

“Liberal Studies”
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**First Presbyterian Church
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II Timothy 1-20 (KJV)**

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Excuses to give your teacher when you don't do your homework:

- A sudden gust of wind blew my homework out of my hand and I never saw it again.
- I wanted to frame the detention letter you're about to give me.
- It was destroyed in a freak accident involving a hippo, a toaster, and a bag of frozen peas. You don't want to know the details.
- My mom used it as a dryer sheet.
- My agent won't allow me to publish my homework until the movie deal is finalized.
- We had homework?!
- I didn't want to add to your already heavy workload.

How many of you remember doing homework?

How many of you enjoyed doing your homework?

I for one, was not enthralled with homework, with studying – in grade school and even high school. Thankfully, I found my love of learning, studying in college! And it hasn't abated!

How blessed we human creatures are – with the gift, capacity, to learn, accumulate knowledge, apply it, and then learn more! The thrill of knowledge needs to continuously be rekindled. The flame of study, enhances us as individuals, and as a culture! We must demand this of ourselves!

I could start further back; but I'll begin with the 17th century Puritans. They believed in 100% literacy. The need for all “children of God” to individually be capable of reading, studying the Bible for it was of paramount importance! This was the way to learn how to live one's life to the fullest!

From this major thrust by the Puritans – learning greatly expanded. All disciplines were nourished, increased, and studied – for the wondrous value of God's creation – was more and more within the grasp of every child and adult!

Back to School – has commenced. Homework is being assigned. Hopefully fewer excuses will be devised, (but with Original Sin – still the coin of human nature – we'll see!). But for those of us out of school – learning, studying should never cease!

Especially important today, in our culture and civilization, is the concern for the lack of knowledge about “religion”, including our own Christian Faith. Our morals, ethics, ethos; in how to live, as individuals and as part of a community (including neighborhoods, to the nations of the world); did not “naturally” develop from our DNA! Rather – and to a great extent – our “Religion”, specifically “Christianity” has formed us, and brought us to where we are today. I speak, not doctrinally, (Although that is not excluded), but ethically, culturally.

We must study, in order to know, to implement, and to teach the future generations! We are at a cultural crossroad! We have become lethargic as a culture – in failing to study and thus know who we have been and who we are.

Knowing about, your “Faith”, and about other Faiths in today’s world is more important than most realize!
We have been lulled into a complacency that will have dire consequences for the future!

Religion is here to stay!

What kind of Religion is the question! And the Christian Religion has been extremely formative in the American experience! No apologies!

Question; with knowing and studying these foundations – how do we welcome, and work with other faiths – in tandem with our Declaration and Constitution, which reflects certain values!

This past week an essay caught my attention and my approbation. Full disclosure: It comes from the Wall Street Journal. It was penned by Dr. Michael S. Roth, president of Wesleyan University, and author of Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters. Dr. Roth reviews two new books on the topic of Liberal Arts Education, in today’s colleges and universities, and its remaining importance for our nation, our democracy.

Quote: Breadth of study and deep critical thinking, once thought to be the crowning achievements of American higher education, now strike fear into the hearts of many parents and policy makers, who view them as luxuries or distractions.

To be clear (and all of this is intimately connected to the history and development of our Christian Faith. Keep in mind the University was birthed by the Christian Church – the first being the University of Bologna, Italy, 1088): “The Liberal arts are those subjects or skills that in classical antiquity were considered essential for a free person (Latin: Liberal is, “worthy of a free person”)

This liberal education was deemed essential for a person to take an active part in civic life. These liberal studies include; literature, philosophy, mathematics and social and physical sciences. And religion – permeated the very concept – moral foundation, a purposeful future.

Of course – “careers” are necessary! But, so too is a civic foundation, and the verities, truths of our culture are derived from Christianity. The great history of all of this is available – it only needs to be read and studied!

One of the author’s reviewed by Dr. Roth, declares; “Strong grounding in the humanities or social sciences,” Mr. Anders writes, “doesn’t have an expiration date.”

So True!

So dangerous to think otherwise!

The unassailable argument goes something like this: A common culture and society – is a must! The study of historical works from one’s own history and culture – through its, at one time, agreement of a “Western Canon”, was, and remains a prerequisite to maintaining this Liberty (Freedom of the individual) – within agreed upon beliefs – maintaining “civil discourse and society”

Out of a plethora of historic examples of this pursuit: I give you, Booker T. Washington, (1856-1915) a black man, an American Educator, author, orator, and advisor to presidents of the United States.

Mr. Washington saw education as a way to economic inclusion into the nation, and that such an education might lead to higher pursuits. Education was much more than getting a job, it also brought responsibility to help others attain their own freedom!

So too, Dr. Roth, along with others sees that “today” these “liberal studies” must reach out beyond the universities – to educate the citizen, to cultivate the “whole person” for his/her life, and the life of the polis (community, city, state, nation).

This morning’s Biblical text is from the Pastoral Letter, traditionally attributed to Paul. Paul writes to a young pastor, Timothy. He has much to teach, this studious student! Paul, here, as in the rest of the letter, is imparting much knowledge. I’m sure Tim was taking, writing down notes, as he read this letter from his professor.

“Be strong, grace is in Christ, be faithful, teach what you have been taught, listen to my teaching, take it in, know the basics of Christ and his resurrection to life, endure, no matter what God is faithful, study, take care what you pay attention to, and remember – God’s foundation is secure!

And that was only part of Tim’s study guide!

Many of you may recall my mentioning Professor Stephen Prothero’s book, Religious Literacy: What every American needs to know – and doesn’t. In his introduction he shares:

“Americans are both deeply religious and profoundly ignorant about religion. They are Protestants who can’t name the four Gospels, Catholics who can’t name the seven sacraments, and Jews who can’t name the five books of Moses...faith is almost entirely devoid of content.” (p.1)

He goes on to declare that “...the power of religion is overwhelming, particularly in the United States.” (p.5) Did you know that by one report 90% of the members of Congress consult their religious beliefs when voting on legislation? Should that surprise you!? Consulting one’s moral compass, which primarily comes from one’s religious background? (Not that all follow in lockstep, but the foundation is there, whether Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, or other.)

Prothero’s argument is not sectarian, but rather civic. He reasons, “If religion is important, we ought to know something about it, particularly, in a democracy, in which political power is vested in voters. But the average voter knows embarrassingly little about Christianity and other religions.” (p.5)

Because of the majority and history of America he gives pride of place to knowing - being literate of - Christianity. But he also proposes the need to know other religions, especially subsequently to the immigration act of 1965.

“My goal is to help citizens participate fully in social, political and economic life in a nation and a world in which religion counts.” (p. 15)

Paul had it right for Timothy – to know who his is, to study, to share, to realize his potential, and the community’s potential!

Study to show yourself approved unto God!

Study!

Study!

Study! And... Do your homework!

Amen.