

**Weekend of Sunday, October 20, 2019**  
**19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 29/Proper 24/Year C**

**Primary Text: 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5**

**Sermon Title: “20/20 Vision – Part 3 – Teach, Inspire, and Prevail”**

## **Theme**

*Paul continues his instruction of Timothy, his younger colleague in ministry, by emphasizing the importance of faithful teaching despite opposition. The time in which we find ourselves is different and yet the same. There is little interest in the things of God and yet Jesus taught his disciples that they must persist in prayer in order to prevail.*

## **Text**

<sup>14</sup>But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, <sup>15</sup>and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup>All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

<sup>4:1</sup>In 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: <sup>2</sup>proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. <sup>3</sup>For 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, <sup>4</sup>and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. <sup>5</sup>As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

## Sermon

Most of our long-time members are aware of our history, but just to bring us all up to the same level of awareness, I want to remind you that Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church was formed back in 1810 in Canfield and moved to the southwest corner of Cornersburg in 1899 and to this current location in 1956. For over two-hundred years now, the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been retold with a Lutheran perspective.

One time I asked how long Food Distribution has been going on as an outreach ministry of Zion, and no one seems to know, but it has been a long time.

I do know for a fact that this year we will host the 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Live Nativity.

Over the more than two-hundred year history, countless children have gone through our Sunday School and Confirmation program and thousands of children have been cared for and taught in our Preschool and Daycare.

Over the more than two-hundred year history, thousands of people have had their faith nurtured here through Sunday School, and discipleship classes. Thousands have worshiped God revealed in Jesus Christ in this and our predecessor sanctuaries.

Though the oldest records were lost in the fires of our first two log cabin-like church structures in Canfield, no doubt hundreds of marriages have been solemnized and hundreds of babies and others have been baptized at Zion.

That work, if we want to call it work, has been done by countless Zion Lutherans who were inspired by the Holy Spirit to do that work. Yes, they were inspired to do it but if you will allow me to speak for them, they also did what they did out of a thankful response for all that God has done for them. How can I know that? That's easy. It is how God works and it has been that way for thousands of years throughout our Jewish and Hebrew roots to Jesus himself teaching his disciples and then in turn, they teaching others right up to this present day. You and I are just the current re-tellers of the Gospel and workers in Christ's universal church through this outpost, Zion Lutheran Church.

I hope you feel lifted up and encouraged by all that history and can see a clear future for this old church and for the continuation of its ministry to thousands more as we continue our Annual Stewardship Campaign, entitled, "20/20 Vision." Today in part three of the campaign, we will see how instruction in the apostolic age is still important today.

The New Testament letter that we know as Second Timothy was alleged to have been written by the apostle Paul to Timothy, Paul's young understudy, whom he left in charge of the fledgling church at Ephesus.

### PIC - MAP

In the First Century, Ephesus was an important sea port on the western coast of what we know as Turkey today. It was a cosmopolitan and multicultural city where people from all over Europe and the Middle East intermingled freely as they did business, and shared culture and religion and ideas freely. The city was controlled by the Romans since 129 BCE and so it is no surprise that by the time of Paul and Timothy, Ephesus had many temples dedicated to the many gods that the citizenry worshiped.

It is not clear whether Paul founded the Christian church in Ephesus, but he did teach out of it for a while and then used it as a hub out of which he could start other churches. At the time of the writing of First and Second Timothy, however, Paul had been taken captive under the order of Emperor Nero, and so Paul left Timothy his young understudy in charge.

Now this is pure speculation on my part, but I imagine that when Christianity was brought to Ephesus it was welcomed because the God of Israel was just another god among gods and everyone was fine with that except Paul and a few other Christians. And as Paul and Timothy tried to grow the Christian fellowship in Ephesus, they undoubtedly encountered a few who came and worshiped the God of Israel, but then went and worshiped at other temples as well. By the time of these two letters Paul was in fact in prison and so he resorted to write letters to Timothy as both encouragement and further instruction on how to handle the troubles that existed in the Ephesus church.

In the first nine verses of chapter three which you did not hear, Paul wrote that in the future, when "distressing times come" people will wander from the one true faith in God revealed in Jesus Christ and turn in on themselves and others to seek only what they themselves desire. And point of fact, the basic reason for religion in those days was to try to placate and manipulate the gods so you got what you wanted. Paul and Timothy were constantly trying to fight this culture among the fellowship of the Ephesians.

And then in the verses ten through thirteen, Paul encouraged Timothy and the fellowship of the Ephesians, to take notice of and be inspired by Paul's own life of discipleship. He had endured much and remained faithful. He urged them to stick to what they have been taught by him and what they have learned from their study of sacred scripture.

Then getting into the first paragraph of the passage that is our Second Reading, Paul encouraged Timothy and the fellowship to stick to what they had learned since childhood and through their own personal study and corporate study of sacred scripture. In that paragraph he made it clear that sacred scripture is the instruction manual for all Christians and each of them had to be personally responsible for knowing what it said.

Then in the second paragraph Paul reminded Timothy specifically, but then the rest of the fellowship too, of what their job as disciples was. It is so important for you to hear it from Paul's voice that I am going to read it to you.

**I solemnly urge you: <sup>2</sup>proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.**

Yes, it is true, the letter was written to Timothy, the leader of the Christian fellowship at Ephesus, so I could see how some of you might say that this teaching applies to church leaders like me, and that is true. But since Paul himself said

**<sup>16</sup>All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>so that *everyone* who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.**

That passage is in every Bible, not just mine and so I want to remind you that it applies to all of us. Every one of us are to become proficient and equipped for every good work.

At this time, during this Annual Stewardship Series entitled "20/20 Vision" I want each of us, every one of us, to see that it is our shared responsibility to see that this church prevails. And we cannot do that if we are not prepared.

A recent study of the ELCA revealed that its high water mark in membership was five million members in 1988 when it was organized, and has been declining ever since. The study further predicts that it will have fewer than 67,000 members in 2050 and worship attendance of less than just 16,000 by 2041.

"How could this happen?" you ask. Two-thousand years ago Paul predicted it when he wrote:

<sup>3</sup>For 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, <sup>4</sup>and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.

I could run down a list of churches and movements and the names of leaders and televangelists that I think are who Paul was talking about, but that is not profitable. Rather, I return to the real point of Paul's letter.

Come what may, we are to be found guilty of passing on the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Vestments and traditional hymns played on an organ and sung congregationally may not be trendy, popular, or fashionable at the present time, but we Lutherans have been around for over 500 years. And our style of worship has its roots in the apostolic period. We don't continue to worship this way because we lack creativity! On the contrary, we stand behind a long line of Christians who have seen this pattern of worship as orthodox and appropriate.

Within our fellowship, we have numerous members who are lifetime members, and many more who are long-time members. We have several multi-generational families who want this place to be here for their future generations. As an aside,

who knew seven years ago that the Jesse's would be one of those multi-generational families – three generations of Jesses currently attend this church.

**Proposed Vision Statement:**

*To be a thriving congregation vital in the community.*

I told you last week that I don't think God will allow a church to fail that is a "thriving congregation vital in the community" but to be a "thriving congregation vital in the community" takes intentionality and effort and sacrifice. Paul wrote it this way:

*<sup>5</sup>As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.*

**Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

So once a year, the Give Table and I come to you to ask you to do just that, carry out your ministry fully. This week you all received a letter from the Give Table asking you to prayerfully consider your faithfulness. I hope and pray that you do that so that this church will indeed be a "thriving congregation vital in the community" for generations to come. It is worth your investment. And your rewards are being laid up in heaven.

**PIC – MAP**

And this week the Invite Table has a special invitation for you to be evangelists. That program we have been talking about, Saturate USA, is finally organized and we want you to do your part to be an evangelist for Christ and his church, Zion Lutheran Church.

All we ask you to do is take a bundle of little bags that are on the table in Crossroads and deliver them to the homes on the attached map. Some of the bundles only have a dozen or fewer homes, others, like the Brandywine Apartments are larger bundles, but that is because they are so densely populated. And yes, we have permission to distribute there.

There are probably only 75 bundles so each able-bodied family need only take one, provided you all take a bundle. We aren't asking you to knock on doors or even talk

to anyone. Just hang it on the door knob and move on. And let me tell you, if this takes any of you longer than 30 minutes, you are doing it wrong. Will you endure that much suffering to do the work of an evangelist which is your sacred duty?

Next week we will have a guest preacher who is from the ELCA Mission Endowment Fund. Chris Burnette helped us document our own Endowment Fund and now they manage about \$157,000 for us so that at some point in the future the dividends from that fund might fund other ministries out of this church. Chris will introduce the concept of Legacy Giving which is a way that we who love this church can continue to make an impact right here long after we are physically gone.

I've not added them up, but in the seven years I have been pastor here, I've presided over more than one hundred funerals of beloved members. Some did remember Zion in their estates, but imagine how it would help if every one of those beloved members left the church just a portion of their estate to the church. Why if each of those 100 gave just \$5000 of their estate that would be a half a million dollars!

And if any of those members gave a portion of their estate specifically to debt reduction we could pay down our enormous debt and get on with more important aspects of ministry rather than serving the mortgage.

Well that is for next week. Let's conclude with a prayer.

### **Prayer**

All loving and merciful God, we thank you that you are a God who creates and loves and nurtures all of creation, and that you are not a god that can be manipulated and influenced by our phony incantations. However we do ask that through the gentleness of your Holy Spirit, you remind us of the duty of discipleship – to give of ourselves through our time, talent, and treasure, and that we tell others of your great love for them. We pray your blessing on this annual stewardship campaign, and our efforts to saturate a little corner of our community with these tracts and videos so that others may come to know you. We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen