

“Disciples Higher Education, Then and Now”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, September 28, 2014

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Holy Scriptures: I Timothy 4: 6-16

“Train yourselves in godliness,

for while physical training is of some value,

godliness is valuable in every way,

holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.” (v. 7a-8)

“These are the things you must insist on and teach.

Let no one despise your youth,

but set the believers an example in speech and conduct,

in love, in faith, in purity.

Until I arrive, give attention

to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching.” (v. 11-12)

“Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your

hearers.” (v. 16)

Sermon

“There are two kinds of education

– one teaches us how to make a living,

and the other teaches us how to live.” (William

Barclay)

One of my nephews lives in east Boston,

where he teaches Second Grade to a mostly Latino student body.

A couple of my kin folks went to visit with him,

and after a tour of his classroom they shared what a blessing it was.

They reported to me that the way he set up the classroom and decorated it

creates an atmosphere for both personal learning and community building.

There are hooks and spaces for the children to store personal

belongings.

Every student has a chore to do,

and his or her chore is posted by their hooks.

Chores rotate on a regular basis so everyone gets a chance at each responsibility.

One of the chores assigned to the classmates is that of mediator.

Should there ever be a dispute or disagreement between classmates,

then the mediator is called over and invited to help resolve the matter.

Throughout the day each child wears a vest with two pockets.

In the right hand pocket are two pieces of paper.

During the school day when a child feels a need for a break,

he or she simply holds up two fingers in a V, like a peace sign,

and after they get an affirming nod from the teacher,

the child may quietly move over to a corner of the room

where there are a couple bean bags.

Next to the bean bags are three sand timers:

a one minute timer, a two minute timer, and a five minute timer.

The child selects a timer, turns it over, and settles in for a brief break.

When done the sand runs out,
the child moves one of the two pieces of paper
from the right vest pocket to the left.

This is how the children get to take up to two personal breaks
to clear their mind, process some information, or relish in
some daydreaming.

In my home we call this a “mental margarita.”

Whatever you call it in your home, we all need it.

In the midst of learning the 3 Rs and how to make a living,
the children are also learning how to live.

What strikes me about this overall, holistic approach
to personal learning and community building
is how respectful it is for every child of God.

There is a solid element of dignity and mutual respect
that is extended to the children both individually and
collectively.

We all want to be respected and recognized.

We are all deserving of receiving information and sharing
responsibilities.

We crave some personal time alone with God and our thoughts,
as well as social time with the whole people of God.

We need the spiritual gift of solitude.

No one is an island; no one stands alone.

We need each other, so we might as well learn – and teach – how to get along,

how to live in community,

how to build each other up for the common good.

Education is definitely about learning,

learning new information, historical data, and how to think.

Much of what we were taught and gleaned in school has been of use.

Not everything, but enough that we don't think it was a total waste.

Of course, I love that line in the film *Peggy Sue Got Married*,

when Kathleen Turner's character goes back in time to high school.

She is in math class when the teach calls on her to answer an algebraic equation,

and she says,

"I happen to know that I will never use algebra for the rest of my life."

The church of Jesus Christ is invested in education at all levels of learning

because we affirm that people can and should and need to learn godliness.

We have the audacity to think that an educated population of believers

will make better decisions,

will be more ethical,

will be more committed,

will be more generous,

will be more well-rounded,

and more invested in what happens to us

in this life and the next.

A company's commercial tag line says, "An educated consumer is our best customer."

An educated Christian is God's best chance for the world.

The Apostle Paul spoke about this in his letter to Timothy and the Christian Church. Paul said, "*Train yourselves in godliness,*

for while physical training is of some value,

*godliness is valuable in every way,
holding promise for both the present life and the life to
come.” (v. 7a-8)*

1 Timothy 4 encourages us to be learners,
to teach and listen and grow in our knowledge of the faith.

Verse 12 affirms us upon whatever level or grade or degree or
plateau we stand.

“Don’t let anyone intimidate you because of what you are,”
or where you are on your spiritual journey.

You know as well as I that both intimidation and confidence come
from within.

We choose which one we will let inspire and lead us
forward.

Paul said,

“These are the things you must insist on and teach.

Let no one despise your youth,

*but set the believers an example in speech and conduct,
in love, in faith, in purity.*

Until I arrive, give attention

*to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to
teaching.” (v. 11-12)*

You and your spiritual journey are valid.

You have something to offer.

You have something to learn.

Paul encourages Timothy and the congregation that,

based on what you know and who you are,

be a model for the wider community.

“Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching;

continue in these things,

*for in doing this you will save both yourself and
your hearers.” (v. 16)*

This, my friends, brings us to the joys and challenges of Disciples
Higher Education.

When our nation was born, our founding fathers and mothers
commitment

to Christian higher education was so high, was such a
priority,

was so much a part of the life of our forbearers

that of the first 270 colleges established in
America,

180 (two thirds) were church related.

By the time of the Civil War, there were five hundred colleges in 16 states,

and the majority of them were affiliated with some Protestant denomination.

One of the main priorities for our spiritual forbearers in the Christian Church

was to start schools for teaching and learning.

We got our start at Bethany College in what would become West Virginia.

Bethany College was founded by one of our founders, Alexander Campbell.

While many Disciples colleges were originally established

as training grounds for ministers,

soon Disciples campus curriculums across the country

took on wider ranges of fields of study and advanced degrees.

Today our 17 Disciples college campuses can be found from North Carolina to Kentucky,

from Virginia to Missouri , from Indiana to Texas to California.

We proudly claim four seminaries and four Divinity Houses on seminary campuses.

Georgia's clergy and laity have direct access to the Christian College of Georgia.

The Christian College of Georgia is based near Athens
yet found in church classrooms across the state.

Thanks to on-line learning,

the Christian College is now available wherever you can tap into the internet.

As a matter of fact, Disciples higher education is now state of the art.

You and I can study at Disciples colleges and take seminary classes,

and tap into webinars and audit most any subject matter.

All that is needed is desire, a willingness to learn, some time and effort,

and a computer screen or a smart phone.

Scholarships abound; where there is a will there is a way.

Once upon a time there was a cultural ethos

that feared higher learning, higher growth, higher capacity
for understanding and community building.

In 1870, a church bishop expressed his displeasure with higher

education

to the president of a Christian college.

The bishop took the stance that there was nothing new
that needed to be learned or invented or discovered.

The college president said,

*“Why, I believe it may even be possible for people in the
future*

to fly through the air like a bird.”

The bishop exclaimed,

“Flying is reserved for the angels.

*I beg you not to mention that again lest you be
guilty of blasphemy.”*

With that the bishop left with his two sons, Orville and Wilbur.

Some 33 years later

Orville and Wilbur Wright made their first flights
across the wind-swept dunes of Kitty Hawk,
and ushered the world into a new age.

Today we can soar with the angels.

Now we are empowered and educated to practice godliness.

Paul taught us that godliness is valuable in every way,

saying, *“Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching;*

continue in these things,

for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

Thanks be to God,

in the pursuit of new ideas and new discoveries,

in the studying of where we have been,

what worked, what needed improvement,

in the exploration of how to practice
godliness, together,

we save both ourselves and
our neighbors,

in this world and the
next.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!