

May 12, 2019

“Myth Busters”

1 Timothy 4:1-16

We’re beginning a 5-week series called “Mythbusters.” Since it’s Mother’s Day I thought I’d start off by busting a few myths about motherhood. Our Wednesday morning women’s group actually used a book called *Hoodwinked* by Karen Ehman and Ruth Schwenk that addresses the “10 Myths Moms Believe.” It may be something that encourages you as a mom. Here’s a few of the myths moms sometimes buy into:

- Mothering is natural, easy, and instinctive.
- I am “just” a mom.
- A good mother can do it all, all at once.
- I have to do it all right, or my child will turn out wrong.
- My child’s bad choice means I’m a bad mom.

Moms, you make a difference. We should honor our moms throughout our lives in whatever ways we can; and NOT perpetuate these untrue and unhelpful myths.

But, let’s face it, moms aren’t perfect. They get it wrong too. In fact, moms have done their fair share of passing on myths. For many of us ‘because my mom told me’ is reason enough to believe just about anything. I’m here to tell you there’s a long list of things your mom may have told you that just aren’t true. Here are a few myths I came across recently:

- Going out in the cold with wet hair will make you sick.
- Swimming after eating causes cramps.
- Eating carrots improves your vision.
- Cracking your knuckles causes arthritis.
- Reading in poor light worsens your eyesight.

It turns out there are myths in the Christian community as well. These vary from errant, even heretical, teachings and doctrines passed down over the years, to the often unintended misunderstandings and mis-readings of actual Bible passages, to little slogans and clichés that get put on bumper stickers and greeting cards that aren’t helpful at all. In fact, some of these myths can be quite harmful. Have you ever said or heard any of the following?

“God helps those who help themselves.”

“Cleanliness is next to godliness.”

“True Christians never/always _____.”

“Jesus never claimed to be God.”

How do you determine truth from lies, myth and legend from reality?

In 1 Timothy 4, Paul says we should “have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales.” (4:7a) Paul mentions a few in our passage this morning – myths or false teachings encouraging abstinence from certain foods and marriage itself. But there were plenty more of these myths in the Early Church that Timothy would need to point out, refute, and replace with the truth of scripture AND the truth displayed in his actual life.

Since it’s Mother’s Day I should also mention that Timothy’s mom and grandma played a huge role in his spiritual formation. They impacted both what he believed and how he lived out his beliefs. We know this because of what Paul writes at the beginning of his second letter to Timothy. “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.” (2 Timothy 1:5) Paul emphasizes it wasn’t just what his mom and grandma taught Timothy, but what ‘lived inside of them’ – which they then lived out in their day-to-day lives. Maybe this is another myth we need to keep busting: that faith is mostly about believing the right things but can be disconnected with our everyday lives.

Paul is clear with Timothy, and we can be clear with each other: the Church is full of myths, false teachings, and things which sound nice on the surface but are harmful at the root. Paul is convinced all people have the capacity of being misled – even duped – by manipulative leaders and demonic powers. He says we can count upon more and more of these myths/false teachings surfacing as we await the return of Christ.

So over the next few weeks we want to bust a few myths that have crept into the Church over time. Here are the myths we’ll look at together:

God never gives you more than you can handle.

Everything happens for a reason.

You get what you deserve.

Worship Is . . . (There’s a bunch of myths connected to worship and music.)

I don’t know about you, but I hear these exact statements all the time; inside the Church. The problem is they just aren’t true and need to be rooted out of our vernacular.

What I love about Paul’s message to Timothy here in chapter 4 is that he doesn’t just tell him what NOT to do, say, or believe. He tells him what TO DO. In verse 7 Paul tells Timothy to “train [him]self in godliness.” (1 Timothy 4:7b) Notice he didn’t say ‘go get a seminary education’? Paul knew personally that being an ‘expert’ in the scriptures didn’t guarantee someone would follow Jesus. He gives a lot of weight to the way our day-by-day living impacts those we are teaching and influencing.

And yet, Paul is emphatic that scripture is central to faith. Some of his most practical advice about what Timothy needs TO DO includes, “Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to preaching and teaching.” (1 Timothy 4:13) Although it is often individual

scriptures that serve as the kernel of what becomes a myth, reading the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is essential to our faith. In fact, knowing the larger story of scripture – creation, fall, covenant, Exodus, exile, prophecy, Christ, redemption, resurrection, renewal by the Spirit, and the promise of a New Kingdom – [being familiar with that overarching story] is what keeps us from getting sucked in by one of the many Christian myths out there. Scripture is essential.

And the scriptures make it clear that what we believe (doctrine) and how we live (behavior) matter. At the end of the chapter Paul emphasizes the need for Timothy to put the words of scripture into practice. And he ends with this: “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.” (1 Timothy 4:16) He says, “Persevere.” Keep at it!

It’s easy to get off track in the life of discipleship; there are a lot of myths and spiritual trends out there. You and I can get duped if we’re not attentive and disciplined and diligent. If enough people tell you “God helps those who help themselves” – and live as if that’s true – you might actually believe it’s in the Bible, and not realize it’s either from Aesop’s Fables or Benjamin Franklin or the Koran. If you keep hearing and saying “Everything happens for a reason” you’ll spend the rest of your life trying to fit school shootings and sexual abuse and cancer and divorce into the Master Plan of God. If you keep hearing “God will never give you more than you can handle” you might eventually think that *everything* comes directly from God, not just “every good and perfect gift.” (James 1:17)

Getting off track and buying into these myths never ends well. So let’s keep our focus on the central story of scripture. Let’s keep The Main Thing The Main Thing. Let’s keep our eyes on Jesus, inviting Him to bust any of the myths we need to stop holding onto and believing.