

***“Ingest, Digest, Dissect, and Regurgitate,” A Sermon delivered by Pastor Cheryl Schalm, St. Paul United Church of Christ, Taylor, June 5, 2022***

Good Morning again and welcome graduates! We are so excited to be able to acknowledge and to celebrate your accomplishments with you during this morning’s worship service. While I trust you would like for me to tell you that your work is now done and that the road ahead is going to be smooth and easy, I cannot do so. And I caution you from expecting it to be so.

In many respects, as a society we have evolved into creatures of habit and convenience? We prefer the quick fix to the often painstaking, time consuming tasks of building and securing something that lasts. In our pursuit for instant gratification we often squeal at anything that demands our time, patience and endurance. We resent such things. Why? Because they require us to emerge from the comforts of our rigorous daily routines and hectic schedules. They require us to reallocate our precious time and to transition from a more mechanical form of existence to a more thoughtful, deliberate and disciplined form of existence.

For certain, submitting to the demands of continuously digesting and dissecting what it is we have learned and experienced in order to be able to regurgitate it and bear fruit, is not an easy task. Nor is it one that ends with a cap and gown. However, when continuously practiced, it will afford you the opportunity to take flight and soar. And while we may all ascend too fast and fly too high at times and descend too slow and dip too low at others, when we choose God as our pilot we can be sure of a safe landing.

When we commit ourselves to ingest information, to include God’s word, and then apply the skills of digesting, dissecting and regurgitating it; we connect with our deeper, more spiritual selves. We find hidden truths and greater understanding when we utilize these too often untapped abilities. As Author, Frances J. Roberts writes, “The fool shall not discern the value and shall cast aside great treasure. The practiced eye knows the true worth of a gem and shall not let it escape him.” Whether for the purpose of academics or spiritual growth, becoming an active lifelong learner, critical and discerning thinker, and an effective communicator of truths learned is worth the sacrifices required to do so.

I once heard it said that, “To read or hear without reflection is like eating without digesting” (Ruggiero). I am guilty on both counts! The culprit, the unnerving tick of the clock that screams “keep moving or risk impending quicksand.” Far too often we may set out to read daily devotions or assigned class readings only to conclude with a sense of completion versus accomplishment. When reading only out of a sense of obligation and duty, we often keep ourselves from entering that sanctuary within; that place of refuge where we are free to connect with our inner self and our Creator. In essence, we deny ourselves the very wisdom of which we seek.

Critical lifelong learning and/or listening is defined as active and thoughtful; a skill that calls the learner to evaluate rather than to simply accept words in print or as we hear them. We must weigh and consider them; reflect and reason. While our eyes and ears may be required to see the print and or hear the words, our minds are required to dissect it and our hearts to digest it. Far too often, as was the case in the parable shared this morning, while our eyes and ears may be present, our hearts and minds often remain absent.

While it is crucial that we reflect upon what we read and hear, as the Apostle Paul warns, we must do so with boundaries. Our thoughts are not to conform to the pattern of this world, but they are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. For then, we will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:2).

Jesus taught the same, “Change your mind” was the central theme of His first sermon, The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 4:17). Jesus challenged people to change their thinking. Regardless of how many times we read through the Bible, if our mind doesn't change, we will simply impose our learned, inherited biases and labels on the words we read.

If we allow our minds to roam aimlessly and to be controlled by others, they will not serve their purpose as critic and evaluator. In essence, the active lifelong learner controls and directs his/her mind. And as Christians, God's Word serves as the foundation, the basis, the benchmark by which we analyze, evaluate and dissect information for truth.

While the Bible serves as the main source, the active learner also benefits and grows in knowledge and wisdom by choosing to read and listen to other materials and sources provided by credible sources. A committed lifelong learner does not refrain from nor reject an author or text based on personal biases. Rather, they consider and then evaluate what it is they have read and/or heard. Our standard of judgment should never be on how closely the author's view matches our own, but whether it is accurate and reasonable. For many of Christians, if not all, would prefer some part of the Bible, the part that does not fit their lifestyle to be rewritten or eliminated. However, like it or not; accept it or not – it still stands as God's Truth, His Word to us.

Likewise, when we close ourselves off to different ideals and understandings we deny ourselves the opportunity to grow in knowledge, understanding, and truth. An individual seeking knowledge and truth should never fear any material; for the remnants that remain after being tried, tested, and put through the fire stand to make us wiser. God's Word, the Holy Bible stands as proof. Many atheists have converted to Christianity, to include Lee Strobel, Jane Fonda, Andrew Klaven, Kirk Cameron and C.S. Lewis as a

result of investigating, considering, analyzing and putting God's Word to the test. They tried it and put it through the fire and as a result, they have been transformed by it.

Becoming an active and open learner provided C.S. Lewis, Lee Strobel and Kirk Cameron with the skills and truths they needed to share the relevance of what they discovered and learned with others. While perhaps on a smaller scale, as Christians, we too are called to relate the relevance of scripture and devotional messages to others through our words and our conduct. When we bring God's Word to life, it becomes a life application versus a history lesson.

Our commitment to lifelong learning and to the obtainment of the skills needed to digest, dissect and regurgitate the truths learned will afford us the opportunity to make the best possible decisions, to problem solve, and to gain understanding and insight into many different areas of study. The greatest benefit however is ownership over our own minds, versus the possession of it by others. These skills serve as assets to students, professionals and within the personal lives of all who strive to obtain them. Becoming an effective lifelong learner helps us to communicate efficiently and effectively with family members, professors, peers, fellow Christians and non-believers. The truths that we stand upon and build our lives upon will serve to sustain us and keep us upright.

While we may ingest a lot of information it's how we digest, dissect and regurgitate it that determines "who produces a crop, who will yield a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." While the challenges of perfecting these skills are as varied as the benefits they produce, it is crucial to the success of all: student, professional and individual.

Our Creator has given us the freedom to choose to passively exist and get by, or to actively live and contribute to the lives of others. The benefits of committing to actively learn and grow afford us the opportunity of the latter. Graduates and church family, may we never stop learning and may we never stop growing in Christ. May "each of us use whatever gift we have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."~ 1 Peter 4:10 ~**Amen.**

**Baccalaureate Roster**  
**St. Paul United Church of Christ, Taylor**  
**June 5, 2022**

***Andrew Caruso\****

**High School Diploma – Livonia Franklin High School**

**Parents:** Ronald & Michele Caruso

**St. Paul Grandparents:** David & Pamela Lange

**Future Plans:** Employment at Roush Automotive, Artwork, Design and future schooling

***Jacob Kasner***

**High School Diploma – Algonac High School**

**Parents:** Jeff & Tammy Kasner

**St. Paul Grandparents:** Tricia & the late Richard Sherman

**Future Plans:** Olivet College – Sports Management

***Joshua B. Miller\****

**Engineering Degree – Aerospace – University of Michigan, Ann Arbor**

**Parents:** Jack & Jennifer Miller

**St. Paul Grandparents:** Dan & Dorothy Evison, Jack & Brenda Miller

**Future Plans:** Employment at Space X, Los Angeles, California

***Zachary Jason Miller\****

**High School Diploma – Woodhaven High School**

**Parents:** Jason & Julia-Joy Miller

**St. Paul Grandparents:** Jack & Brenda Miller, Pati & Mike Widby, Jan Filpus

**Future Plans:** Wayne State University, College of Nursing

***Bethany Schalm\****

**Bachelor of Social Work - Saginaw Valley State University**

**Parents:** James & Cheryl Schalm

**St. Paul Grandparents:** Pat and the late Ralph Herkimer

**St. Paul Great-Grandparents:** the late Ralph & Edna Herkimer, the late Harvey & Helen Cagle

**Future Plans:** Graduate School Wayne State University in June for Master's in Social Work

***Morgan Schalm\****

**MSN/FNP – Family Nurse Practitioner – School of Nursing – Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia**

**Parents:** James & Cheryl Schalm

**St. Paul Grandparents:** Pat and the late Ralph Herkimer

**St. Paul Great-Grandparents:** the late Ralph & Edna Herkimer, the late Harvey & Helen Cagle

**Future Plans:** Provider, Doctor's Urgent Care Group

**Other graduates:** Lexi Berringer, Ryanne Berringer, Kayla Chavez, Olivia Craig, Joshua Ochab, Emily Pedersen, Carlee Robbins.

***\*Indicates graduates who are current St. Paul members***

