

Tell the Next Generation the Praiseworthy Deeds of the Lord

Psalm 78:1-8

¹ Give ear, O my people, to my instruction. Turn your ear to the words of my mouth. ² I will open my mouth to share a lesson. I will speak about puzzling problems from long ago, ³ things we have heard and known, things our fathers have told us. ⁴ We will not hide them from their descendants. We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders that he has done. ⁵ He set up testimony for Jacob. In Israel he established the law. He commanded our fathers to make it known to their children. ⁶ Then the next generation would know it, even the children not yet born. They would rise up and tell their children. ⁷ Then they would put their confidence in God, and they would not forget the deeds of God, but they would keep his commands. ⁸ Then they would not be like their fathers, a stubborn, rebellious generation, a generation that did not keep their hearts steadfast, whose spirits were not faithful to God.

Christian education is important at St. Michael's. This weekend, another year of Sunday School begins. On Wednesday, four young people (two from St. Michael's and two from Christ Lutheran) met with your pastor for catechism instruction. Over sixty-five years ago, St. Michael's decided to offer Christian education at a grade school level. Over fifty years ago Buffalo Lutheran School began educating children in the truths of God's holy Word. When Buffalo Lutheran School closed its doors, the Buffalo Lutheran School Association continued supporting families who wish to offer Christian education at the grade school and even high school level. Now our association supports families who home school. We're part of the Luther High School association and will continue supporting young people who are educated there. Why is Christian education so important to us? It's because of the word of God that is before us in Psalm 78. The Psalmist reminds us that God has given us good news. It's good news that we treasure. It's good news that we share. And this sharing of God's good news goes beyond those who are present here. It's also for generations still to come. We want all generations that follow us to see God's power and fear him. We want those generations to see his mercy and love him. So we'll follow the Psalmist and tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord.

The Psalmist who writes this word of God is a man named Asaph. Asaph is contemporary of King David. Asaph refers to God's Word as "my instruction." He has been entrusted with this truth and has made it his own. He calls for his hearers to pay close attention to what he has to say. The lesson he is teaching is a difficult one, but it is important that they learn it. Asaph says he writes his lesson in parables and riddles. The Gospel writer Matthew quoted this psalm to explain why Jesus taught the way he did. Matthew writes: *Jesus spoke all these things in parables to the crowds. He did not speak to them without telling a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world* (Matthew 13:34,35). Why did Jesus teach in parables? He used those earthly stories with heavenly meaning to harden unbelievers and to strengthen believers. Unbelievers only dismissed God's Word as worthless riddles that wasn't worth their time. But believers ponder the parable until they could say, "I've got it!" So parables do allow believers the joy of discovering truth.

The psalmist says he's using parables and riddles with his readers. What he teaches in the psalm is hidden and must be revealed by the Holy Spirit. His lesson for God's people is that they are not to be like their rebellious ancestors. So what's the riddle in that? The riddle is why Israel was so rebellious when God had been so good. God had chosen them as his special

people. He made promises to their patriarchs that no other nations received. When they were slaves, he freed them. He used powerful miracles to show how special they were to him. When the Egyptian army pursued them, God opened the Red Sea and provided a dry path for them to escape safely. Any that opposed them learned the hard way that God was for them. It's hard to understand how the Israelites could be so ungrateful for God's goodness. We're only considering the first eight of 72 verses in this psalm. But the whole psalm is filled with comparisons of God's faithful acts and the unfaithfulness of God's people. The history of God's people reveals that by God's free and faithful love he still claimed Israel as his people.

We too should pay close attention. Israel's history was recorded for our learning as well. Paul told the Romans, *"Indeed, whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that, through patient endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we would have hope"* (Romans 15:4). You've heard the saying: Those who fail to learn history are bound to repeat it. And that's true about us. Though Israel's history takes place thousands of years ago, we are made of the same sinful flesh as they were. In 1 Corinthians 10 the Apostle Paul tells us that the stories of the exodus serve the same purpose for us as they did for Israel. Paul writes, *"God was not pleased with most of them. He had them die in the wilderness. Now these things took place as examples to warn us not to desire evil things the way they did...All these things that were happening to them had meaning as examples, and they were written down to warn us, to whom the end of the ages has come. So let him who thinks he stands be careful that he does not fall"* (1 Corinthians 10:5, 6, 11, 12).

One thing that has always surprised me about Israel's history of unfaithfulness is how blatantly obvious they were. While they're camped at Mt Sinai and waiting for Moses to come down the mountain, they convinced Moses' brother Aaron that it was a good idea to make a golden calf image and worship it. Or while God is leading them through the desert with his pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, they start to grumble for whatever reason. As if God isn't going to notice. But then how often do we fall to them same temptations? We would never worship a golden calf. But how often do we fail to keep God first in our lives. We would never let anyone else hear our complaints in life. But have we forgotten that God hears every complaint that we mumble under our breath. He knows every impure thought that crosses our mind. We may think we're all alone and there are no witnesses. But God is always present. He knows every wrong choice we make. We had better learn from Israel's past. Our record at obedience is nothing to brag about.

To make sure the lessons of Israel's history are not repeated by us and by the generations that follow us, we must turn to God with repentant hearts. We must take serious the fact that God cannot be mocked. He's serious about us following his law. Israel's history should convince us of that. Sinful flesh does not allow us to stay on the straight and narrow path that leads to life. So we must return to the waters of our Baptism. There our flesh was put to death. It was buried with Christ. With sorrow over our many sins and with heartfelt faith in Jesus our Lord, we turn from our life of sin. We receive his forgiveness and commit ourselves to following him. We feed our faith with word and sacrament. We make sure our children, and grandchildren are brought up in the same faith. And we make sure that all generations that follow us have the same training in God's Word that the generations before us made sure we had.

That's why we support Christian education. That good news about our Savior must go out to the generations that follow us. We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of our

Lord. Those generations that follow us must see God's powerful acts and fear his powerful wrath. But we also want those generations to see his mercy for us in Christ and love him.

The Psalmist has more teaching for us and generations still to come from Israel's history. The Israelites had God's testimony which should have led them to obey God. They had his commandments and laws that instructed them what to do. God's purpose in giving his testimony was so that a new generation of Israelites and those born in the future might know these things. They would then pass them on to their children, so their children would place their hope in God. They had seen the mighty things God did to save them. Those praiseworthy deeds of the Lord remind us how compassionate and gracious he is. He is so patient and forgiving. These wonderful deeds should have motivated Israel to obey God's commands. They should not have become stubborn or rebellious like the generation Moses led out of Egypt. They did not have a right heart nor maintain a faithful spirit toward God.

In addition to the acts of God we have an obligation to tell the next generation what God has given us in his Word. The greatest treasure we can pass on to generations that follow us is God's love and his power revealed in his Word. We see God's merciful love in not giving up on his rebellious people. He used a remnant of them to carry out his saving plan. And when the time was right, he sent his Son to be that Savior. Our Savior fulfilled every righteous requirement that God's law ever made. He willingly took the blame for every rebellious act ever committed, not only from his chosen people, but for a whole world of sinners. He shed his precious blood on a cross to appease our righteous God. With his glorious return to life we are assured of forgiveness and peace with God.

This truth that was preserved for us to hear is something we must pass on to coming generations. Christian education must begin with us adults devoting ourselves to God's Word. We must fill our souls with that word. We must ponder it, think deeply about it, and keep it in the center of our lives. If you haven't already, please grab the devotional materials that are on small table where you took a bulletin or on the table downstairs across from the streetside entry doors. And use them with your family. Show the generations below us how important God's Word is in your life. It is a sad that during the time of the Judges, several times we're told how a new generation of God's people arose that did not know the Lord. How could that happen? It's easy. The generation above didn't share God's truth with them. That could easily happen to us. We're only a generation away from losing the gospel. A person grows up and decides God's Word is not that important. He stops reading devotions. He stops coming to church. He marries a spouse who does the same. They are blessed with children that are not baptized and are not taught the truths of God's Word. We are now living at a time of biblical ignorance. People simply don't know what God's will is in their life. They care little about what God's purpose for their life. Soon they are lost in time and for all eternity. And the word of God that they hear from a concerned co-worker or neighbor, remains a silly riddle that isn't worth any thoughtful time.

So that doesn't happen to the generations that follow us, keep supporting Christian education. Encourage parents to send their children to Sunday School. When those children become middle-school age, have them meet with your pastor for catechism instruction. As the costs of private education continue to rise, keep supporting families that wish to have their children in Christian schools with your offering to the Buffalo Lutheran School Association. Losing the gospel can happen easily. Preserve it for future generations to come. When we inherit eternal life on the merits of Christ Jesus alone, we'll know why Christian education was so worth it.