

Gretchen could not remember when the church was not part of her life. She had been baptized in church. She grew up in church. She even met her husband, Sam, in church. For both of them, church and church activities seemed natural and normal – the way life was supposed to be. Their worldview – how they saw life and how they made their most important decisions - had been largely formed around the teachings of the church.

Joey was Gretchen and Sam's oldest boy. His parents took him to church regularly. But church was not the center of Joey's teenage years. He was a busy young man with lots of activities at school and outside of school. Parties on weekends, a part-time job, and sports, consumed his life. He started missing coming to church weekly. His parents felt he needed to make his own decisions, so they didn't force him to go, when he didn't want to. By the time Joey got to college, church was not on the agenda at all. Weekends were times to relax, party and study. When Joey got married to Marie, got a job in a big city and started his own family, church had become a place to go on special occasions – weddings, funerals and such.

Joey and Marie had their first child, Ricky, they didn't think to baptize him – it just wasn't on their radar screen. To Joey and Marie, baptism was a ceremony and not much more than that. Besides, they thought that when Ricky got older, he could make his own decisions about religion. By the time Ricky was a teen, he had been to church only a few times on Christmas. So Ricky knew very little about the church and almost nothing about the Bible. This story is being played out again and again. There are lots of Rickys in the world.

I don't know about you, but for me the greatest heartache in life for me is to see young children around Bay City today, who have little or no knowledge of the Bible. If you talk to some kids about Adam and Eve, they think that they are a couple down the street. The cross of Christ is simply something religious people wear around their neck. And church is where people jump around, sing some songs, and listen to a man talk about stuff you don't understand for 20 minutes. My friends, it is vital for us as big people today to pass on the teachings of God's Word to future generations. The eternal destiny of these children is at stake. So today on this Christian education Sunday, Let's Pass it on!

Can you imagine if you were an Israelite how fantastic it was to see the miracles God performed as you left the land of Egypt. You had a pillar of cloud leading you during the day and a pillar of fire at night. Then when you get to the Red sea, God opens the waters of the red sea like a giant frozen tsunami on both sides. You walk through safely to the other side on your way to the promised land. Meanwhile, as you look back you see the waters come crashing down on the Egyptian horses and chariots. Man, God had delivered his people. Then there was the day when Dathan, Abiram, and Korah rebelled against Moses and Aaron. The Lord caused the ground to open up, and it swallowed them up along with their wives and children. And then the earth closed up making that place their gravesite. What a spectacle of how the Lord will punish those who rebel against him. But you know, the children that were growing up as they wandered through the wilderness on their way to Palestine, did not see these events firsthand. So Moses tells the people, this new generation, "Your children didn't see the Ten Plagues. Your children didn't see the Red Sea part. They won't remember being fed with Manna in the

wilderness. ... You will have to tell them.”

As it was for Israel, so it is for you and me, his new Israel. We are the people of God because that is what God made us. Not by any thinking or choosing of our own. By his choice. And in his love, he has given us his Word so that we can know who he is-- so we can know what he did long ago-- and so we can know his mercy and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Without him, we would be in darkness like the rest of the world. But he has called us out of darkness into his wonderful light-- so that we can shine as lights in this world. No-- we haven't seen Ten Plagues. We haven't seen the Red Sea part. But we have heard about it. We have heard far greater things than that. We have heard about God himself, coming to our rescue, wrapped in swaddling clothes. We have heard about God himself, coming to our rescue, riding on a donkey, headed for the cross. We have heard about Jesus as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is our rescue. Without God coming to our rescue, we would have something a lot worse than slavery and making bricks without straw. We would have no hope. We would be the slaves of the devil. Led from evil to evil. From death to death. This is what we have been rescued from. And as Moses told Israel-- “You need to tell this to your children.” They won't figure it out on their own. Remember, as the twig is bent so grows the tree.

But before we can pass it on, we need to make sure these words of God are fixed in our own hearts and minds. Our lesson says, “Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.” How do you “fix on them on your heart?”

Imagine if someone bought a bunch of beautiful pictures for your wall, put some nails in it, gave you instructions on how to hang them, but then you never hung those pictures on that wall. The wall would remain clear and ready - ready for beautification - but not enhanced with the beautiful pictures. Those pictures, while remaining on the floor, could easily become broken or misplaced. In a sense, this was what the Israelites were being warned against doing - not hanging anything on their hearts - leaving them bare. So Moses gave them instructions on how to hang these words on their hearts. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Maybe today God might say to us, “Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at the computer and when you're stopped at a red light, when you are having family dinner at the dinner table, when you say prayers at night and when you do devotions in the morning. Make it clear to your kids, Christ and His Word are number 1 in importance in your house...” Do your children see you read the Bible at home? Do they see you bow your head in prayer? Do they hear you talk about portions of the Bible with them? The basic message to us today is - don't just make these words your Sunday morning words. Learn how to grow in God's Word at home as well. Learn how to talk about God's Word around the kitchen table, in the car, at the park, at the movies, in any situation that presents itself. Take for instance the recent earthquake and tsunami in Japan. What an opportunity to discuss that earthquakes show us that

this earth is not going to last forever. Teaching us that when Adam and Eve sinned many years ago, the ground was also cursed. That's why we have all these natural disasters. But we are going to be safe. Even if a tornado or earthquake hits Michigan, we have a God who either safely take us to heaven in that tragedy or give us the stamina and strength to deal with limited food supplies, and water. The opportunities are there to talk about and apply God's Word - but YOU have to take advantage of them and use them.

This is a big problem that we have within our Lutheran culture. It's a drop-off culture. It's also a departmentalized culture. How do we train our children in God's Word? We drop them off at Sunday School or Christian Day School. We let the teachers teach them God's Word. Then we pick them up. Do we then talk about the lesson with the children? Do we then discuss God's Word with them during the week? Do we help them learn their Bible passages? Or do we just say, "make sure you learn your memory work!" Do we - as married couples - talk about Jesus with one another? Do we feel compelled just to sing a hymn at joyful times or say a prayer after a close call on the road? Luther designed the catechism for PARENTS to teach their children - not Christian Day School teachers and pastors. Every day Luther would review the Ten Commandments and the Creed and the Lord's Prayer with his children. The point He was making was that God's Word isn't supposed to be like a Sunday suit you put on and then take off immediately after the service. Indirectly, we are telling our kids and showing our kids that Jesus is for formal times in church - not at home.

Another thing that concerns me is that we can have our kids learn basic facts about the Bible-kind of like a Trivial Pursuit Jesus - without any expressions of what this means to ME and how this AFFECTS me. I am scared that we treat God's Word more like something simply to be hung on the brain. Go home and learn your memory work. Make sure you recite it well. But also discuss how it makes you feel guilty, or how it makes you feel good. Let your children know the struggles you have at forgiving yourself, dealing with co-workers, or even being patient with them. Let them see how you also struggle with sin, so they can learn from your own trials. That's how you hang the Word on your hands and on your doorsteps and on the roads of life - and more importantly on the heart and soul of the self

Remember to do this, don't forget! What happens when you forget? You repeat the same mistakes. You revert to your old ways. You can't remember and you can't teach your children this unless you are immersed in God's Word yourself. So parents, let continuing education continue in your life. Join a small growth group at Trinity. Do that daily Bible reading. Have that family devotion at the dinner table.

Remember how your God comes to you with an outstretched arm. Dying on a cross. For you. For you who haven't always done a great job teaching your children. You who sin. You who forget. Remember - God comes with an outstretched arm for you. A fantastic, loving God. Therefore, Pass on the baton, parents. Pass it on.