

WHAT DO YOU TEACH OCTOBER 25 2009
ST. LUKE'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
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This morning we are thinking about Jesus as a teacher and we are privileged to have one of our Sunday school students read the Scripture for us today.

I would like to invite:

8:15 am: JACOB ROWLAND to join me up here. Who are your parents, where do you go to school, and what grade are you in?

9:30 am: ANNA FERGUSON

11 am: CAROLINE SINICKI

Jesus taught in a boat beside the Sea of Galilee; he taught in the Nazareth Synagogue; he taught in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus taught people wherever he went.

Let us pray.

This past week I did some research on how often Jesus is referred to as a preacher and how often he is referred to as a teacher in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. What I discovered surprised me.

We often think of Jesus primarily as a preacher of the Good News that God's amazing grace and steadfast love and forgiveness are available for everyone who has faith and trusts in God.

The Gospel of Mark begins with these words:

JESUS CAME TO GALILEE PREACHING THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD AND SAYING 'THE TIME IS FULFILLED, THE KINGDOM (LIVING PRESENCE) OF GOD IS HERE, REPENT AND BELIEVE THIS GOOD NEWS.'" There are many places where the Gospels refer to Jesus as one who preached or proclaimed the Good News of the Gospel.

A Bible concordance is a book or computer program which will tell you how often and where any particular word is found in Scripture. This is a Bible Concordance which has every word in the Bible recorded and tells us where it is found and how many times that word is used.

For example, if you want to find out how many times the word Jesus is used and where, you look under "J" and find all the listings of the word Jesus in the Bible.

Now, you know every preachers secret. When we think of a verse from scripture but we can't remember exactly where it is found, we think of one word in that verse and then look up that word in the Concordance and find the verse we're looking for.

Now, with computers it is even quicker. If you have a concordance program downloaded on your computer you can simply go to that program, type in the word you want to find and discover quickly every verse in scripture which has that word in it.

Well, this week I did some research and discovered that Jesus is referred to as a teacher or that he taught or gave teachings 56 times in the four Gospels. But the Gospels refer to Jesus as preaching only 21 times. The Gospel writers refer to Jesus as a teacher almost three times more than they refer to him as a preacher. Jesus was first seen more as a teacher than a preacher.

I shared this with a teacher friend and he responded by saying that this shows that teaching is three times more important than preaching and I said, "You may well be right."

In the texts that JACOB, ANNA, OR CAROLINE just read for us, I just chose three of the many places where the Gospel writers wrote that Jesus taught. Jesus stood along the shore of the Sea of Galilee teaching a crowd of people but the crowd grew so large that he got into Peter's boat and put out a little way from the shore so the whole crowd could see and hear him as he taught them many parables or stories about the nature of God.

Another time Jesus returned to his home town of Nazareth and went into the synagogue and taught people there the meaning of a prophesy from Isaiah.

On another occasion he went to the temple in Jerusalem where he stood at the top of the steps going into the temple and the people gathered on the steps below him and he taught them about how they should trust and love God with their whole being.

I think the Gospel writers saw Jesus primarily as a teacher who taught children, youth and adults about a compassionate and forgiving God and how to live a purposeful and meaningful life. The lives of people were changed by the teachings of Jesus. Their lives were changed by a teacher.

This morning I want you to think about the teachers who have had a transforming impact on your life.

Recently I was talking with a very successful businessman. I asked him to tell me about his life journey.

He told me that he was born into a very poor family with several brothers and sisters in a southern state. He explained that his family was seen as that poor family on the edge of town who were just barely surviving.

However, when he got into high school there was a teacher who discovered that this young man was a hard worker and eager to learn all he could learn. This teacher saw his potential and spent time with him encouraging him in his studies. No one in this boy's family had ever gone to college and he knew his family could not afford to send him to college, but his high school teacher encouraged him to go on to college after high school.

His teacher got him a scholarship to attend a community college and eventually a scholarship to attend one of the major universities in Indiana. While he was at that university, another teacher took him under his wing and helped him to become a well educated professional in his chosen field.

This very successful businessman said to me that he really owed all that he was today not only to his parents but to two teachers: a high school teacher and a college professor who believed in him and encouraged him.

I suspect that the same thing is true for all of us. Think about your time in grade school, high school or college. Can you think of a teacher who gave you special attention and made you feel like you are valuable and could achieve anything you set your mind to?

I went to a very small high school but I know that my life was positively shaped by Mrs. Fowler, Miss Ulrich, Mr. Butler, Mr. Van, and Coach Doyle. In college I remember the powerful life shaping impact that Mr. Jennewein, Miss White, campus pastor Roper and Coach Penney had on my life. In seminary, it was Dr. Beck, Dr. Muelder, Dr. Rowlingson, and Dr. Ferre who had a profound shaping affect on my life and ministry.

When I look back on my life I realize that there are about a dozen teachers from grade school through graduate school who shared their time, energy, love and knowledge with me in such a way that my life was changed for the better and I will always be grateful to them for choosing to be teachers and professors and blessing me with their knowledge and concern for me as a person.

Can you think of grade school teacher, high school or graduate school teachers who helped to shape who you are today? If you can think of a teacher who has made a positive impact on your life would you raise your hand? When we stop and think about it, most of us here are indebted to a teacher somewhere who made a positive difference in our lives.

Today I hope that you will offer a special prayer of thanksgiving for the teachers and professors who have had a positive impact on your life.

Teachers and professors are not the highest paid profession in our society, but they are persons who make one of the highest contributions to improving the lives of the people in our society because they devote themselves to the education and growth of children, youth and adults.

If you have children or grandchildren in school or college you want them to have the best teachers possible because you know the powerful impact teachers will have on the persons you love most.

God sent Jesus as a teacher and I thank God for all teachers who follow in his footsteps as teachers and are devoted and committed to the education and growth of their students.

I once asked a teacher the question: "What do you teach?" She answered, "Students."

I said: "I meant what subject do you teach to students." She explained to me that she knew what I meant but she wanted me to understand that her focus was on her students and their life situation and their needs. She explained that she had to know her students and their needs before she teaches them the subjects they needed to learn to live a fulfilling life.

I thank God for teachers who care for their students like that.

However, I would like to ask that question to all of us: What do you teach? What are you teaching people around you by everything you say and do?

The truth is that all of us are teachers whether we work in a school or college or not.

The best teachers are simply those who care about their students and have a positive impact on them. And the best people in the world are those who care about the people around us and having a positive impact on their lives.

So I ask again: what are we teaching all of the people around us by our attitudes and actions?

What are we teaching our families by our attitudes and actions? What are we teaching our neighbors on the streets where we live by our attitudes and actions? What are we teaching our colleagues at work by our attitudes and actions at work? What are we teaching the clerks in the stores where we shop by our attitudes and actions? What are we teaching everyone we meet by our attitudes and actions?

Today, I would like to encourage all of us to think about what the people around us are learning about God, about Christ, about love, compassion, generosity, and forgiveness through our attitudes and actions. People are watching us all the time and the only question is: what are we teaching by our attitudes and actions?

The truth is that all of life is a school and we are all students. Life experiences are the lessons and God is our teacher.

Whenever anything happens in my life I always ask the question: what does God want me to learn from this experience? What is the lesson I need to learn from whatever happens in my life?

So when something happens in your life, whether it is something you call good or something you call bad, ask yourself: what does God want me to learn from this experience? How can I grow to be a better person through this experience?

Think about what is happening in your life right now whether it is something you call good or bad. Then simply ask yourself: what am I intended to learn from this experience?

I've shared with you before that when Minnietta and I were on vacation last summer four teenage boys broke into our home and stole my car, a computer and a television set. The next day they were driving my car in Broad Ripple when they ran a red light and a police officer pursued them.

They jumped out of the car while it was still running and ran away. The police officer stopped my car and called in other officers and they caught all four of the boys. There was a 14 year-old, two 16 year-olds and an 18 year-old boy who is being tried as an adult.

The younger boys were put in juvenile detention and I was invited to come to their preliminary hearing. After the charges were read against them, the judge asked if I wanted to say anything to these boys.

I explained that I am pastor of St. Luke's United Methodist Church and I had been praying for each of these boys since I the break in.

I explained that I prayed that these boys learned something from their experience of breaking in and stealing from a home, being caught and spending time in the juvenile detention jail. I said that lesson is that negative behavior has negative consequences. Breaking in and stealing is negative behavior and spending time in juvenile detention is the negative consequence.

I went on to explain that out of every bad experience in life God wants something good to come out of it. I told them that my prayer was that out of this bad experience in their lives and in ours, God would bring something good.

I told them that if they wanted to go in a different path in life, I would like to help them. I told them if they wanted a mentor to meet with them every week to talk to and to help them with their problems I would help them find one. Afterwards, two of the mothers of those boys came up to me and thanked me for the offer to help their sons and we prayed for each of those boys while they were in jail.

The boys spent about six weeks in juvenile detention and then were put on probation with electronic ankle bracelets which monitored where they were at all times. They were not allowed to go back to the same school they came from or to associate with each other.

A couple of weeks ago, I received a letter of apology from one of the 16 year-old boys in which he said that he was sorry for breaking into our house and stealing some of our things. He said he knew it was wrong when they were doing it and he is sorry that he was a part of it and he promised that he would never do that sort of thing again.

Then his counselor called me and told me that this boy would like to take me up on my offer to find a mentor for him. So I called couple of people in our congregation asking for suggestions about who might be a mentor for this young man. I called one of the men suggested who is an African American attorney in our congregation and when I asked him if he would mentor this boy he immediately responded, "Yes."

Last Friday the 16 year-old boy, his counselor, the attorney, our outreach director Jayne Thorne and I met in my office to talk about the mentoring process. After we got acquainted (and I discovered that counselor's family was from South Dakota) we worked out this arrangement.

The mentor will pick him up at his home every Saturday morning and they will go out to breakfast together. The boy will share what has happened in this past week and what is coming up in the next week and what problems he is having with life and the attorney will try to help him with these issues.

I asked the boy what his hopes and dreams were and he replied immediately that he wanted to be a cook or chef in a restaurant. He explained that his grandfather had been a chef and he loved to help his grandfather prepare and serve meals to the family.

I told him that we were all on his team and would do everything we can to help him achieve his dream and I told him that we would all come to his graduation from high school and from chef school when that happens a few years from now. I told him I looked forward to eating in the restaurant where he worked as a chef.

When I said those things, I could see that his eyes lit up and he knew that there are some people who care what happens to him and would help him achieve his life goals.

Then this boy turned to me and said something like this: "Mr. Millard, if someone broke into my house and stole my stuff, I would be mad at them and I wouldn't want to help them. Thank you for not being mad at me and for helping me." His statement touched all of us.

I offered a prayer for him and his family and his future and thanked God for his new mentor and prayed God would bless them in this process.

I read recently that in order for a young person to grow up with a feeling of value and self worth, they need at least seven adults who care about them and what happens in their lives.

This means that raising children is not something that parents can do alone. Their children need not only their parents' love and support but the love and support of grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbors, public school teachers, church school teachers, youth counselors, pastors and family friends who will be a one of those seven adults who cares about them and is committed to their growth to be all that God created them to be.

This is why it is so important that we have a lot of Sunday school teachers for children and youth counselors in our youth program because each of these children and youth need to know that there are at least seven adults who care about them.

The tragedy in our society is that there are so many children and youth who grow up with hardly any adults who care about them.

A couple of years ago, I was on the Mayor Bart Peterson's Crime Prevention Task Force chaired by Dr. Jerry Bepko from our congregation. As a part of that commission we visited a group of about a dozen teenage girls who were in the Juvenile Detention center. There were five adults sitting in a circle with these girls.

The counselor asked them "how many of you have an adult mentor?" It was silent and finally one girl asked: "What is a mentor?" The counselor explained that a mentor is an adult who cares about you and what happens to you. It can be your mother or father or a relative or a neighbor or a teacher-any adult who cares about you.

It was still silent; no one raised their hand. Finally, one girl pointed to the female guard in their unit and said, "I know that she cares about what happens to us." Then we all thanked this guard for her care and concern for these girls in her unit.

Afterwards I thought how tragic it is that these girls couldn't think of one person in their family or neighborhood or school or church that cared what happened to them.

Friends, if our society is going to improve in terms of education and care for the children and youth in our midst it is up to us as adults. We have to make a commitment to be among those adults who spend time mentoring and caring for the children and youth around us. This is why we ask you to teach Sunday school, become a youth group counselor, volunteer to mentor or tutor someone at Fox Hill school or simply become a caring neighborhood adult who cares for the children and youth in your neighborhood.

Jesus came among us as a teacher and I believe that he calls all of us to be teachers and mentors sharing the Good News of God's love with all of the children and youth around us.

Prayer