



**Pastor Gwen's Sermon
15th Sunday after Pentecost
"The Greatest Book Ever Written"
Sunday, September 10, 2023**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Today, across the country many churches will be holding "Rally Day" in an effort to gather children and get them signed up for Sunday school. Also, today is the ELCA event called "God's Work, Our Hands" where churches are asked to get out into their communities and do a service project. Next week, here at CTS we are going to be blessing the quilts and kits that will be going to Lutheran World Relief. Our Sunday school is underway, and confirmation will start tomorrow afternoon.

Years ago, when the members of Christ the Servant built this beautiful building, that we still enjoy today, the church members had a dream of what it should look like. They got an architect who drew up blueprints listening to their wishes. I found these blueprints in the safe this week. Boy they sure look confusing. Guess I did not have Architect 101 in seminary. Different words and so many lines and angles. The drawings even start with the foundation so the church would withstand storms and be a pillar in this community for a good long time to come. The blueprints have many renderings that show different steps for construction of this building, probably so the contractors could work smoothly in harmony to get the job done. But boy or boy does it look complicated to me. So many details, so many things to understand that most of us could not make heads nor tails out of it. Good thing the construction manager is able to read and understand all the details of the structure so he or she can share it with the many specialty contractors to have a result of a good quality space, our church.

As a church we have another set of blueprints for building a congregation. The Bible is God's blueprint for how we are to live our lives in fellowship with one another. Since God is no longer walking the earth in the person of Jesus,

we need the Scriptures to guide us on our earthly paths. God has specific ideas on how we should be living our lives and to find out what God wants for us; we need to study the Bible.

I think most of you have figured out that I love Bible study time. It is a time when we gather as a community to read, to pray, to study, and to try to understand what God is telling us and share our thoughts with others. The Holy Spirit does the work among us to stir our hearts in accordance with the will of God.

The Bible that the ELCA uses is called the Lutheran Study Bible. It is a New Revised Standard version and has 2054 pages. I do think that most of the outdated King James version language has been rewritten in a more understandable way. Yet, there are still words that we don't tend to use often like justification, sanctification, and absolution still present. There are also references to things we normally don't think about today like tending sheep, carrying a cross or having manna drop from the sky. Even though the Bible is the most published book, in most languages in the world, people seem to be scared off because they have not learned how to read or to study it.

Last Wednesday in Sunday School, we did our first lesson on how to find the book, the chapter and verse in the Bible. As I was teaching that to Miss Mya, I was thinking to myself that maybe some of our parishioners would like such a class as a refresher. Who wrote the Bible, what was the original language, how come the Roman Catholics have more books in their Bible, etc. I am up for anything that allows more people to have a Bible in their hands because I believe this Good Book has all the details and directions on how to build a meaningful life. God shows us how to build our faith on a firm foundation so when the storms come in life, we will be able to hold fast to our beliefs.

The Bible is God's blueprint for living. And I hope that many many children in churches all over this country will return to Sunday school this rally day to sit at the feet of a teacher who will teach them about Jesus and how important the Bible is in getting to know God.

Do any of you remember your days of Sunday school? Fondly, I'm sure with flannel graphs, blackboards and acapella singing. I remember the animal cut outs that the teacher used to show, putting two by two on the flannel board walking toward the Ark. Well, technology has changed, and flannel boards are

a thing of the past, but it is still important for one person to teach another about who Jesus is and how and why we follow Him.

What a shame that as we age, we sometimes get out of the habit of reading the Bible and studying what there is to learn in it. Today our Matthew Gospel lesson is about conflict resolution. And boy could the world use a blueprint for how to handle that! There is so much conflict in this world, Jesus gave the answer to resolving conflict right here in Scripture. Don't you wish that everyone in the world would read and study scripture to learn this method? This is the method that Jesus proposes to his disciples and followers.

First, we are to go to the person that has offended us in private and point out what the offense was, as you believe it. Never really thought of it, but this is so much different than what the world tells us to do. Usually, it is the offender that continues to hurt the one they offend. An example is bullying in our schools which has grown to be a huge issue and not just for our children. It is rarely that the one offended is the one to confront the offender. Hopefully, they will listen to the one offended and then ask forgiveness for the sin against the one offended. Jesus goes on to say that if they don't listen to the error of their ways, then bring witnesses along and confront the offender again. If they refuse to listen, then it is time to bring the matter to the church. And if they still refuse to listen then it is up to God to change their hearts, as he has done, for many a Gentile.

What a great blueprint for resolving conflict! No ill will harbored on the part of either party. No revenge sought. And the matter is resolved. Quite a wonderful way to solve relationship issues, community disagreements and world wars. Folks, this is not the only helpful blueprint for our lives that Scripture shows us. I urge you over the next year to pick up your Bibles and commit to reading Scripture every day. And if it fits into your schedule, join the men's group one Saturday a month at 8:00 am. They will be starting the Old Testament book of Job in October on the 14th. Or stay after coffee hour as today we are starting a new study by Walt Wangerin Jr. on prayer and what Scripture says about it.

Another good way to read the Bible is by coming to worship on Sunday. Guess I am preaching to the choir, as it were, on this topic. We read Scripture from the Old and New Testament and a Gospel lesson every Sunday. Also, much of our liturgy that we sing or say is also from the Bible. Most Sundays I preach on the Gospel lesson for the day and hopefully bring a message that you can relate to in your own life. And I am never opposed to starting a new group to

study anything in the Bible whether they are certain books or a specific topic. The Holy Spirit will guide our discussion and learning together so we can come to not only know what our abundant lives should look like but to also come to know God more fully.

When I was younger, I always teased that I was born with a bowling ball in one hand and a deck of cards in the other. Today, my mantra would be to I live life with the Bible in one hand and my cell phone news app in the other. Luther would be proud, the kingdom of God and the world around us are two worlds that come together for us to live in. That is what a Christian life is all about, learning how to live in both worlds and remain faithful to Jesus.

So, give some thought to joining a small group here at CTS or starting one yourself. Studying and discussing Scripture is so much more fun when you do it with someone. And the last verse of our Gospel reading for today is one that is probably a bit overused. "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." It is a very true statement but only when you gather in Jesus' name. It is then that He will meet you where you are at. So, not at a Brewer's baseball game, but only when you gather around the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Gathering in groups to read the Bible, and to pray to God are places where the presence of the Almighty is felt. Even making quilts or beds or putting kits together where your time begins with prayer and is done to honor God, is where He will meet you.

So, just think about the Bible as our blueprint for a fulfilling life. The time could be no more right with all the war, murder, theft, idolatry, drugs, alcohol, illicit sex in the world today. There is no better roadmap than the Word of God to find direction for our lives. And thanks be to God for giving us His word, Jesus Christ and a written blueprint known as the Holy Bible. **AMEN**