

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost, September 23, 2007, Liturgical Year “C”

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW’S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY**

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

*“A Mind Is a Terrible Thing to Waste”*

**REMEMBER THE NEGRO COLLEGE FUND?**

About 30 years ago there used to be commercials on television for the *United Negro College Fund*. Does anybody remember them? While we may not remember the ads themselves, we probably all remember the slogan that ended the ad, “*A mind is a terrible thing to waste.*”

It’s true, a mind is a terrible thing to waste, and a good education is vitally important for a society. Someone has said, “Knowledge is power.” That’s partly true. I would add it is the right application of knowledge that is power, not just knowledge itself. You can have all the knowledge in the world, but if you don’t know how to use it, if you are not wise, it’s not going to do you any good.

And that goes for education. Education is vitally important, but it is not the answer to our problems. Nazi Germany was the most educated society in the world in the 1930’s, but it gave us Adolph Hitler. If someone has a criminal mind, an education is only going to make them smarter at doing wrong. I mean an uneducated guy might try to steal watermelons off a boxcar, but give him an education and he’ll take the whole railroad.

**GETTING A CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**

Education in and of itself is not the answer. What’s more important is the right kind of education, a Christ-centered education. Today we honor our members who are Sunday School teachers. Every fourth Sunday of the month, at the 9:15 and 11 AM services, the children come forward to hear the Church School Homily. This is all part of Christian education. You might add the sermon and being in Church every Sunday is part of a Christian education, so too are the various Bible Studies at St. Bart’s like the Beth Moore Bible Study, the Creationism Bible Study and Friday Night Bible Studies in Lent. And also ministries like the Junior and Senior High Youth Groups. And then of course, there are the Christian private schools and colleges.

What I would like us to reflect on this morning is how we are making sure we are supporting and getting a Christian education. For there is undoubtedly a crisis in our land – it is not an economic, military, or political crisis, it is a spiritual and moral crisis.

**THE DECLINE OF A NATION**

And this spiritual and moral crisis did not happen overnight. It can be traced back to the early sixties, when the nine justices of the US Supreme Court, nine men in black robes, the high priests of secular humanism, took prayer, the teaching of the Holy Scriptures and the Ten Commandments out of the public schools. And it wasn’t just this removal of faith and God from school and public institutions, but a spirit of rebellion that took over our nation. Yes, there were some good things that came out of that time, namely civil rights, but there was also a captivity with a worldview that not just ignored the Lord God but one that rebelled against His laws and standards. And we have witnessed the consequences. A 300% rise in teen suicide, a 500% rise on teen pregnancy, an exponential rise in not just people infected with sexually transmitted diseases but an increase in the number of kinds of

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STD’s, and a rapid rise of teen violence, drugs and alcohol abuse, and, of course, the breakdown of the family.

And I would like to just highlight what we and our children are up against. Think about, for a moment, the spheres of influence in our world. There’s the media which includes entertainment, news, and advertisement. Hollywood does not espouse Christian values, in fact, years ago when the motion picture industry was loosening its standards, movie producers believed that if you were to have a successful movie, you needed to break at least four of the ten commandments. The news isn’t concerned about the truth but about selling a message. And advertisement? Advertisement wants us to believe that if we buy their product we will be happy, successful, and a better person. And then there’s government. While Social Security and welfare have their place, there’s a growing sense of entitlement among our people to the point that there is the expectation that government needs to take care of all our needs and wants. Big brother here we come! Finally, there’s education – public education – devoid of God, and the message it sends – especially in the colleges and universities of America - that faith in God is not the answer but part of the problem! These are the spheres of influence that our children have to face.

The truth is we are in a battle, a battle for the hearts, minds and souls of our children. And it is a battle that begins in the mind. **Romans 12:2a** says “***Do not be conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.***” The Apostle John further clarifies the contrast between following the world and following the Lord in **I Jn. 2:16-17**, “***The world and its lusts (the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life) are passing away but the one who does the will of the Lord will abide forever.***”

### **GOD’S WAY VS. MAN’S WAY**

Do you know what is the principle difference between God’s way and the world’s way?

God’s way says that truth is defined by God for everyone. It is objective and absolute. The world’s way says that truth is defined by the individual; it is subjective and situational. That my friends is at the heart of the war: God’s way or man’s way. And when we talk about absolute truth we are saying that there is a truth that is for all people, for all times, and for all places. It is a truth that is not only objective, but it is universal, consistent, and constant. It doesn’t change.

Sadly, we live in a society in which the majority of our citizens no longer believe in absolute truth. In fact, most surveys show that about 70 percent of today’s generation claim that absolute truth does not exist, that all truth is relative. It is a view expressed by such words as “What’s wrong for you might not be wrong for me, and what’s right for me might not be right for you.” And God forbid that we declare something to be absolutely true lest we offend someone. That, my friends, is the thinking of this age.

Such thinking is so prevalent in our society that in his best selling book, *The Closing of the American Mind*, Alan Bloom wrote, “There is one thing a professor can be absolutely sure of; almost every student entering a university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative.”

But as we have seen God’s truth is not relative. Listen for a moment to **Psalm 19:7-9**: “***The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord***

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*are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous.”* There is not one ounce of relativity in that passage.

### **THE FOUNDATION FOR RENEWING THE MIND**

So how do we renew our minds and renew are children’s minds? We begin with the One who made our minds in the first place.

Please turn with me to **Proverbs 1:7**: *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.”* Who is the fool? The one who does not acknowledge the Lord God. (**Ps. 14:1; 53:1**). **Proverbs 9:10**: *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”*

We must begin with the One who created everything . And the Creator has given us the user’s manual for life: His Word. Notice that is more than just knowing about the creation, it is about knowing the Creator personally.

And yes, this knowledge is found in the Word of God. But it’s more than just learning about the Word of God. Like I told the children earlier, *“The Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth, the only Son of God, Jesus Christ.”* That is the foundation. The Lordship of Christ and the Word of God.

The reason why there is a truth that is absolute and does not change is because it is embodied in a Person. It is embodied in the Personhood of God. It flows from His character. And it is revealed in Jesus Christ. That’s why Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but through Me.”* (**Jn. 14:6**). And Jesus said, *“You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.”* (**Jn. 8:32**).

God’s Law is truth. God’s Word is truth. And this truth is embodied in Jesus Christ.

### **BUILDING A FIRM FOUNDATION FOR OUR CHILDREN**

You know when it comes to my children, my greatest desire for them is not that they be successful in the world’s eyes. I don’t care about awards and accolades. My greatest desire is that they grow up wanting to love and serve the Lord with all their heart and mind and soul and strength. That’s what matters. Jesus said, *“Whoever hears my words and does them will be like a wise man who built his home on the rock,”*

And one of the ways our children are going to build their lives on the rock will be renewing their minds. And the way we renew their minds is to make sure they know the Living Word – the Lord Jesus Christ; and that they know the Written Word – the user’s manual for life. And we are able to do this in three principle places: in the home, in the church, and in a Christian school.

Now not everyone has the means of being part of the third – a Christian school. Christian schools are a wonderful blessing. Not only do kids learn the three R’s they learn about a fourth R – their relationship with the Living God. You can’t put a price tag on that. I realize that not everyone has that opportunity, but we all can grow at home. And that means dads and husbands, as head of the home, you have a responsibility to make sure your family is coming together for times of prayer and reflection and the reading of God’s Word. Are you too busy? I have an acronym for you – “Bound

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under Satan’s Yoke.” What’s more important? Watching TV, playing ball, or praying and getting into the Word with your kids? What will matter in the end?

But not only does God want us to set apart time to learn and grow in the family home, He calls us to be part of another home – the Church. We are part of the family of God. And this means weekly attendance. This means if we have children to make sure they are part of the Sunday School ministry. We are blessed to offer two Sunday Schools here at St. Bart’s. We have a great program with committed teachers. There is weekly Chapel, they learn memory verses, they study the great passages of the Bible, there are special events.

But our learning doesn’t stop after we become adults. We are called to keep learning, to keep growing in the knowledge, wisdom, love and power of Jesus Christ. God has called us to know the truth. That’s why He sent His Son Jesus Christ. And the truth is sure and it is certain and it is constant. And the knowledge of God’s truth comes from a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and continues through our growth in His Word.

So today, as we reflect on Christian Education, may we never forget St. Paul’s words in **Romans 12:2a**: ***“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds!”*** In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!