

*“Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.”*

Dear friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed;

It was just over a year ago, last August, when I was privileged to preach at the Ordination and Installation of one of the ‘sons’ of this congregation, Michael Mayer. Michael was ordained into the Holy Ministry in a congregation that holds some significance for me. It is not the church where I grew up, but it is the congregation where my father was baptized and confirmed. My grandparents were an active part of that congregation. I had often worshipped at that church, for that is where the family went whenever we visited the farm. I knew many of the pastors who served in the past. One of them, Walter Wentzlaff was the father of the pastor who baptized and confirmed me, who married my wife and I, and who preached at my ordination. Those servants of the Lord from the past did exactly what the psalmist says to us today. They told *the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done*. They passed on the truth of God’s Word to my ancestors, who passed on to their children the truth of God’s Word, so *that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments*. I thank God for those faithful pastors and even more for my faithful parents, for all that they passed on has helped me become the servant of God that I am today.

Most of us know that there are times when we must keep to ourselves the things we hear, the things we know, the things we learn. There are confidential things shared with us that are no one else’s business. But there are things that are meant to be passed on, things which are meant to be shared with others. Our text today is a perfect example of this. The psalmist reminds us of God’s command to us to pass it on, to tell our children—and to all those around us—the wonderful things that God has done, is doing, and continues to do for us. We are to pass on to them the good news of God’s love for us, and of His power to save us from sin and death. And on this Rally Day, we remember the importance of sharing with our children and with others this great and glorious message of the Triune God who is at work in our lives, that they might have that wonderful, abundant and eternal life with God that is promised to all who believe in Him.

We all have things that we want to pass on to others. They might be family heirlooms that are handed down from generation to generation. We may have something that is special and valuable to us that we want to give to our children as a great expression of our love for them. But we also pass on more than just material possessions. There are those gems of human wisdom and insight that we teach our children. We might pass on the family history, so that they do not forget their roots. In some families, it is a special skill or trade that is passed down from father to son, so that there have been families who are known from generation to generation for their special skills as craftsman. But the greatest thing that we can pass on, especially to our children, is the knowledge of God, teaching them of the Lord’s love and power at work for the good of the people He loves. The psalmist says: *I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments*.

We are to tell our children about our great and gracious God, because in doing so, we are passing on to them—and to generations to come—a very precious gift and legacy. We give them the gift of peace and hope when we pass on to them what we know: that God, in His mercy, has taken all the sin and guilt of our lives and let His own Son, Jesus Christ suffer in our place as He dies for us on the cross. We give them the gift of life when we share with them the joy and hope we have in the same Jesus, who rose again from the dead and lives to bless us and to bring us to eternal life with Him. We give them guidance for their lives with God and for their lives with others as we continue to share His Word with them. What a difference this gift can make

in their lives! Along with giving them the peace and joy that only God can give, our faith in God also gives us freedom from sin's power over us. J. Edgar Hoover, the former head of the FBI once said that a child brought up in church seldom was brought up in court. That does not mean that the church somehow magically produces children who are saints and who never get into any kind of trouble. There have been more than a few Christian parents who have sadly seen their children turn their back on all they have learned in church and Sunday School and who lived their lives without the benefit of God's loving influence and guidance. There have been more than a few pastors who have watched their children wander from the faith. And there have been more than a few people who call themselves Christians and who claim to be doing what God expects of them, but who are really living under the devil's influence. But that does not change the fact that helping our children to know and trust God does make a difference in their lives. I think that many of the problems that we see in our society today such as growing crime rates, disrespect for people and property, greed, pornography, and drug and alcohol abuse are, to a great extent, related to the fact that God's love and His guidance for our lives have not been passed down from generation to generation. Children are not brought to church and Sunday School and taught what it means to live as a child of God. They are not taught how God's love for us moves us to love one another. They are not taught the difference between right and wrong. And, unfortunately, they learn all too quickly the ways of our selfish, self-centred and sin-driven world. Even worse, they fit into it all too well.

That is why on this Rally Day, we want to give some thought to what we are passing on to our children. We can give our children an education, clothes and any number of luxuries. We can give them the opportunity to be involved in sports; we can let them take piano lessons or whatever. But if we do not share with them God's word and its meaning for our lives, we have denied them what matters the most. We can teach them the facts of life, but are we sharing with them the facts of eternal life? It starts when we bring our children to Jesus through Holy Baptism, but we need to build on that. Our children—no, actually each and every one of us—need hear and study and learn the truth of God's Word. We need that Word to help us understand how we are all sinners, but we are forgiven and free through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We need to learn and pass on to others that our God is with us and working for our good. Our text says we do this *so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.*

Of course we cannot pass on what we do not have ourselves. We need to learn and treasure what God has done for us before we can share it with our children or anyone else. In our Old Testament lesson, Joseph had learned of God's grace and that God has plans we don't always understand. It allowed Joseph to pass on to his brothers the forgiveness he had experienced from God. Jesus expressed that same truth in our Gospel lesson: forgiven, we forgive. In other words, we take what God has given to us, and we pass it on. We teach by our own example. Those lessons aren't always positive. The abusive father who calls himself a Christian teaches by example, but it's the wrong lesson. The parent who says that God and church are important, but who doesn't go, teaches that God really isn't as important as we say He is. If you want to pass on to your children the gift of eternal life, you won't do it by sending them to Sunday School or telling them that someday they should consider going to church. You will do it by sharing God's Word with them; by worshipping and studying God's word together as a family. You will do it as your family tries to live as the children of God that we are through faith in Jesus Christ.

I read an article recently which stressed the importance of people preparing their wills. In our legalistic society, a will becomes a safeguard for a family, enabling the maximum amount of the estate goes to our heirs while eliminating unnecessary estate taxes and court costs. It lets us choose guardians for our children. It gives us an opportunity to designate funds for the support of the Lord's work through the church. It can also help keep peace in the family by removing any doubt as to how possessions are to be divided. It helps us to pass on to our children the things that we want to give them.

If we take care to provide for the physical needs of our family, does it not make even more sense to leave them a spiritual legacy which will be a blessing to them for all eternity? But this is not something we pass on through a will. It is something we need to teach our children, something we need to share with others while we are alive. And the good news is that, by God's grace, this is a truly lasting legacy. It has been said that our children are our only earthly possession that we can take to heaven. As we teach our children about God's love and tell them of the Saviour who died and rose for them; as we bring them to church and Sunday School; as we show them how important God and His mercy are to our lives. As we grow with them in God's word of truth we will be passing on to our children the best gift we can give them, and that is the sure and certain hope of eternal life through Christ Jesus, our Lord. May God help us to pass on this wonderful hope in such a way that our children and our children's children will put their trust in God, keep His commands and have the blessings of life with Him. Amen.