

Saint Matthew's/San Mateo Episcopal Church

16 Pentecost, Proper 19, September 12, 2021

READINGS:

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalms 116:1-8

James 3:1-12

Mark 8:27-38

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

"The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens - wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught."

"Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For all of us make many mistakes."

"Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him."

Most of my preaching resources, as well as the sermons I have heard and read on today's readings take as their major theme the necessity for followers of our Lord Jesus to deny self, and take up their crosses and follow him. But as I read the lessons in preparation for preaching them this year, what jumped out for me was the teaching, and the learning!

Stop and think - everyone in this room has been a teacher at one time or another. We have taught someone to tie a shoe, to say "please" and "thank you," to polish a clarinet reed, or to grill a cheese sandwich.

Some of us have taught professionally, or still do - things like breath support in singing, or reading a story, or how people lived in the Las Vegas Valley five hundred years ago, or identifying a snake or bird or cactus flower.

Most of the time, we don't stop to really think about teaching, or how important it is, or how it helps learning happen, or how those who teach can change lives for the generations who follow them. Today's readings made me stop, look, and listen - about teaching, and about learning!

Isaiah says his ability to teach comes from God, and he gives the REASON for his teaching - to sustain those who are just plain tired out! And, he says that God wakens HIM every day to listen and be ready to learn! He is what we call today a "lifelong learner."

James has a cautionary word for teachers - they will be held to a very high standard! It's important in teaching to get your subject RIGHT, and not let your tongue run away with you. James says teachers will be "judged with greater strictness," and calls our attention to the plain fact that we all make mistakes - lots of them!

And Jesus, in our reading from Mark's Gospel, has a REALLY hard lesson about the cost of following him. It is not one Peter wants to learn. We don't like it very much, either. But Jesus wants Peter, and the other disciples, AND the crowd - and us - to be perfectly clear what HE wants his followers to do.

Have you ever considered just what a good teacher Jesus was? He had all kinds of teaching skills, and he used them with his disciples and with crowds of people who came to him, over and over.

Think how often we hear in scripture of Jesus telling a parable to engage his learners with the lesson he wanted to teach them. Think how often the Gospels record him demonstrating how he wanted something done by doing it himself in the presence of his disciples. Think of him reading from scripture in the synagogues, and interpreting for the community what he has read. Think of those gatherings of people sitting around Jesus as he spoke to them, or gathered up their children for a blessing in what we would call today a "lecture hall" format.

In today's Gospel, on the way to some villages in the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus has a very serious lesson for his disciples. He begins by asking two questions.

The first would be called by our professional educators a question requiring "Lower Level" thinking: "Who do PEOPLE say that I am?" That's easy! It only requires the disciples to remember and say what they have heard said. They respond with John the Baptist, Elijah, and "one of the prophets."

The second question requires what we call today "Higher Level" thinking: "But who do YOU say I am?" Not so easy! Now the disciples have to remember the stories Jesus has told them, what he has done as they looked on, how he has read scripture, and what he has taught directly to the groups of people who gathered to hear him. Then they have to pull all that

together, apply what they know about their religion, and make a decision. I wonder how long it took Peter to answer "You are the Messiah" - Mark doesn't say!

Peter gets the answer to the higher level question right. But, he runs into trouble when the really tough part of the lesson comes along - when Jesus teaches the disciples what MUST happen to him. Peter argues against the suffering, the rejection, the killing, and even the rising from death! Like my high school chemistry teacher when we mistakenly almost made chlorine gas in the school lab one day, Jesus quickly tells Peter "NO, NO, ABSOLUTELY NO - STOP - you have it all wrong! Good teachers have to do that, too, sometimes.

Mark doesn't say any more about Peter's error. Instead, he moves on to Jesus telling the disciples, and the gathered crowd, about what his followers ARE to do. That's the part we still have trouble with on this Sunday, in this room, isn't it? Working for God's will over our own, picking up individual crosses day by day, and following Jesus all the way through life, to death, and to the new life beyond! The lesson IS very hard.

Not impossible, though. What was true for Isaiah is still true for us. We too, have been given "teacher tongues." We are called to teach to others OUR answer to Jesus' question, "But who do you say I am?" We too, are lifelong learners. With each day, each cross, each submittal to God's will, each scripture reading, we learn more and more, and become more and more like Jesus.

Many generations of teachers and learners have gone before us, in this Year of Our Lord 2021. Now, WE are the teachers, and WE are the learners. It is up to us to tell the old, old stories of Jesus and his love. It is up to us to do what Jesus did. It is up to us to keep in contact with scripture, and to speak about our life in Christ Jesus. It is up to us to wake up every morning with our ears perked up, ready for the day's lesson. Remember the people Isaiah taught? The ones that were just worn out? Now, the work of "sustaining the weary with a word" is ours!

That's a big job! Remember, James says when we teach we will "be judged with greater strictness." I think it's good, once in a while, to check how well we have learned the lessons Jesus taught. Do we remember the stories he told? Do we treat other people as Jesus treated them? Do we read scripture regularly? Do we tell others what we know about God's kingdom? In short, do we use our "teacher tongues" wisely and well?

I wonder if Jesus has a sign like the one my Junior High bandmaster had hanging below the clock in his band room posted on the wall in heaven.

That sign read, "I have not taught unless you have learned."

Amen.