**Confirmation at Zion Lutheran Church**

**Letters**

**Background Information**

Today we are studying the Letters or Epistles of the New Testament. Next session we will learn that the letters of Paul were preserved, copied, and passed around. The same thing happened to the letters written by the other apostles and they too were preserved in the New Testament as some of the earliest writings we have from the early Christian era or Apostolic Era. With many written before the completion of the four canonical Gospels, these letters bear witness to the struggles and faith of the first generation after Christ. Although we don't always know the authors, audiences, or circumstances that inspired these writings, it is clear that they were written by individuals moved by the Holy Spirit to spread God's good news.

These letters were written to specific communities and individuals struggling to understand the implications of their newfound faith in Christ. While not all of the information in the letters is relevant to our context today (indeed, we might not even agree with some of it), the letters remain Scripture because they attest to the Spirit's work within the Christian community and to the importance of the communion of saints. They remind us that part of our call to be the church is a call to encourage one another, to hold the faith for one another, and to struggle together to discern how we can serve faithfully within our many vocations – and we all have vocations.

More than just an example of form, the letters contain many gems of faithful speaking that have stood the test of time. They include important reminders about the need to balance faith and action in our daily lives, words of encouragement and theology that help us remember who Christ was and is, and visions of the church and the body of Christ that continue to challenge and inspire us to be equally faithful as Christ’s church.

**What you need to know**

Even though we may not agree with everything in the letters, we do ourselves a disservice if we dismiss them entirely. There are verses and passages in the letters that no longer conform to how we understand faith and the church (especially concerning women and slavery). We can try to make sense of these passages by researching the context in which they were written. This is called the historical-critical method. We can also trust that every generation of Christians does its best to try to live out the faith in their context.

Many of the letters remind us of the need to balance the faith we profess with the lives we lead. Saying we have faith in Jesus Christ is an important and big step, but if our everyday lives don't reflect our identity as sinners redeemed by Christ, then we're missing an essential piece of the faith to which Jesus calls us.

The letters are an example of the value and importance of the Christian community. Through the letters, we're able to glimpse how early Christians supported one another in the faith, and an important part of church membership and Christian faith is taking seriously our call to encourage our fellow believers.

**About the Lutheran Study Bible (LSB)**

There is nothing specific about the letters in the Lutheran Study Bible. However, some information about the context of each letter is provided in the introductions to each letter. Please read the article entitled “Background File,” “What’s the Story?” and “What’s the Message” for each book. These articles can be found at the beginning of every book of the Bible and are very helpful in getting a basic understanding of each book’s content.

**Essay Questions**

*In your own words, answer two of the following questions below in 100-150 words each and return them to Pastor Jesse by email at* [*pastor@zionohio.org*](mailto:pastor@zionohio.org) *no later than next Sunday.*

1. Read 1 Timothy 1:1-11  
   Who is the author and who is the recipient?  
   Focusing on verse 4 compared to verse 5, what seems to be the issue?
2. Read James 2:14-26  
   What is the argument James makes, and do you agree?  
   Is this consistent with the teachings you have heard in your church, especially concerning Martin Luther and the Reformation?
3. Read Titus 2  
   To whom is the letter written?  
   Focusing on verse 5, how do you feel about the instruction that is issued?  
   Verse 9 seems to indicate the support of slavery. How do you make sense of this?
4. Read Hebrews 12:1-13  
   The author uses athletics as his metaphor to explain the life of the disciple. Does it work for you? Explain why or why not.  
   Focusing on verses 7-11, how do you feel about the concept of discipline in the faith?