

In three weeks the evangelism committee will be offering an evangelistic training seminar on Friday evening, April 30 and Saturday, May 1 here at the church. My sermons for the next two weeks are meant to raise the consciousness of this congregation to the need of such evangelistic training. Knox church has traditionally relied almost exclusively on the preacher as the evangelist. This worked fairly well as long as the community was growing. But no growing church can rely for very long on dramatic evangelistic preaching for the simple reason that when the preacher leaves the evangelistic program falls apart. The Bible indicates, however, that laypeople are ~~the~~ most effective evangelists. The work of the pastor is to assist in training the lay people to do the work of evangelism. We see this in our Scripture lesson. Jesus healed a demon possessed man and then sent him to his people saying, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you. So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed."

~~One of the most effective ways of evangelism is the personal testimony.~~ You don't have to be a theologian to tell others what the Lord has done for you. This morning I would like to apply that command to myself and give you a personal testimony of what the Lord has done for me. Then I would

sation in our home. The names of God were held in the most reverent awe. I never heard my parents take the Lord's name in vain ^{or} ~~I never heard them speak about God~~ in a flippant manner. And when the name of God was mentioned I would feel a kind of tension in the air almost as if there were some kind of theological reason for their reluctance to talk ^{much} about God.

But we did talk to God! ^{we} I remember my Father kneeling ^{read about God} beside my bed at night as I said my prayers. I remember my mother reading me the Bible and Bunyan's, Pilgrim's Progress. Our house was filled with books about such people as John Newton the converted slave trader, John Wesley, and contemporary Christians such as the missionaries killed by the Auca Indians back in 1957. I can remember seeing my ~~father~~ ^{Father} read ~~his~~ Bible for hours on Sunday afternoons. I can see in my minds eye my parents kneeling at their bedsides to pray. I remember hearing my Father pray publicly at the worship service on rare occasions. We rarely spoke about Christ, but we often spoke to him ^{read about him in}

~~This influence of my parents had striking results in my life. For example, Because of their influence I can never~~ ^{No influence of my parents} remember a time that I didn't trust in Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. I cannot remember when the Lord gave me a new birth. I recognise that the Bible teaches that by nature we are all born under God's wrath and curse and that unless he gives us

a new birth which results in our trusting in Jesus as Lord and Saviour we are lost even though we are born into a Christian family. But I can no more remember when ^I was born again than I can remember when I was born physically. I believe the Lord in his grace and mercy gave me a new birth very early in my life before I can remember. Now I have fallen into very serious sin during my life but I believe if it had not been for the hand of God in the person of my parents I would have remained in sin. What God has done for me makes whatever sins I have committed all the more heinous because I ^{have} sinned against the clearest light.

Let me give you two examples to show you something of the kind of influence my parents and youngest sister had on me. When I was six years old I won a state-wide contest by printing an essay on "What the Bible means to me." I wrote, "The Bible means to me God's Word, heaven, and life after death for all born-again Christians. To me it means everything good and beautiful in life. It means that all people, though their sins be as black as night, they can be washed white as snow by reading and believing in the Bible and accepting His son, Jesus Christ as their own personal Saviour, because God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not ~~wish~~. but have everlasting life."

I can remember one time when I was playing with friends. I was in third grade. For some reason we all stopped playing and one of the boys asked me and a friend who attended the same church why we didn't swear. My friend said it was because he wanted to go to heaven. I corrected him by explaining to everyone that we are not saved by not swearing but through faith in Jesus. I distinctly remember that experience and where it occurred.

Now I must confess that ^I tell you these things with a certain amount of sinful spiritual pride. But I would suggest that these things are living illustrations of the value of parents training their children at an early age and praying for God's covenant blessings upon them. Let parents take note of this and apply it in your homes. Never underestimate the ability of your child to understand basic Christian doctrine. Never underestimate the importance of Christian education in the home as well as Sunday school. Never underestimate or ridicule the value of memorizing ^{the shorter} catchism ~~and~~ ^{and} Scripture verses by rote at the earliest ages. Never forget the powerful influence of your lifestyle on your friends and family. And never forget that God has made covenant promises to believers concerning their children. We should pray that our children come to trust J̄sus Christ at an early

age. We should expect them to.

I believe that God gave me a new birth very early in my life but I didn't become a communicant member of a church until I was 22 years old, when I joined the First Presbyterian church of Princeton, N.J. I waited so long because I went through a long period of dark despair and doubt that shook the very foundations of my faith. From the time I was in junior high-school until my first year in seminary I began to doubt even the very existence of God. It was never unbelief ^{Doubt has to do with our feelings, Unbelief is an act of the will whereby we reject Christ. I doubted but I didn't reject Christ.} however, I continued to cry out to God for light and for faith. I cried out to God for some sign, a voice from heaven, some miracle to confirm my faith but none was forthcoming. I microscopically examined my life for sin and confessed it and asked for repentance. I arose at 6 a.m. to read the Bible and pray and turned to my Bible at night after I finished my home-work. I often went to bed with a terrible fear of hell and weight of guilt because of my doubt.

In a note-book dating from when I was 17 I wrote this prayer, "Jesus, Saviour, I believe that you lived, died, and rose again. I believe you can make my life meaningful and take away the guilty that I have. If I don't believe I want to believe; help my unbelief. Let me know the reality of your presence and the Holy Spirit." In that prayer I go

to pray for my parents and for unsaved friends that they would be converted. This was a time of intense spiritual torture.

What could I do to have this doubt removed? I attempted all sorts of things. I heard of a minister who claimed to have heard the audible voice of God speaking to him and I cried out in vain to hear God's audible voice to confirm his existence and my faith. ^{I went to hear him preach every night for a week. At the end of the week?} I thought, "Maybe I ought to raise my hand and go forward in response to an altar call. Maybe that will be a demonstration of my faith and I will have assurance."

^{that's what I did}
~~I did so that~~ Sunday evening in fear and trembling but went home in great disappointment. My doubts remained. ~~I had been baptised as an infant~~ ^{then} but I began to think maybe I need^d to be

baptised by immersion. Maybe that ^{would} ~~will~~ confirm my faith. ^{I had been baptised as an infant but maybe God required baptism by immersion as a sign of faith.} So I was rebaptised by immersion and went home in great sad-

ness because my doubts remained. ^{Carry Bible to school... outwardly I gave the impression to most people of being absolutely certain of everything but inside my heart was dark & filled with fear & doubt.}
 From this terrible experience of the dark night of the

soul I have learned how important it is to have someone to talk to when one is going through spiritual depression and doubt. I found someone in my high-school youth group leader

who quietly listened to me without offering slick and easy answers. ^{He suggested books to read that would deal with my questions. He encouraged me.} My doubts and fears were not allayed but I found

comfort and freedom to unburden myself to him without being

afraid that he would lay some ~~kind of~~ ^{added} guilt ~~trip~~ on me. ^{try to manipulate my emotions.}

To make a long story short the Holy Spirit confirmed my faith apart from all of my efforts in God's own time and in his own way. ^{In my first year in seminary} I came to the place where I realised that God exists objectively, apart from myself, in spite of what ^{between doubt & unbelief discovered that I did have a saving faith & feelings I might have.} I came to the place where I saw the danger of the idolatry of feelings and the idolatry of seeking religious experiences. I came to the place where the Holy Spirit ^{through the written word of God alone} assured me of the things I believed and confirmed my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

These experiences are reflected in some way in the poem I wrote entitled, "Song of the Gaderene Demoniak." I read this narrative a number of years ago and this poem came to me expressing something of what I felt in the way of spiritual despair and depression for so many years. ^{a new experience of deliverance} These experiences have taught me that doubt can be a servant of God which drives us to the Scripture and to Christ for assurance. My experiences ^{also bear} ~~are~~ witness to the truth of what the Westminster Confession of faith says about the assurance of salvation. It says, "This infallible assurance (of grace and salvation) doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties, before he be partaker of it.... True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken,

diminished, and intermitted... yet they are never utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith; that love of Christ and the brethren; that sincerity of heart and conscience of duty; out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may in due time be revived, and by the which, in the meantime, they are supported from utter despair."

Let me close with the following brief observations on my Christian pilgrimage to the present. First, for me the Christian life is a warfare. I do not identify very easily with those Christians for whom life is a bowl of cherries ^{of a soldier engaged in battle} since they became a Christian. ^{The life has its joys but they are the joys} The Christian life is a warfare. Secondly, it is a pilgrimage. I have a hard time dealing with Christians who feel that they have arrived and are waiting for everybody else to catch up with them. The Christian life is a pilgrimage. Thirdly, sound doctrine is indispensable for ^{my} spiritual growth. Without doctrine the Christian life is very shallow and has very little affect in the world. Doctrine to me is what the laws of physics are to the engineer. ~~They may appear to be dry and boring to some but~~ the engineer cannot build a very solid bridge unless he is well grounded in theory. Likewise ^{I have discovered that I} the Christian cannot ^{live my} build ~~his~~ Christian life apart from being well grounded in Christian doctrine, ^{which is summarised in the good Creed & Confessions of the Church.} Fourthly, beware of giving the impression that becoming a ~~Xn.~~

involves necessarily a dramatic crisis religious experience. ^{No Hadesian demons, not such an experience. So did Paul. But Timothy's was quite different having been raised in a furnace.}
 We are not saved by our religious experiences. We are saved

by the grace of God, apart from experiences or works, through faith in Jesus Christ. ^{Fiducia} Faith is not a feeling. Nor is it

something that we can work up on our own. It is a gift of God which the Holy Spirit creates in us? ^{by & through the Word of God.} Faith means that we

accept as true everything that God has revealed to us in his Word... but more than that it means a wholehearted trust

that God will forgive my sins and grant me everlasting life out of sheer grace solely for the sake of Christ's saving

work on the cross. Or, in the words of the Westminster

Shorter Catechism, "Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace,

whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation,

as he is offered in the gospel." ^{Sixthly} Saving faith is always

accompanied by repentance. The important thing is not whether you can remember a crisis experience sometime in the past.

The important thing is that you are now trusting in the Lord

Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord ^{living a life of daily repentance & turning to Jesus for forgiveness & strength.}

You have now heard something of my testimony. I would encourage you to go home this afternoon and write out your

testimony. It might be quite different from mine. God deals

with us in different ways so that we, in turn, might be able

to minister the Gospel to others like ourselves.