

*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed; and especially you, Eden, on your Confirmation day:

Every time I sit down to write a sermon for a Confirmation Sunday, I start to think back to the day when Jesus sent the disciples out to share the gospel with the lost sheep of Israel. On that day Jesus said to them: **“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.** (Matthew 10:16 - ESV) Jesus knew that it would be hard for the disciples to live as His followers. He knew that they would not be welcomed and accepted by all people. He knew that they would have to make some pretty tough choices as to whether they were going to be faithful to Jesus and all that He had taught them, or whether they were going to be tempted by the things around them and live like everyone else they knew.

When we confirm our young people, I feel a bit of that, too. I feel like I am sending you out as a lamb among the wolves. It isn't that you don't have your church for encouragement and strength. It isn't as if you are going away and I'm not going to see you again. In fact, I do expect to see you regularly. I hope and pray that you, and all God's people, will be faithful in your worship and study of His Word. But I know that you are growing up and that you are now facing new and different experiences in your life. In the midst of many of these things, you are going to realize very quickly that the God we talked about in Confirmation class is not known to many people of our world. There are so many who think Christians are weird because we believe in Jesus Christ as our Saviour from sin and death. And you know what often happens to the people who are different, don't you? They get picked on by the people around them—or even worse, people tend to despise and hate the people who are different. This is especially true of the world's attitude toward Christians. That's why Jesus told His followers: ***If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*** (John 15:19 - ESV)

For you, Eden, this is a special day, because you are going to become a communicant member of this congregation. You are beginning a new stage in your Christian life. You are going to stand up in a few moments and do what countless others have done before you—you are going to make what St. Paul refers to as ***the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*** (1 Timothy 6:12 - ESV) This Reformation Day also gives each of us, your brothers and sisters in Christ, the opportunity to join you in making this confession, as we declare together that we will, with the help of the Holy Spirit, be faithful and true to the God who has redeemed us as His own through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But don't forget that there is a big world out there—a world of *cancel culture*; a world that thinks we would be better off without God and the “rules” of religion. I see the devil working hardest to attack our young people, our teenagers, who often find so much pressure from their friends to do what they want you to do, rather than clinging to what you know God wants you to do. You are going to have to face this challenge. Will you be faithful to God and live for Him, or will you live only for yourself?

That is why I think these words of encouragement that St. Paul shared with Timothy are so important. Paul encouraged Timothy to remain faithful to God even though the world and its temptations were at work to lead him away from God's truth. I urge each and every one of you today to do what Paul says: ***But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*** Continue in what you have learned and believe as you worship the Lord with gladness. Continue in what you have learned and believe, and draw strength from it as you commune at the Lord's altar. Continue in what you have learned and believe as you continue to study that word in bible study. As you cling to God and His promises, the world will never be able to lead you way from His saving truth, and you will know the joy of life we have in the Risen Jesus Christ forever.

In your testimony this morning Eden, you spoke of seeing God all around us, in art and in nature. God does reveal Himself, so that St. Paul says by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: ***“For [God's] invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.”*** (Romans 1:20, ESV)

God has done more to make Himself known to you. You don't remember it, but shortly after you were born, you were baptized. On that wonderful day God declared publicly, for all to hear, that you were His child, part of His family. God made Himself known to you, giving you faith through the Holy Spirit. Since that day you have had the opportunity to learn more and more about God's grace and love for you in Jesus Christ as you have studied His Word in Sunday School, worship and Confirmation classes. Our text says: ***All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*** Through that true Word we know that God created the world and everything in it—which is why we can see Him in it. His Word teaches us His commandments, and guides us in our lives as His people. His Word reveals that God is our loving Father, who works all things for our good. His Word teaches us how to pray and why we should pray. But the most important lesson we learn from God's word is the lesson of the Gospel: the Gospel that shows us our Saviour and tells us all that He has done for us. The bible makes it very clear that we are sinners, and that we deserve nothing but eternal death in hell because of our sin. But it also is very clear that God's love for us is so great that He willingly gave His only Son to die for us on a cross to take away the guilt and punishment that we deserve because of our sin. Just as wonderful is the assurance that the dying Saviour also rose again from the dead that we too may rise to enjoy the blessings of eternal life in heaven.

These are the things that Paul is talking about when he says to Timothy: ***continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed.*** What Paul is saying is this: Timothy, always remember that you are a child of God, that Jesus Christ came into this world to die for you so that you may be set free from the temptations of this world. He died and rose again for you so that you might be free from eternal death in hell and so that you might live forever in heaven. Remember that God loves you and is watching over you, and that nothing can separate you from His love. Remember His word so that when your friends ask you to do something you know is wrong in the sight of God, you will be able to do what is right and pleasing to Him. And keep learning that word, Timothy. Worship the God you have come to know and believe in through the Word of truth! Keep on believing in Him and trust in His promises, Timothy, even if the whole world turns away from Him. You know what is really important, Timothy. ***From childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*** No matter what, don't let go of that Word! Continue in that word of truth, for it will guide you through this life and into the beauty of that life that never ends in the glory of heaven.

All those things Paul said to Timothy, he also says to each and every one of us. Take Timothy's name out, and put your name in its place. Eden, always remember that you are a child of God, and that Jesus died and rose for you. Remember, Brenda, that God loves you, and that nothing can separate you from His love. Remember His Word, Martin, so that you will never be led away by those around you. Keep on believing, David, even if the whole world turns against you.

Reformation Day is a great day for us to say again before God: "I will cling to your truth, O Lord. I will continue in those things I have learned and believed". That's what Martin Luther said. He declared: 'I won't give up the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, even if it means my life. Nothing is more important than this Word of truth!' But the devil doesn't want us to continue in God's truth. The devil doesn't want us to have eternal life. He will do everything he can to rob us of our faith. And the devil is hard at work to keep you from continuing in the things you have learned. When I was your age, Eden, most of my friends went to church. In a Christian school that is still true, but most people know more people who don't go to church than do go. The devil will try to tell you that you don't want to be different. He will tell you that you want to be like everybody else, and if so many other people don't believe, then maybe you shouldn't, either. Don't listen to the devil and the world! Don't let the world move you from God. Continue in His Word. Trust in His promises in Christ. As Paul said to Timothy, so he says to us all: ***But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*** Yes, keep on going; keep on believing. He will help you by His holy Spirit. And, when all is said and done, we will join together in joy in the presence of that Lord who loved us, who died for us, and who is our life forever. Amen.