

Feast of St. Matthew the Apostle

Proverbs 3:1-6

Psalms 119: 33-40

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Matthew 9:9-13

In his letter to Timothy, Paul says that all scripture is useful for instruction and correction. The scriptures Timothy learned from childhood were those we refer to as the Hebrew Scriptures. What we know of as the New Testament were just being written and would not be gathered into the collection we have today for a couple of centuries. Thus, looking at the readings from Proverbs and Psalms might give us some understanding of what Paul was using in his instructions.

Proverbs is not the most common book in our lectionary. It only appears a handful of times and few commentaries have been written on it. However, some of the richest passages we learn as children come from this book. These early chapters of Proverbs are written as instructions from parents. They are given to this child to direct the child's attention to the guidance of Wisdom. This is the teaching we are to look for.

If we really draw God's Word into our hearts as we are told in the third verse, we will truly live according to the leading of Wisdom. Thus, like the promises in Deuteronomy attached to honoring our parents, we are promised long and prosperous lives. Too often, we follow the leading of our own hearts and, therefore, stray from God's path. But, if we will trust God completely, we shall receive the promise God gives us. We will have the approval of God and our fellow people.

The selection from Psalm 119 continues in this instruction. Here, the psalmist is asking God to do the teaching so that he can go in the path God would direct. Whenever I read this passage, I am struck by the phrase, "Turn my eyes from watching what is worthless." If any passage of scripture was aimed at me and this generation, it is this. How many hours do we waste scrolling through Facebook or staring at the TV for mindless entertainment? How much better would our time be spent doing the work of God - feeding the hungry, praying for the ill and those in prison, and all of the other tasks God has for us. Yet, there we sit, glued to a screen of mindlessness.

At times, I believe that the only way the Church succeeded in those early years was because they didn't have our distractions. They could focus on the work God planned for them to do. Perhaps it is time for us to turn back to the admonitions Paul gave to Timothy in our reading today. "Continue in what you have learned and believed, knowing from whom you learned it." Timothy had great teachers - his mother and his grandmother - long before he met Paul. He was raised to know scripture in his heart. I know many of us also had that experience. Our parents or some other adult early in our lives began the process of teaching us to love the Word of God. We understand how it affected us when we were young and some may have even felt called to tell others about their experience.

Those who live around us do not always agree with us on matters of life. As Paul says, “they accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires.” They listen to what reinforces their own beliefs and fail to listen to God. We are called, along with Timothy, to carry out our ministry fully. We are to continue doing the work God has laid before us in this community - feeding the hungry both in body and spirit - as we live out the gospel every day.