

We are in the midst of a Sermon Series titled "Rivers of Grace." We are using as our theme song "The River." Some days you have to laugh, and I laughed when I received an email this week. I think it was sent to me because of the connection with the word "river."

Seems a pastor was completing a Temperance sermon. With great emphasis he said, "If I had all the beer in the world, I'd take it and pour it into the river."

With greater emphasis he said, "And if I had all the wine in the world, I'd take it and pour it into the river."

And then finally, shaking his fist in the air, he said, "And if I had all the whiskey in the world, I'd take it and pour it into the river." That completed his sermon, and the pastor sat down.

The song leader stood and very cautiously announced, "For our closing song, Hymn #365, 'Shall We Gather at the River.'"

We return to the Waters of Baptism – to the Rivers of Grace. We return because of the grace and forgiveness that continues to flow from this gift.

We draw strength when we faithfully return to the waters of our Baptism, and with commitment and dedication do the things printed on the screen. Please say the words with me:

I will attend the services of God's house.

I will grow in the Christian faith through learning the Lord's Prayer, the Creeds, the 10 Commandments, and holding the Scriptures in my hands.

I will live in the covenant of my Baptism.

I will live in communion with the Church.

I will seek to live a godly life.

This morning we are looking at the second phrase: Holding the Scriptures in my hands.

It is a simple phrase in the Baptism service. "Will you hold in your hands the Word of God? Will you place in the hands of your family and friends the Word of God?" And the answer we give? "We will."

I invite us to look at two questions as an outline for today's Message. We are going to look at a "why" question, and then we are going to address a "how."

➤ **The why question: Why is the Word of God so important?**

- Why do we have Bibles in the pews? Why do we have messages every week based on verses from the Bible?
- Why do we make print copies of "Portals of Prayer" and "Christ on Our Home" available to all who want them?
- Why do we have links on our website to daily devotions like the "Purpose Driven Life Devotions" and devotions from Luther Seminary?
- Why do we encourage daily Bible reading and regular Bible study?

The importance of the Word of God to life is pictured most clearly for me when I see a child beginning the journey of life.

BTW, it is wonderful having so many children in our worship services. Think about it: this is a wonderful addition to our congregation that has been happening over the past couple of years – more kids.

Kids – kids – everywhere kids! Infants and children in worship... More kids for Children's Messages... It is a joy to say that Pontoppidan is a place of kids – kids – everywhere kids.

And we want to make new families feel really welcome at Pontoppidan. So we are working hard on finding a way to have a Staffed Nursery.

That way when kids are being kids they can be brought to a Nursery – a safe and staffed Nursery. There the kids will be cared for and the parents can rest assured in that good care. And the parents can sit down and worship. Parents need that time to be energized and filled for the coming week.

We want that gift for our families here at Pont, and we are working on making that vision a reality. It is part of our emphasis this year to grow in our welcoming and inviting. Pray for the Staffed Nursery ministry!

Back to the main point: I see the importance of the Word of God pictured when I look at infants. At first infants just lay on their back or lay on their fronts. And they cannot even move themselves from their front to their back.

Eventually infants get stronger. Eventually a day comes when someone holds out two fingers, and the infant holds onto those two fingers, and the child is pulled up to stand!

It is almost enough to bring tears of joy to your eyes when you remember a time when you held out your fingers and a child holding onto those fingers came to stand.

- **The first purpose of the Word of God: to save us when we can do nothing and lift us up.**

The Word of God turns us over, if you will. The Word of God holds us up. The Word of God is a power we can hold onto. Martin Luther said: "God's Word! It has feet and runs after me! It has hands and holds onto me!"

But every parent wants to see their child do more than stand in one place. So eventually there is a time when the child stands – let's say there – and the parent kneels over here. The parent does all sorts of things to encourage the movement of the child from there to here.

The delight when the child takes those first steps from there to here. Usually videos of those moments focus on the joy of the child as they realize they can walk. But if you turned the video camera to the others in that room, you would see there is even more joy on the face of the one who receives the child who walks.

- **The second purpose of the Word of God: to encourage us to walk with the Lord.**

From Enoch walking with God to Micah being encouraged to walk with God to Paul cheering us on to walk in the newness of life... God delights when we walk in faith!

Along with this standing up and stepping out, we love to hear infants begin to use words and express themselves.

God loves to hear us speak to him. The example of Jesus: when Jesus lived his 33 years on the earth he addressed God in Heaven as "Abba." Abba was the most personal word of address in the language Jesus spoke during his earthly journey. It was the same word he used as an infant to address Joseph.

- **The third purpose of the Word of God: to give us the freedom and privilege to speak with our Lord.**

The Word of God is important to Christians because it puts us standing on a firm foundation, guides our walk, and gives us the words to use to address God.

That is the "why" question. Now for the "how" question...

➤ **The how question: How are we to hold onto the Word of God?**

Let me share three phrases from a Max Lucado book¹ that speak to this point.

- **The first phrase: You have a Bible? Read it!**

There are many different ways to allow God's Word get into our lives. This week we added two more ways for that happen. I am excited about this! Use this tool!

On the screen is a picture of our website – pontonline.org. If you go to the website and click on the link that says "Read the Bible in One Year," you will be brought to this webpage.

From this page click on the month and then the day and you will be presented with Bible readings – an OT reading, a NT reading, a Psalm reading and a Proverbs reading. Do that for 365 days and you will have read through the entire Bible.

Or, on our website click on the link that says "Listen to the Bible in One Year." You will be brought to this webpage.

Pick the chapters of the Bible you want to listen to and click play. Then grab your cup of coffee and bowl of oatmeal and listen as the Bible is read for you.

If that made no sense to you, good for you! Just pick up your Bible and read it! The first way we hold onto the Word of God is to actually hold onto, or listen to, the Word.

▪ **The second way to hold onto the Word of God? You have a family of faith? Visit them often!**

God's Word comes alive in a family that uses that word on a weekly and a daily basis.

The moment you were born into God's family – the moment you believed and were baptized – you were given some amazing gifts:

- You were given the family name – Christian.
- You were given the family likeness – in the image of Jesus.
- You were given the family privileges – the Kingdom of heaven.
- You were given the family inheritance – eternal life.

God's Word is used and treasured in the family of faith. Visit often with Family members – in worship, in fellowship events, in discipleship events, in mission events. "Since you are his child, everything God has belongs to you" (Galatians 4:7b, NLT).

And the third way to hold onto the Word of God?

▪ **The third way to hold onto the Word of God? You have a heart for God? Listen to your God touched heart!**

Paul writes to growing Christians in Philippi. He tells them: *"God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him."* [Philippians 2:13] That is how Paul defines the growing Christians: "God is working in you!"

The Bible is God working in you. Max Lucado writes about God's Word:

In a late, lonely hour, you read the words *"I will never fail you. I will never forsake you."* [Hebrews 13:5] The sentence comforts like a hand on a shoulder.

When anxiety takes away your peace, you read these words: *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."* [Philippians 4:6] The words stir a sigh from your soul.

So... Our Baptism invites us to live a life where we attend the services of God's house, and hold the Scriptures our lives.

Here is a verse to hold onto this week, from Acts 4: *"The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus."*

May the same be said of each of us this week. Amen.

¹ Max Lucado, Facing Your Giants, pages 95-97