

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Christian Education Sunday
February 4, 2024
Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl
Firm in the faith

Therefore humble yourselves under God's powerful hand so that he may lift you up at the appointed time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Have sound judgment. Be alert. Your adversary, the Devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him by being firm in the faith. You know that the same kinds of sufferings are being laid on your brotherhood all over the world.

¹⁰ After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who called you into his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you. ¹¹ To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

—1 Peter 5:6-11

Sometimes adults ask children, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Children, has anybody ever asked you that question? And you know the responses. "I want to be a firefighter. I want to be a police officer. I want to be a doctor. I want to be a professional baseball player. I want to be a DEA agent. I want to be a teacher. I want to be a pastor."

Certainly, it is good for children to think about their future careers. But even more important than their future careers is their future character. "What do you want to *be* when you grow up?"

Today we are celebrating Christian education. Christian education isn't just imparting information to others. Christian education isn't just memorizing the 10 Commandments or the Creeds. Christian education isn't just learning about Abraham or Moses or David or Paul. Christian education is power. It is power that equips a person for a lifetime walk with Jesus. Christian education is power that is for our daily lives. God the Holy Spirit molds us and shapes us into the people he wants us to be.

The power is found in the gospel, the good news about Jesus. The power in the gospel is for your daily living. So, what do you want to be? The apostle Peter encourages us, "**Therefore humble yourselves under God's powerful hand so that he may lift you up at the appointed time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.**"

"Humble yourselves." Probably one of the characteristics that has always plagued people the most is insubordination. Ever since Adam and Eve, people do not want to be subordinate to anybody else. Every person wants to be the center of the world. We want the world to revolve around us. Right? It starts from little on. The little child does not want to wait for mom or dad's timetable. No. The little child raises the arms up and starts the whining, reflecting the desire to be the center of attention. "I want you to attend to me *now*."

But that doesn't end the older we get. The words may not be said, but certainly they are thought: "Nobody is going to tell me what to do." That's a really defiant attitude, isn't it? If you are an employer hiring someone and that is the attitude of the individual who is seeking to work for you, are you going to hire that person? No way. That insubordination is not going to fly in the workforce.

So, let me ask you a question. Who are the people you most highly respect? I would guess that the people you most highly respect are those who show a servant attitude that seeks to help other people. It's really hard to respect the person who is so focused on himself and completely oblivious to the needs of others, isn't it? But the person who shows a servant attitude? The person who really wants to help others? The person who wears the cloak of humility? The person who treats other people with respect and value? Ah, that's the person you hold with respect. Right?

That's how God wants you and me to be. And Peter tells us why we can be like that. You see, you don't have to protect your own back. You don't have to make sure that you are the center of the world. You don't have to ensure that you are taken care of. Why not? Because you can rest securely in the certainty that God cares for you. Just look at how servant-minded Jesus is for you. Nothing stood in his way of demonstrating his commitment to you. He went all the way to the cross and empty tomb for you. And if he was willing to do that for you, he's got your back. He cares for you.

So humility is an important attitude, an important characteristic, that God wants us to have. In humility think of others more than yourselves. But Peter gives us more to shoot for. "**Have sound judgment. Be alert. Your adversary, the Devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Resist him by being firm in the faith. You know that the same kinds of sufferings are being laid on your brotherhood all over the world.**"

Peter says, "**Have sound judgment.**" It's actually an interesting picture. It's the picture of having a sober mind. You have all your faculties about you. You think straight. You make rational decisions. Maybe a way of understanding characteristic is to ask what would be the opposite. The opposite of having sound judgment is sending out a text

message that speaks poorly of someone without thinking about how that will hurt that person. The opposite of having sound judgment is losing self-control.

When you hear of self-control, what image comes to mind? Maybe you think about controlling yourself at a party, not having too much to drink. Maybe you think about that bag of candy sitting on the counter, not eating the entire bag at one sitting. Maybe you think about what you say or how you say it. Maybe you think about what you look at, where your eyes look. Self-control is a very important characteristic to have, especially as Christians.

In the book of Proverbs, God talks a lot about the importance of self-control. In Proverbs 25, God says, **“A person who lacks self-control is like a broken-down city without a wall.”** In the Old Testament Scriptures, a city was safe only because of its walls. The writer of the Proverbs says that the moment we lose self-control or we don't have sound judgment, we are like a city without any kind of protection. Throughout the Proverbs, you can see examples of this that can ruin lives and relationships.

God often talks about anger, drinking, lust. He even talks about uncontrolled ambition and spending. Each of those actions can ruin lives and relationships, can't they? But do you notice where it all starts? It starts with you. It starts with self-control. So, Peter encourages us, **“Have sound judgment.”**

Closely connected to that is Peter's encouragement, **“Be alert.”** Be vigilant. Keep a watchful eye. And here's why. **“Your adversary, the Devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.”**

Last week Pastor Pflughoeft reminded us that demons are real. The Devil is real. He's the leader of the demons. He's the one who seduced other powerful angels to join in his rebellious conspiracy against God. Peter describes him as a roaring lion that is hungry. He is constantly on the lookout for a quick and easy meal. He wants us to let our guard down. So, Peter exhorts us to be alert and wake up to what we are really against in this world. The devil wants your destruction. He wants to destroy your relationship with Jesus.

And he aggressively uses your sinful nature to lead you away from Jesus. Do you see how all this fits together? Of all the people I come in contact with, do you know who gives me the most trouble? I do. I have the most trouble with myself. That's why Peter piles these characteristics on top of each other: humble yourselves, have sound judgment (self-control), be alert. Don't pawn your problems off on someone else. Have you noticed how easy it is to push responsibility off on to someone else?

Just watch the news. People kill people. Years ago, when someone killed another person, that person was tried for murder. Now they bring in therapists and blame the murder on a traumatic background. And often times people get off. “They were mentally unstable. They just need counseling. They aren't to blame.”

No. They *are* to blame. It is important to take responsibility for our lives. Guns don't kill people. People do. Windows don't just break and doors get kicked in. People steal. Sadly, so many people don't want to admit that they are to blame for the sin in their life.

But that is fundamental step number 1 in a relationship with God. We need to see that we are responsible for our sins. It's what we admit when we meet here in this church. We admit, “I am a horrible, poor, miserable sinner. I have sinned. I am guilty. I am the one to blame. I am the one who deserves hell. I am the one who deserves death. It's me.”

We need to stop blaming others. Your parents who didn't love you when you were growing up are not the excuse why you aren't loving your children. Things can be different. The cold shoulder from your spouse does not excuse your relentless addiction to images on your computer. Things can be different. The pain you feel in your life because work is hard does not excuse you to numb the pain through a bottle or pills. Things can be different.

We need to recognize that the devil keeps on tempting us because he wants to destroy our relationship with other people and most importantly, he wants to destroy our relationship with God.

The devil knows my weaknesses. And he knows your weaknesses. He is just waiting for us to let our walls of defense down and give in to the temptations. He's prowling around looking for the opportunity to attack. And when we aren't ready, he pounces us and drags us away in his trap. He wants to devour us for eternity.

Pastor Pflughoeft has a picture in the narthex of a ferocious beast about to devour a little lamb. When you leave today, take a moment and look at that picture. That's what we are up against. And by ourselves, we don't stand a chance.

That's why we need Christian education. Because it's only through Christian education, whether it's in Christian schools, in Sunday schools, at home around the devotional table or in the meditative space of your office, in Bible class for youth and adults, it's only through Christian education that we are anchored in the good news of Jesus Christ. Take a look at Pastor Pflughoeft's picture. In that picture you will see Jesus running to save the little lamb.

That's what Christian education is all about. It's all about Jesus. Jesus saves us by crushing the devil's head. The devil accuses you and me. That's what his name means. But Jesus silences his accusations by shouting, “It is finished.” And the devil knows it. Just look at Jesus out in the wilderness. The devil came to him again and again. And yet what

did Jesus do with every single one of those temptations? He kept resisting them. He denied them. Jesus told the devil to leave, and he had to listen.

And that wasn't easy for Jesus to do. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that all the temptations that Jesus faced were real temptations. These were real struggles that he went through. This wasn't like a vegetarian walking into a meat shop. He didn't just walk past these temptations, and say, "Oh, not interested." No, these were real struggles. And yet he resisted each and every one of them.

Why? Because he had you in mind. He knew how we would give into temptations. He knew that we wouldn't live up to the standards of God's holy will. He knew that our sound judgment would be weak at times. He knew that we would give in to Satan's temptations. He knew we were eternally at risk of losing life with God. So, Jesus came and crushed Satan's head. He defeated him.

Satan's power to control you and manipulate you is broken, because the Spirit of the Lord lives in you and shares his strength. Christ shares with you his power to rebuke Satan, and Satan has to now obey you. One little word can indeed fell him. It's the word of the gospel. It's the truth that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. That's what Christian education is all about.

It's the good news that keeps you firm in the faith. **"Resist [the devil] by being firm in the faith."** Resist the devil by being firm in the content of your faith, by being firm in Jesus, the one who crushed Satan's head.

You see, that truth is what forms your character as a child of God. Do you struggle? Do you have hardships? Do you battle against temptations and against impulses? Let me tell you that you aren't alone in those struggles. You have brothers and sisters in faith all over the world who struggle just as you do. And yet what does God do for you through Christian education? Peter tells us. **"After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who called you into his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you."**

God restores you. He forgives you. He establishes you as his dearly loved, redeemed child. He strengthens you so that you are ready to *be* what he has called you to be. And he supports you through the power of his Word. And you in turn will be a good counselor for other people who struggle. As you tap into the power that is given through Christian education, you in turn can be the Christian educator who connects others to the power of Jesus.

My friends, what do you want to be when you grow up? Whatever career path you may have had, or you currently have, or you want for yourself, I pray that what is first and foremost in your heart and mind is this answer. I want to be firm in the faith. To have that characteristic, we need Christian education. **"To God be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen."**