

*“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 complete, equipped for every good work. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

One Canadian television show that has enjoyed some success is the series, “Murdoch Mysteries”. The show is set in Toronto in the early 1900s. Detective William Murdoch is a great detective in the league of Sherlock Holmes and some of Agatha Christie’s great sleuths. He is an inventor, and often finds opportunity to learn from and cooperate with people like Alexander Graham Bell, Nikola Tesla; with architect Frank Lloyd Wright; and with authors Mark Twain, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Jack London. I have always found it amusing how we see inventions in their early stages, such as television and even the internet. Yet most of the time we also hear that these inventions are not likely going to ever be widely used or accepted.

Of course, most of the inventions did catch on, especially television and the internet. If anything, we can’t even remember what our world was like before them. But I must admit that, even though I watch television and even though I use the internet, I do wonder if we would be better off without most of it. After all, what kind of influence has television had on our society, especially in an ethical sense? People debate whether the media—and social media and visual media, in particular—shape our social conscience. When a young person tries to emulate a stunt that they saw in a movie, and dies in the process, we may ask if the film producers should share the blame in his death. When someone commits a crime based on something they have seen on television, wouldn’t we have to conclude that tv has affected them in a negative way? When a group of teens goes on a killing spree because they have been caught up in some radical sites on the internet or in hateful social media, hasn’t the internet affected them in some way?

Movie and television producers excuse themselves by saying two things: one, that the movies and shows on television don’t direct our society, they merely reflect our society; and two, that they are simply giving the people what they want. This sermon isn’t the place to debate this hollow response, but movies and tv don’t really reflect culture—they direct culture to certain ideas and philosophies. The acceptance of homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle in the eyes of so many is driven by the media’s presentation of this. It is also true that movie producers do work to give the people what they want. In other words, movies, television and social media provide opportunities for people to say and to hear what their itching ears want to hear.

It may be bad enough that the media has this kind of approach. But we see the same thing happening in the spiritual realm, and within the church today. Go into any bookstore, and look at the material that fills the ‘religion’ section. At one time, the majority of those books would have dealt with Christianity. But now there are teachings about transcendental meditation; Zen Buddhism, Islam, paganism, new age spiritualism and a whole host of other tenets and beliefs that are so far removed from the truth of Scripture that I cannot even begin to describe them to you. Sadly, many of these things have crept into the church today, too. When Christian churches celebrate earth day, and offer prayers to the earth mother, they are being influenced by the world, not by the Word. When churches consecrate same-sex marriages, they are being led by the world, not by the Word. When churches are more concerned about having a blessing of pets than they are about protecting the life of those yet unborn, we see the influence of the world upon the church.

So often churches fall into the trap of telling people what they want to hear, rather than saying what God wants people to hear. This is exactly what Paul told young pastor Timothy would be one of the greatest challenges he would face in his ministry. Paul says that *the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths*. In the face of that danger, Paul tells Timothy to *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.* People may have itching ears. One translation says that people want to have their ears tickled. I always thought that was a great way of expressing Paul's words. Well, God gives us a lot more than just a tickle. He gives us the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. He gives us His Word, and we cling to that Word for it is our very life and salvation.

We know that we live in an age of relativism, where everyone wants to believe that their particular philosophy and creed is just as true and valid as the next person's. Somehow we have bought into the senseless idea that there are no absolute truths. And we have done this, because no one wants to be wrong. What we think—and what we believe—has to be right, and so we want to hear other people tell us that what we think and feel are indeed correct. This is what Paul was telling Timothy would happen. It's what we still see happening in our world today. We want our ears tickled, not boxed. We want someone to scratch whatever itch we have. We want to be affirmed in what we believe, not challenged to be more than we are. That is especially true when it comes to the message of sin itself. No one wants to hear that they are a sinner. If we sin, then we have done something wrong. If we sin, then we are not perfect. If we sin, then we have failed. If we have sinned, we deserve the punishment of hell. So don't talk to us about sin. We don't want to hear about it. Don't tell me that I am a sinner, and don't try to preach the Bible as literal truth, or I'll find someone who will tell me what I want to hear. Make us feel good. Entertain us with good music and uplifting words. Tell us God loves us. Think positive, and stay away from the hard to understand things like the law things, or those gory ideas of the cross and the death of the Saviour in our place.

You people have it so rough, because you have a stick-in-the-mud, fuddy-duddy preacher who still believes that the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation is the inspired, inerrant Word of God. I cannot scratch your itch. I cannot tickle your ears. I have to tell you what God has said about sin and grace. I truly hope that the very reason you are a member of this church is because you want to *continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it.* We cling to God's Word, not man's wisdom, because it alone is true. We cling to God's Word of sound doctrine, not the myths of the world, because only God's Word has the power to truly change lives.

This coming Saturday the Lutheran Laymen's League of Canada will hold their annual general meeting here at Foothills. The LLL and Lutheran Hour Ministries work to bring Christ to the nations—and the nations to the Church. For many years, their motto was "proclaiming a changeless Christ to a changing world." That is what we do. We cling to the changeless Christ and to His changeless Word. Yes, we may look for different ways and different opportunities to share the word, but we know it is the Gospel, and the Gospel alone, that gives life to us, and to others, as the Holy Spirit works to bring that Word alive in our hearts. Paul speaks of the Scriptures *which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.* That is what the Gospel is: the message of Christ Jesus, who came to give Himself as the sacrifice that covers our sins. It is the truth of a Saviour who destroys death as He bursts forth from the tomb on Easter morning. It is the promise of God that He will forgive us and take us into the life we have through faith, as we, too, rise from the dust of death to live in glory with Him forevermore.

Paul also assures us that *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 complete, equipped for every good work.* Words like reproof, correction and training don't sit well with people who think of themselves above reproof and correction. I guess this is really the part that people don't like. They don't like knowing that there are things that must change because we have drowned the old, sinful part of us in the waters of our Baptism, so that we can come forth in the newness of life in Christ. God's Word confronts our behaviour day by day. It does remind us that we are to love one another and encourage one another. It does remind us that there are those things that are right, and those things which are wrong in the sight of God. And it does rebuke us when we fail. Thankfully it also points us back to our Saviour, and the forgiving love that God has for His children.

Paul told Timothy that people won't always listen to the truth. They won't rejoice in the preaching of law and gospel. They want to have their ears tickled. Thankfully, God offers us a lot more than just a tickle. He offers us Himself, and life in its fullness. Jesus once preached a sermon that, from a human point of view, didn't seem to go over very well. He said to them, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."* (John 6:53-54, ESV) This wasn't something those people wanted to hear. Many of the people who were following him as disciples found this too hard to accept. John sadly notes: *"After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, 'Do you want to go away as well?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.'"* (John 6:66-69, ESV)

People seem to approach their spirituality today as a religious smorgasbord. We take what we want, and we skip the rest. That may be fine at a buffet, but it doesn't work so well in the things that really matter. Don't settle for a little tickle. Get into the Word and hold to it in all its fulness. Through it you will find strength, hope, forgiveness and life. Instead of that tickle, it will give you joy forevermore! Amen.