

## Lord Teach Us Your Word

Text: Deuteronomy 18:15-20

1 Corinthians 8:1-13 (Series B. 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany) Ps. 111

Mark 1:21-28

*Jesus and his disciples came to the town of Capernaum, and on the next Sabbath Jesus went to the synagogue and began to teach. The people who heard him were amazed at the way he taught, for he wasn't like the teachers of the Law; instead, he taught with authority.*

Let us pray

Her name was *Mrs. Thompson*.

As she stood in front of her 5<sup>th</sup> grade class on the first day of school, she told the children a lie. Like most teachers, she looked at her students and said that she loved them all the same. But that was impossible, because there in the front row, slumped in his seat, was a little boy named Teddy Stoddard.

Mrs. Thompson had watched Teddy the year before and noticed that he did not play well with the other children, that his clothes were messy and that he constantly needed a bath, and Teddy could be unpleasant.

It got to the point where Mrs. Thompson would actually take delight in marking his papers with a broad red pen, making bold X's and then putting a big "F" at the top of his papers. At the school where Mrs. Thompson taught, she was required to review each child's past records, but she put Teddy's off until last. When she came around to review his file, she was in for a surprise.

*Teddy's first grade teacher wrote:* "Teddy is a bright child with a ready laugh. He does his work neatly and has good manners... he is a joy to be around."

*His second grade teacher wrote:* "Teddy is an excellent student, well-liked by his classmates, but he is troubled because his mother has a terminal illness and life at home must be a struggle."

*His third grade teacher wrote:* "His mother's death has been hard on him. He tries to do his best but his father does not show much interest, and his home life will soon affect him if some steps are not taken, soon."

*Teddy's fourth grade teacher wrote:* "Teddy is withdrawn and does not show much interest in school. He does not have many friends, and he sometimes sleeps in class."

By now, Mrs. Thompson realized the problem, and she was ashamed of herself. She felt even worse when her students brought her Christmas presents, wrapped in beautiful ribbons and bright paper, except for Teddy's. His present was clumsily wrapped in the heavy, brown paper that he got from a grocery bag.

Mrs. Thompson took pains to open it in the middle of the other presents. Some of the children started to laugh when she found a rhinestone bracelet with some of the stones missing, and a bottle that was one quarter full of perfume. But she scolded the children's laughter when she exclaimed how pretty the bracelet was, putting it on, and dabbing some of the perfume on her wrist.

Teddy Stoddard stayed after school that day just long enough to say, "Mrs. Thompson, today you smelled just like my Mom used to." After the children left, she cried for at least an hour. On that very day, she quit teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic. Instead, she began to teach children.

Mrs. Thompson paid particular attention to Teddy. As she worked with him, his mind seemed to come alive. The more she encouraged him, the faster he responded. By the end of the year, Teddy had become one of the smartest children in the class and, despite her lie that she would love all the children the same, Teddy became one of her "teacher's pets." Teddy went on in school doing real well and then to another school.

A couple of years later, she found a note under her door, from Teddy, telling her that she was still the best teacher he ever had in his whole life. Six years went by before she got another note from Teddy. He then wrote that he had finished high school, third in his class, and she was still the best teacher he ever had in his whole life.

Four years after that, she got another letter, saying that while things had been tough at times, he had stayed in school, had stuck with it, and would soon graduate from college with the highest of honors. He assured Mrs. Thompson that she was still the best and favorite teacher he had ever had in his whole life.

Then, four more years passed before another letter came. This time he explained that after he got his bachelor's degree, he decided to go a little further. The letter explained that she was still the best and favorite teacher he ever had. But now his name was a little longer, the letter was signed, Theodore F. Stoddard, MD.

The story does not end there. There was yet another letter that spring. Teddy said that he had met this girl and was going to be married. His father had died a couple of years ago, and he was wondering if Mrs. Thompson might agree to sit at the wedding in the place that was usually reserved for the Mother of the Groom. Of course, Mrs. Thompson did, and guess what...She wore that bracelet, the one with several rhinestones missing. She made sure she was wearing the perfume that Teddy remembered his mother wearing on their last Christmas together. They hugged each other, and Dr. Stoddard whispered in Mrs. Thompson's ear, "Thank you, Mrs. Thompson for believing in me. Thank you so much for making me feel important and showing me that I could make a difference."

Mrs. Thompson, with tears in her eyes, whispered back, "Teddy, you have it all wrong. You were the one who taught me that I could make a difference. I did not know how to teach until I met you." (Elizabeth Silance Ballard)

Remember that wherever we go, whatever we do, we will have the opportunity to touch and/or change a person's outlook. "Today is the tomorrow you and I were worried about yesterday." (D.Carnegie) Was it worth it? "Friends are Angels, who lift us to our feet when our wings have trouble remembering how to fly." (Unknown)

Today, we heard of Jesus entering the synagogue at Capernaum and beginning to teach. Now I'll admit that if you compare standing up and teaching folk in a synagogue to some of the other things Jesus did – teaching in the synagogue could have been rather dull.

But Mark tells us that all who heard his teaching "*were amazed*" because "*he taught them as one having authority.*" In fact, a little later Mark repeats how amazed everyone was, saying,

*"The people were all so amazed that they started saying to one another, "What is this? Is it some kind of new teaching?"*

Mark doesn't tell us what Jesus taught that day. Rather, he tells us firstly, *how* he taught—*with authority*. He spoke as someone who knew what he was on about. He explained what the Scriptures said with confidence and, when asked a question, he knew how to answer. He spoke with authority.

When he challenged Satan and cast out demons, he spoke with authority. When he spoke to the wild forces of nature, he spoke with authority. Without any exaggeration, those who heard him would never be the same again.

He taught his disciples and all who would listen, using stories and the Scriptures; he spoke with authority words of forgiveness; he spoke with authority to the man on the cross beside him; he spoke with authority as he ascended and promised he would be with us always. And whenever he spoke, or helped someone, the Gospel writers tell us what impact Jesus had on people's lives. Again and again we are told how amazed people were.

We know of at least one instance when Jesus invited children to come close to him. Jesus spent time with the children; he was keen for them to hear what he had to say. He wanted them to get to know him. No doubt, what was seen and heard left a lasting impression on those young lives. No doubt we can think back to people who have made a lasting impression on our lives – either good or bad. Perhaps it was a grandparent, an uncle or aunt, a parent, a friend who loved you and cared for you in such a way that left a lasting impression on you. Perhaps a Sunday School teacher or pastor who encouraged you in your faith and helped you to know what it meant to be a Christian. I know I am grateful for my teachers who were agents of the Holy Spirit and had a very positive impact on my life.

As we look back, often we can't specifically remember what a person said but we remember what kind of person he/she was and the impression that was made on us. We may not even know what it was that was so special about the person that we recall with such fondness. All we know is that the person has somehow made an impact on our life and made us what we are today.

What good and positive things are children learning from my example and from the way I speak to them? Are children learning something from me that will stand them in good stead for the future? These are natural questions for all of us to reflect on. We want children to grow into strong, wise, confident, capable, mature adults. But we want more than that. We want them to grow in their faith and follow Jesus all the days of their life.

God has given to all of us, when it comes to growing children, to be loving and with a strong faith. We can't treat them with an attitude of **"benign neglect"** and expect them to flourish. What if we say: "Well, after all, it's a natural thing for children to grow up. As long as we provide food and clothing and love, we can just let nature take its course. They'll pick up what they need to know. They'll learn how to get along in society. They'll turn out OK."

I'm afraid too many people in our society today have that kind of attitude and let their children's moral and spiritual life be moulded by the world. Distressed mothers and fathers have a great deal of pain in their hearts because they don't understand why their child has **"run off the rails."** In most cases, it is clear that from a very early age, parents have let their child's values be molded by society's values.

As parents, grandparents, uncles or aunts, God has given us the responsibility to deliberately be a powerful influence in the lives of the children in our family. As members of this congregation into which children are baptized, some who are members of your family but many who are not, through the water of baptism God has given each and every one of us a special responsibility to ensure, either personally or through our support of those who teach children. It is our responsibility to see to it that they are able to come and see Jesus as their Saviour and friend.

And when we fail by poor judgment, in Jesus there is always the chance to make things right. He loves failures. He forgives our weaknesses and failings. He encourages and supports us and, through the Holy Spirit, he gives us the know-how to do a better job.

When God's Word and God's ways are taught and spoken about *with authority* – with conviction – our children (*and others*) will see with amazement God's love for them in his Son Jesus. Amen.

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We are back into a lockdown situation as the COVID-19 virus has not subsided, so let's all take time to pray, to encourage and to call one another in the household of faith and ALL nurses, doctors, truck drivers, all essential workers etc.

**Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:**

- Children of the Heavenly Father # 781
- Break Now the Bread of Life # 515
- The Lord's My Shepherd # 778

Let us pray: Compassionate God, you gather the whole universe into your radiant presence and continually reveal your Son as our Saviour. Bring wholeness to all that is broken and speak truth to us our confusion, that all creation will see and know your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

January 31, 2021