The only way I can explain it is that it's a supernatural thing!

Christians were not the first to believe that ministry to young children was important. It goes back at least thousands of years in Judaism-- to Abraham, when children are included in the covenant with the Lord and circumcised at 8 days old, in accordance with God's Word. Orthodox Jewish families, from ancient times, are expected to teach Scripture to their children beginning when they are 5 years old, but they hear and sing God's Word long before that. Psalm 8:2 says, "Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger."

We know how Jesus feels about the young children's importance in the Kingdom. He lifts them up as models for believers! "And they were bringing even their babies to Him," says Luke 18:15-17, "so that He would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they began rebuking them. But Jesus called for them, saying, "Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all."

Jesus himself is a child, in Luke 2:42, when we read how he engages in serious study of the Scriptures. He is just 12 years old when his

parents accidentally leave him behind in Jerusalem after the Passover Feast ends. They find him days later at the Temple, “sitting amongst the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.”

Paul’s first “school” for faith is his own Jewish family. His father, he says in Acts 23:6, was a Pharisee. Timothy, however, lives in an interfaith family; his father is a “Greek” - not Jewish or Christian, as far as we know. His mother and grandmother are Jewish when they accept Jesus as the Messiah, risen from the dead. Paul says his friend has “sincere faith” (in 2 Timothy 1:5) “... that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.” Timothy, though we don’t know his age, answers the call to church leadership as a youth, urged on by his mentor, who says in 2 Tim. 4:12, “Let no one despise your youth (or look down on your youthfulness), but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”

Timothy’s is not a traditional Jewish upbringing; he is not circumcised until he is at least a teenager. Paul wants him to accompany him on his missionary journey in Acts 16 and fears the Jewish people will not accept him unless he is circumcised. But Timothy has a firm foundation in Scripture and sound teaching nurtured from childhood. In 2 Timothy 3:14-15-- we read, “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing *from whom you learned it* (meaning Paul), and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”

Are you wondering what Paul means by “sacred writings”? The OT is the only Scripture for Christians during Paul’s time and throughout the age of the apostles, though Paul’s earlier letters, such as his letters to the Thessalonians, are ranked with “other Scriptures” as early as 2 Peter 3:15, “Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.” Paul’s letters are written in the 50s or very early 60s-- before the gospels of Matthew, Luke and John and probably Mark, which is the oldest gospel. The expression of “sacred writings” (in Greek--*hiera grammata* with no definite article--no “the”) is found only here in the Bible; normally the word for Scripture is *graphe*, which can mean a book of Scripture or Scripture as a whole.

So how does studying the OT lead to salvation through *Christ Jesus*? The word translated “instruct you” is literally “make you wise” or “provide you with wisdom”-- something lacking in the false and deceitful teachers espousing erroneous doctrine that Paul warns Timothy to avoid. What Paul is saying is that the key to understanding Scripture is faith in Christ Jesus, a faith that is made alive by the Spirit of God.

Paul goes on. “All scripture (now Paul uses *graphe* for *scripture*) is *inspired by God* and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” The Greek word translated “inspired by God” -- *theopneustos*--doesn’t appear anywhere else in the Bible! It means literally “breathed into by God” or “God-breathed.” Isn’t that beautiful? Scripture is opened to our understanding and given personal relevance to us when God breathes into it and gives it life, much like

when He breathed life into us at Creation.

Cheryl and I ran into cute little Sophie from the MIPC VPK class on the evening after our morning chapel. Sophie was the one who wanted to know when God created the people. She may also have been the one to say, "Aren't we going to sing?!!" Sophie was with her parents at the Tuesday night church supper. She entertained Cheryl and me with conversation throughout the meal. Before we began to eat, her mom said it was OK for me to take her picture, but be prepared for silly. And here she is with her parents. Afterward, Sophie enthusiastically helped us sing our grace for the gathering of adults and some children from the preschool and childcare center. With us extending personal invitations to the students, staff and families of the childcare center and passing out flyers to them with the menus each week, sometimes as many people from the center attend the meals as people from our congregation. Wouldn't you like to join us next Tuesday night? Don't you want to meet Sophie and her family--and the other families, too, and show them God's love?

For our grace, we sang the song Sophie learned in chapel when we had read about Creation and how God made human beings in His image-- and breathed life into us! And I thought to myself, that day--the chapel, the meal with her family and her singing the song--it was a supernatural thing. Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelujah! Praise Ye the Lord!

Let us pray.

Holy God of mercy and grace, thank you for your God-breathed Word-- our Old Testament and New-- that teach us all that we need to know for our salvation in Jesus Christ and shapes us into the people you want us to be. Help us to study your Word every day and encourage one another to dig more deeply into Scripture, welcoming the transformation of our hearts and lives and world. Lead us to gather around your Word in small groups in church, such as our women's Bible study, adult Sunday school, and meetings inside and beyond our church walls. And teach us to pray--and to persist in prayer and never lose hope. Thank you for entrusting us to care for the children at MIPC. Please bring us more workers and leaders for your sake for our session and committees, preschool and childcare center, Sunday school, Kids Klub and youth group. Please bring us more children and youth to nurture in the faith and reveal your grace. For your Son says the Kingdom of God is "such as these." Bless our teachers, assistants, directors and volunteers with joy, energy, creativity, patience, and love. Move us to give generously to support and improve our ministries for children, youth and young adults, to take risks, trust in you, and truly be good stewards of all that you have given us. In Christ we pray. Amen!