

In considering the gospel for today as well as the memory verses that our confirmands chose for this occasion, I found myself wondering two things: first, why do we give advice and second, why do we memorize things?

As I read the passages of scripture that these five young people chose for today – it struck me that they are all words of advice. Advice, for the most part, can be categorized in very explicit ways. It falls into one slot or the other. It can be good advice or bad. It can be requested or unasked for. It can be welcome or resented. Followed or ignored.

Often, words of wisdom are shared at important moments. At the birth of a child. At weddings. Or at the start of a great new job. Advice is often given when someone is leaving or at times of ending. Graduations. Moving. Retirement. Even at the end of our lives.

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Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life and honor. [Proverbs 21:21]

Brookelyn chose a verse from the book of Proverbs, which is a part of the wisdom literature in the Bible. It is a collection of writings that talk about questions of values – what's important and what's not. It covers moral behavior – what should we do and what should we not do. It talks about the meaning of life and the importance of opening yourself to the will of God. Brookelyn's particular verse has to do with the value of doing the right thing and then sticking with it. If we are true to what we know to be right – if we choose to follow God's word, we will be blessed with life and dignity and even distinction. People will notice when you are kind and when you are fair.

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Think before you speak, and don't make any rash promises to God. For God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few. The more you worry, the more likely you are to have bad dreams, and the more you talk, the more likely you are to say something foolish. [Ecclesiastes 5:2-3]

Connor chose a passage from Ecclesiastes – which is also a part of the wisdom literature in the Bible. It is the journaling of a preacher who tends to talk about the big picture of life. He's the guy who wrote.

*There is a time to be born and a time to die
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;*

He was a big picture thinker. But in the chunk of scripture that Connor chose, the preacher gives some advice for daily living. He calls us to remember who we are and who God is and some days, we need to simply be reminded of that difference.

We also need to keep in mind in the things we say to others and the things we say to God. If you would be seen as wise, don't talk too much. Measure your words. And of course, the more you worry about all these things – the more likely you are to be up at night with nightmares.

So, remember who you are. And whose you are.

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Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid for the LORD your God goes with you, God will never leave or forsake you. [Deuteronomy 5:6]

Katie's chosen verses come from the end of Deuteronomy, when Moses is very old and close to death. He's been speaking to all the people of Israel right before they get to the promised land. They're almost there and so Moses preaches one last sermon about how they should behave as the people of God and then he says,

*I am one hundred and twenty years old and I can no longer get around like I used to.
Plus, God has told me that I'm not going to get to cross over the River Jordan into the land of Canaan. But God will cross the river ahead of you. And he will keep you safe.*

Moses says, Be strong and bold. Don't be afraid **because the Lord is going with you**. And he will not fail or forsake you.

God will be with you.

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Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. I am the worst of them, but God was merciful to me in order that Christ Jesus might show his full patience in dealing with me, the worst of sinners, as an example for all those who would later believe in him and receive eternal life. [1 Timothy 1:15b-16]

Nathan chose 1 Timothy which is one of Paul's letters to his young friend. Throughout his letters, Paul advises Timothy on how to organize a congregation and the responsibilities of the people who lead the church. Knowing that Timothy didn't always have an easy time in the work he was doing, Paul reminded him to be faithful even when things go wrong.

Nathan's memory verses are from the very start of the letter when Paul tells Timothy that Jesus came to save sinners – including Paul. It may have seemed to Timothy that Paul had it all together. After all, he started lots of congregations. He traveled all over Asia and Europe to share the gospel, even though it meant his life was in danger again and again. He was a great guy! Right? We have been reading his words for centuries. But Paul reminds Timothy and all of us, that he was once an enemy of Christ. He had persecuted Jesus' followers – and yet God was patient with him. Forgiving and loving. Paul's life is an example to all who would believe of how great our God can be.

We, like Timothy, do well to remember that God uses all kinds of people to spread the good news of love and forgiveness. God uses people like you and me to share the good news that our Savior has come.

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*May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with everyone.
[Revelation 22:21]*

The last of our verses comes from Emily who chose the very last verse in the very last chapter of the very last book in the Bible. But before you get to those words, Jesus says this,

"It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let everyone who hears say, "Come." And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

The writer of Revelation calls us to believe that Christ has cared for our needs and will bless us in the life to come. And he seals that wonderful book of visions and dreams by saying the grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. May God's love be with everyone. Share God's love with everyone.

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You have each chosen wonderful words of advice. Words to encourage and strengthen. Words for bravery and blessing. And we asked you to memorize them, along with the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles Creed. But why? And how long will you actually remember them?

Yesterday, Emily's mom said, that the version of the Lord's Prayer that is etched in her brain is the one she memorized when she was your age. And she can't quite shake it loose.

My mom, who will be 85 in November, can still recite bits and pieces from Martin Luther's Small Catechism. She is especially fond of what he had to say about the third article of the creed.

I believe that by my own understanding and strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith just as he calls, gathers, enlightens and makes holy the whole Christian church.

It's been seventy years and still those words are with her as a reminder of how the Holy Spirit works in us so that we might have faith in Jesus Christ. And that's why we memorize things. So that we can have those words, those tools, readily at hand. Stored conveniently in our hearts and minds. The words of wisdom and blessing that you have chosen are yours to keep and remember. And you never know when you might need them.

There are lots of stories about people who found themselves in desperate circumstances - concentration camps, prisoners of war, survivors of disaster - and they were strengthened by the Bible verses that they remembered. They found strength in God's word and they were able to share those words of holy advice, even though they didn't have a Bible.

The words were in their hearts. They knew those verses by heart. I am hopeful that you will never be in that kind of situation, but you may find that these verses you have memorized will guide you again and again. They may show up at times that are quite unexpected. I didn't have to memorize the Small Catechism when I was a kid, but there is a bit of it that is stuck in my brain and will probably never disappear.

In his explanation of the eighth commandment Luther says, that not only are we to not bear false witness against our neighbor "but we are to put the best construction on all that they do." Which means, even when it seems like someone has really done something to wrong you- they've sent an email or text message that sounds less than kind- Luther's advice calls us to assume the best about that other person. There are so many times when that bit of advice bubbles up in my brain. And while it isn't always easy, I'm glad of the advice. It's made me stop and think, so many times.

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You may not remember these verses in seventy years or even seven years. Although we hope you will. But here's this... when Jesus was giving his last words of advice to the disciples, I am sure he hoped they would remember and yet, he also knew that they might not. After all, they were only

human. So, while he gave them all of his very best advice on how to live together and continue to be his disciples he also said,

I've told you these things while I'm still with you. But the Father is sending a great Helper. The Holy Spirit will come to take my place. And the Spirit will teach you everything and will REMIND YOU of what I said while I was with you.

Even if our memories fail us, the Spirit is always here to give us help. Always.

My advice for you today is to remember that God is with you. You are the Lord's beloved child. Today and always. Remember that. The Holy Spirit who loves us, is with us now and always. You are God's beloved children.