

SERVICE FOCUS: *Christian Education That Touches the Soul*

SERVICE THEME: *I Will Put Childish Ways Behind Me*

OLD TESTAMENT: Jeremiah 1:4-10

- 4 The word of the LORD came to me, saying,
- 5 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”
- 6 “Ah, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.”
- 7 But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.
- 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.
- 9 Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “Now, I have put my words in your mouth.
- 10 See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”

PSALM: 78

Psalm 78 A maskil [1] of Asaph. (Text in green found on page 95 of *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*)

- 1 O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth.
- 2 I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old—
- 3 what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us.
- 4 We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.
- 5 He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children,
- 6 so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.
- 7 Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.
- 8 They would not be like their forefathers-- a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.
- 9 The men of Ephraim, though armed with bows, turned back on the day of battle;
- 10 they did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law.
- 11 They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them.
- 12 He did miracles in the sight of their fathers in the land of Egypt, in the region of Zoan.
- 13 He divided the sea and led them through; he made the water stand firm like a wall.
- 14 He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire all night.
- 15 He split the rocks in the desert and gave them water as abundant as the seas;

16 he brought streams out of a rocky crag and made water flow down like rivers.
17 But they continued to sin against him, rebelling in the desert against the Most High.
18 They willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved.
19 They spoke against God, saying, "Can God spread a table in the desert?
20 When he struck the rock, water gushed out, and streams flowed abundantly. But can he also give us food? Can he supply meat for his people?"
21 When the LORD heard them, he was very angry; his fire broke out against Jacob, and his wrath rose against Israel,
22 for they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance.
23 Yet he gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens;
24 he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the grain of heaven.
25 Men ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat.
26 He let loose the east wind from the heavens and led forth the south wind by his power.
27 He rained meat down on them like dust, flying birds like sand on the seashore.
28 He made them come down inside their camp, all around their tents.
29 They ate till they had more than enough, for he had given them what they craved.
30 But before they turned from the food they craved, even while it was still in their mouths,
31 God's anger rose against them; he put to death the sturdiest among them, cutting down the young men of Israel.
32 In spite of all this, they kept on sinning; in spite of his wonders, they did not believe.
33 So he ended their days in futility and their years in terror.
34 Whenever God slew them, they would seek him; they eagerly turned to him again.
35 They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer.
36 But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues;
37 their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant.
38 Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath.
39 He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.
40 How often they rebelled against him in the desert and grieved him in the wasteland!
41 Again and again they put God to the test; they vexed the Holy One of Israel.
42 They did not remember his power-- the day he redeemed them from the oppressor,
43 the day he displayed his miraculous signs in Egypt, his wonders in the region of Zoan.
44 He turned their rivers to blood; they could not drink from their streams.
45 He sent swarms of flies that devoured them, and frogs that devastated them.
46 He gave their crops to the grasshopper, their produce to the locust.
47 He destroyed their vines with hail and their sycamore-figs with sleet.
48 He gave over their cattle to the hail, their livestock to bolts of lightning.
49 He unleashed against them his hot anger, his wrath, indignation and hostility-- a band of destroying angels.

- 50 He prepared a path for his anger; he did not spare them from death but gave them over to the plague.
- 51 He struck down all the firstborn of Egypt, the firstfruits of manhood in the tents of Ham.
- 52 But he brought his people out like a flock; he led them like sheep through the desert.
- 53 He guided them safely, so they were unafraid; but the sea engulfed their enemies.
- 54 Thus he brought them to the border of his holy land, to the hill country his right hand had taken.
- 55 He drove out nations before them and allotted their lands to them as an inheritance; he settled the tribes of Israel in their homes.
- 56 But they put God to the test and rebelled against the Most High; they did not keep his statutes.
- 57 Like their fathers they were disloyal and faithless, as unreliable as a faulty bow.
- 58 They angered him with their high places; they aroused his jealousy with their idols.
- 59 When God heard them, he was very angry; he rejected Israel completely.
- 60 He abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent he had set up among men.
- 61 He sent [the ark of] his might into captivity, his splendor into the hands of the enemy.
- 62 He gave his people over to the sword; he was very angry with his inheritance.
- 63 Fire consumed their young men, and their maidens had no wedding songs;
- 64 their priests were put to the sword, and their widows could not weep.
- 65 Then the Lord awoke as from sleep, as a man wakes from the stupor of wine.
- 66 He beat back his enemies; he put them to everlasting shame.
- 67 Then he rejected the tents of Joseph, he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim;
- 68 but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loved.
- 69 He built his sanctuary like the heights, like the earth that he established forever.
- 70 He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens;
- 71 from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance.
- 72 And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.

1. Title: Probably a literary or musical term

EPISTLE: 1 Corinthians 12:27-13:13

- 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.
- 28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.
- 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?
- 30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

- 31 But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way.
- 1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.
 - 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.
 - 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, [2] but have not love, I gain nothing.
 - 4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.
 - 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.
 - 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
 - 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.
 - 8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.
 - 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part,
 - 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.
 - 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.
 - 12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.
 - 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

GOSPEL: Luke 4:20-32

- 20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him,
- 21 and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”
- 22 All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked.
- 23 Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’”
- 24 “I tell you the truth,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown.
- 25 I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land.
- 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon.
- 27 And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.”
- 28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this.

- 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff.
- 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.
- 31 Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people.
- 32 They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.

In the recent presidential election, one issue came to the forefront of the campaigns and the debates. That issue was education—what was wrong with our education system and how best to fix it. One candidate proposed a solution of increasing aid to hire more teachers. The other candidate sought to give parents vouchers to send their children to a private school. But in the debates on fixing a system, the basic element that makes education truly work was lost. For education must begin in the home and the parents must be committed to it for any type of education to be effective.

The Levite Asaph in the psalm he wrote that the choir sang and we read addresses **Christian Education That Reaches the Soul**. First, *this education begins in the home*. Secondly, *this education must know the Law and what that means in our lives*. Finally, *this education must embrace the Gospel and trust its message*.

Christian Education That Reaches the Soul begins in the home. I'm presently holding my son, Matthew. Most of you were here on November 5 when I baptized him in your presence. But my job and Maija's job didn't end once water was sprinkled on his head over the font. It doesn't stop until he's in seventh grade and then we bring him to confirmation class. Matthew's Christian education has already begun. It occurs whenever we manage to get a family devotion in—admittedly an area that still needs work. His education occurs whenever we sing "Jesus Loves Me" or some other hymn to him. It occurs as he grows and speaks and asks questions. It occurs as we discipline him to mold him as a child of God.

Asaph stresses this home-based education in Psalm 78: "things our fathers have told us," "we will tell the next generation," "so the next generation would know them," "they in turn would tell their children." You see a pattern here. The continuum from one generation to the next within the family. This is **Christian education that reaches the soul**. A vivid example is how God set up his worship and education duties in the Old Testament. We are all aware that the Levites were in charge of the temple and the priests, from the tribe of Levi and descended from Aaron, led the worship of God's people. But nowhere in the Levitical code were the Levites commanded to teach. Fathers were commanded to teach their children. The Passover was a family meal, led by the father who taught his children what the feast meant. Paul reasserts the Father's role in teaching when he says to the Ephesians: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." Luther found this lacking in his day and wrote his *Large* and *Small Catechisms*. The preface states the Doctor's intention: "As the head of the family should teach them in the simplest way to those in the household."

Christian Education That Reaches the Soul begins in the home

Christian Education That Reaches the Soul must know the Law and what that means in our lives. The Law shows us our sin. Not just those sins we consider "major," but even those thoughts and words and deeds that are offensive to God. No doubt like me you've

said, “I’m not perfect” or “No one’s perfect.” Of course, we use it as an excuse really. When someone shows us our imperfections, do we thank them profusely for being so kind and considerate? I doubt it. If you’re like me, you fume and fuss because someone is finding fault with us and “who are they anyway to tell me what’s wrong. They’re no model of perfection.”

But **Christian Education That Reaches the Soul** *must know the Law and what that means in our lives*. That often means hearing things we don’t want to hear. Sometimes it means saying something that is not comfortable to say. Many parents will tell their children when they are about to administer discipline, “This will hurt me more than it will hurt you.” Most of us don’t like to make waves. So we neglect our duties to point out sin. We let our children co-habitate and not encourage them to do right in God’s eyes and receive God’s blessings in marriage. We see a friend caught up in abuse of some substance—even in the pursuit of money!—but we shrug it off by saying he’s not harming anyone but himself. Many of our listed members no longer come to Salem to worship. How many of us go visit the delinquents and bring the Word to them? How many of us visit the shut-ins and have a prayer or brief devotional?

The Law is serious business. It tells us what God expects from us. It tells us God expects perfection. Not “I’ll try my best.” Not, “Well, I’m better than most people.” Not, “If I do enough good deeds or contribute more than my fair share or do a lot of church work, I’ll be alright in God’s eyes.” No, God wants us **to be perfect even as he, the LORD our God, is perfect!**

That’s some heavy stuff. As I’ve noted before, we all claim to be less than perfect! The Law is all too willing to point out our flaws. In fact, it does such a good job of pointing out flaws that we create loopholes so that somehow we can tell ourselves we’re doing what God wants. But we aren’t.

The Law gets into the crevices and cracks of our lives. Like grout in our bathroom tiles, the Law is a spotlight shining and showing the grime that is really in our lives! We may think we’ve had no other gods, but the Law shows us where we trust in ourselves or our own resources rather than God himself. We haven’t physically killed anyone, but we harbor hatred and bitterness toward our neighbor. We have been faithful to our spouse, but those models on TV sure looked attractive. And while we haven’t robbed a bank or stolen merchandise, those five extra minutes at break can’t bankrupt the company. And doesn’t “Charlie” sure have a nice sports car! Yes, even our thoughts and words offend our God. That is why **Christian Education That Reaches the Soul** *must know the Law and what that means in our lives*, because we are all sinners before God worthy of nothing but eternal death.

Asaph in Psalm 78 recounts the history of Israel and the unfaithfulness of Israel. Look through the psalm and see the unfaithfulness: **Ephraim running away from battle**, “**they forgot what he had done**,” “**they willfully put God to the test**,” “**they spoke against God**,” “**they kept on sinning**.” Read on and you’ll find more examples of the rebellious ways of God’s chosen people.

But is that where effective **Christian Education That Reaches the Soul** ends? Thank God, no! For we also need to look at how **Christian Education That Reaches the Soul** *must embrace the Gospel and trust its message*. We have already seen that we are not perfect, that God demands perfection, but we cannot attain that perfection. The Law points out every one of our shortcomings.

But God provided for us a Lamb that was perfect, that could and did keep the Law perfectly. Why do we celebrate Christmas, do you suppose? It's to celebrate the incarnation of God—when God became man and dwelt for awhile among us. God took on human flesh to live under the Law as we live under the Law. He took on flesh to suffer with us and share in our humanity with us. He suffered every temptation we face—but came through it without sinning.

Did Jesus do this to show us how we should do it? No! For David in another psalm tells us that “*in sin did my mother conceive me.*” God recognized after the flood that “*the inclinations of man are evil from birth.*” Thus, we couldn't be shown how to do something because we are unable to do it.

Jesus lived a perfect life so that he could suffer and die to pay for our sins—every one of them, those we've done in the past and those we'll commit in the future. When Jesus uttered, “*It is finished,*” the words he used were the same words used on a bill of sale that meant “Paid in Full.” That is how our account stands before God with Jesus' blood on the ledger—“Paid in Full.”

Look at the cross on the altar. Granted, it is not a true representation of what really happened on Good Friday. Most crucifixes are sanitized. Jesus looks like he's just hanging around, biding his time. In actuality, he was a mess. If an artist depicted what Jesus really looked like on that cross, we may not want to see it. But our Gospel includes the figure hanging on the cross.

I know some who remain tormented by sin. They cut themselves, deprive themselves of nutrition. Luther did the same things. It didn't work for Luther and it doesn't work now. Others feel the Holy Spirit is accusing them and, rather than seek comfort and solace in God's spirit of forgiveness, they seek it in a bottle of spirits. Or in a needle. Others of us may feel we have these problems, but again, do you let go of the past sins and move on? Or do you also mentally torment yourself over past misdeeds? It is amazing that a majority of suicides are by people who appeared to have it all together!

Look again at that cross, close your eyes, and picture the real scene. The back of our Lord is in ribbons. He allowed himself to be cut so that your sins no longer cut your soul. He allowed himself to thirst so that you can drink deeply of living waters! He endured mental agony and anguish so that you can have peace of mind! Paul said it best when he wrote to the Philippians: “*Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead.*” In other words, Paul is telling us “Get on with your life!” We cannot joyously and expectantly look ahead to eternal life if we keep looking back at our sins. We cannot live

a new life if our thoughts dwell on the old life. Thus, **Christian Education That Reaches the Soul** *must embrace the Gospel and trust its message.*

Asaph not only pointed out the sins of Israel in this psalm, he also pointed out how God remained with Israel, provided for Israel, and kept forgiving Israel. He supplied water, manna, and quail. He supplied military victories. He led them through the desert, even as we are told in Deuteronomy, preserving the clothing and shoes for forty years! God did not abandon his people, but remained with them and provided for them. He remains with each and every one of us here today, provides for us, and grants to each of us his salvation from sin.

Two thoughts on this psalm. First, many may tell you it is political. It ends with praises for the new king, David. But is it political? A closer look shows that David is listed as another gift from a gracious God. A political epic would denounce the previous king, Saul. But the blame is placed solely at the feet of the people and the glory goes to God alone.

Secondly, look at verse 71. Here Asaph uses the names “Jacob” and “Israel.” These are two names for the same person—the younger twin son of Rebekah and Isaac. “Jacob” literally means “heal grabber” or “deceiver.” Jacob’s life was one of deception. He used his wiles to get ahead and get what he thought God wanted him to have. He didn’t trust that God would make sure he was blessed properly. Only when things seemed bleak, and he was about to face a brother who could still be angry over how he lost his birthright did Jacob trust in God. In fact, his trust was such that he wrestled with God all night and wouldn’t let go until he was blessed! Thus the new name—Israel—which means “one who wrestles with God.”

There is no coincidence that Asaph uses both names. For we are at the same time saints and sinners. We still live with sinful flesh in a sinful world. The world sees our sin and judges us by that. But God looks at Jesus’ blood covering us and sees us as saints! In every letter Paul wrote, he addresses his readers as “saints.” There’s a lesson for us here. Others may see us as sinners. We may see ourselves as sinners. And to a certain extent that’s good, for it aids in our growth as Christians. But don’t dwell on what you or the world sees in you. Dwell on what God sees you as—his own dear child, purchased with his own precious blood. Don’t claim the title “greatest sinner”—St. Paul already claimed that honor. Claim instead the title, “Redeemed and forgiven child of God.”

Christian Education That Reaches the Soul must *begin in the home*. This is where mothers and fathers practice forgiveness to each other as a model for their children and raise their children in the love of God. **Christian Education That Reaches the Soul** must *know the Law and what that means in our lives*. For in the Law we see our imperfections and our need for a Savior. **Christian Education That Reaches the Soul** must *embrace the Gospel and trust its message*. For in the Gospel we find that we are saved by faith, faith in the full atonement of Christ on Calvary’s cross. This education affirms that, yes, I am a child of God and am his for all eternity. Amen.