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“Dwelling in the Story”

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.

In a hole in the ground, there lived a Hobbit. Or it is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. Call me Ishmael. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

We all know many stories. Many of which might be our favorites. We are a people of stories. But it seems like in our age, we have so much more access to various and different stories. No longer do we read just books. But we can have books read to us. Or on our big screen TV, we watch stories play out across movies or television shows. Or even that small box that fits into our hands. We can watch things there too. And then we also scroll through and see the stories that people tell on social media. And our newspapers, what stories do they tell? We hear so many stories. Some of them good. Some of them bad.

But Saint Paul warned Timothy and us, for the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching. But having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions. And will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

How many times have you heard someone say, Saint Paul is speaking about today. It seems worse than it ever was. It's easy to point to the world's myths, their stories, and see the folly. How could they believe any of that? It's easy to judge others' itching ears. But what about the myths we've fallen for? What about our own itching ears?

Satan uses myths and our itching ears to disrupt our relationship with God. He uses these tools to silence us, to overwhelm us and to distract us. In keeping us distracted, God pulls us away from the Bible. He tempts us to think that other stories are more important. He uses our own desires to give us what we think we need and what we think we want.

What is on the news? What's the latest Viking storyline? How are the rookies performing? Is the market good or is it going to crash? Just one more episode. That's what's really important. Satan pulls on so many strings to take our eyes off of the Word to distract us. And in this distraction, he begins to overwhelm us.

All these stories don't just distract. They begin to impact our own worries, grow as we hear more of the world and its woes. And we start to lose hope. How could these things happen? How could the world end up where it is now? All we hear, it seems, is the bad news at night. And it seems that the bad news just keeps getting worse. And we feel it more and more.

And then these myths that we hear, Satan uses these to silence us. He cuts us off from the Word. And in so doing, cuts us off from prayer and praise, thanksgiving and peace. When we deal so much with the stories of the world, we take our eyes off the story. The Word of God.

If we are too long away from the Word of God, we lose the ability to hear his Word and speak his Word. Satan uses every avenue to tempt us and we fall for it so easily. He silences us. He overwhelms us and he distracts us.

But the Word is not inactive. It is not stagnant. It is the power of God for you. The power of the Word is a greater power than Satan and the world. Saint Paul says to Timothy and to us today, look how you from childhood have been acquainted with the sacred writing. Quit for every good work.

The Word of God is the power of God to save, to soothe, to strengthen. God's Word makes you holy. I forgive you. All your sins, God says. I love you. All the times you turn away. I still see you and I still bring you back. You are my beloved holy child. Jesus' death on the cross earned for you my forgiveness so that you would not be separated from me. This is our salvation.

God gives it to us that we may rejoice. His Word is the power to save. But also in an overwhelming world with its myths, God's Word alone can bring true peace and soothing. My peace I give to you, not as the world gives. Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Hear my Word. It is the good Word. The world will quake and roar, but I am your trusty shield and your mighty fortress. With me, you are safe.

And finally, God's Word strengthens and equips us for every good work. It is not of our own strength, but God equips us with the armor of God. He gives you his love to share with all the world. He fills us up with his love here in this place to go out into all the world to share the good news and to share his love with your neighbor. God's Word overflows with his love for you.

The Word is the power of God for salvation, for soothing, for strengthening. May we never turn away. We need to dwell in the story and in the Word of God. As God's Word makes us holy, we should find the simple joy in it to hear the Word. Hear the comforting words.

And so I ask you today, review your life. How do you set aside time to dwell in the story? To dwell in the Word? How are your daily devotions? Do you set aside time for God, for reading and for prayers? I know it is a busy and overwhelming world. It can seem so difficult. But start small. Make it easy and let it grow as God fills you up.

There's a wonderful little booklet, the Portals of Prayer. So many of you I'm sure are familiar with. It's a wonderful place to start. They give you a reading and a short devotion. And it starts your day beautifully.

But also, do you join the community of faith in studying the Word? There is great benefit and joy in gathering together with the body of Christ to hear God's Word in Bible studies. And we are so blessed here at 1st Lutheran to have so many opportunities for the community of faith

to gather around the Word of God. To ask questions. To hear other perspectives. But ultimately to dwell in the story that God has placed you.

We all have been acquainted with the sacred writings as St. Paul said. And they have made us wise for salvation through faith. But let us continue in that acquaintance and make it a deep, joyful relationship with the Word. There are many other stories that you are bombarded with. But come and dwell here in the story, the story which tells of God's love for you. Giving salvation, soothing and strengthening.

Now to him who is able, according to the power that is worked within us, to do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. To him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations. Forever and ever. Amen.