

Dear members and friends of St. John Lutheran,

But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (1 Timothy 6:11-12, ESV)

St. Paul reminds us in his letter to Timothy, his friend and coworker, to *fight the good fight*. Take hold of eternal life. This 'taking hold' is **nothing more than trusting in our Lord Jesus Christ**, and confessing with our lips that He is Lord. We trust in our Lord when we are nourished and fed spiritually. We trust in our Lord when we have God's Word before us at least weekly (preferably daily). One way that we know that we are being fed and nourished by God's Word is that we are **excited to confess with our lips** that He is Lord of our life. Notice that confession doesn't come first. We don't decide to become a Christian, and confess this, so that God can come and dwell within us. No, confession is always **a response** to receiving the Holy Spirit, the new life we have in Christ. St. Paul writes in Romans chapter 10: *because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*

The 'believing with the heart' comes first. This is a gift from our God. In worship each week, we publicly confess one of the Creeds (Apostles' or Nicene). We do this **not** to satisfy the requirements of Scripture, so that God can check-off our name as someone who confessed publicly. We do this because it **bubbles up from a heart that has been changed by a loving God**. We love our Lord, who came to die for us, removing our sins from us. If you're having difficulty confessing the Creeds with joy in your heart, it may be that you're having a bad day or week. But if you continually question the need to confess, may I suggest that you need spiritual nourishment. This doesn't mean that God is not still part of your life; that the Holy Spirit is missing. However, this is a strong indication that you're *spiritually anemic*. Weak faith makes it difficult for us to experience the fruits of the Spirit, including Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control (Gal. 5:22-23). And this affects every part of our life.

The solution is **the means of grace** – God's Word and the Sacrament of the Altar (Communion). We need to be in church **every weekend**, if we're physically able. No excuses, please. We don't make out our weekly schedule, and then fit worship in *if and where we can*. The same goes for Bible study. All of the New Testament and a good portion of the Old Testament can be read in a year by reading 15 to 20 minutes a day. Our hymnal has a Daily Lectionary that gives you daily readings that are tied to the Church Year (see pages 299-304, LSB). We also have weekly organized Bible Studies, led by myself or other members. These are great for people that need encouragement along the way.

The author of Hebrews describes the affects of not being connected to God through His Word and Sacrament this way: *Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable and every*

transgression or disobedience received a just retribution,³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard,⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (Hebrews 2:1-4, ESV). May God lead you to a stronger faith, and a richer and more fulfilled life, by the power of His Holy Word.

Pastor Travis