

Sermon 1608

Matthew 11.25-30

July 24, 2017

I have always viewed myself as a teacher. The public ministry is a teaching ministry. If you can't teach, you can't be a minister of the Gospel. And in my early years, I actually taught in a boarding high school that prepared teens to enter collegiate ministerial studies. I was part of a faculty and got to know many teachers. Over the years you always are critical of yourself. What are you teaching? Are you keeping up with the times, freshening up the material? Finally you get to the point where you look at the very heart and core of what you are. What makes a good teacher?

We Christians have great familiarity with the best teacher, Jesus Christ. What makes him head and shoulders better than every other mentor and guide in the classroom?

The Best Teacher

1. Reaches everyone (25-26).
2. Knows his stuff (27).
3. Teaches what works (28).

Jesus is the best teacher because the best teacher reaches everyone.

“At this time Jesus said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure (25-26).’”

One of the most frustrating things about teaching is trying to reach people who don't want to learn. They know it all already. They don't need to know it. Jesus ran across that, a lot! “We are Moses' disciples! As for this country-bumpkin, we don't know where he came from!” the learned religious scholars of Jerusalem said about Jesus. “Are we blind?” they asked Jesus one day. “If you admitted you were blind, then there's a chance you could see, but since you say you can see, your sin remains,” Jesus responded (John 10.28-29, 40-41). You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.

Haven't we all discovered that? Children look up to their parents until a certain age. Then you could swear the parents have been in a tragic accident and have suffered severe brain damage, the way their children treat them. And it won't stop until they get about 30, when suddenly you are smart and worth listening to again. I know this is true because I'm seeing it from both sides. That's the way I treated my parents when I was growing up.

It's the sinful human nature at work. The sinful human nature knows how to have a happy life already, so why listen to God's Word? The sinful human nature knows all the answers when it doesn't really even know the questions. Adam and Eve thought hiding from God in the bushes would solve all their problems. Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery would get rid of the daily irritation of being around daddy's favorite. Murdering an Egyptian slave driver was the way to start the

rebellion to free God's people, Moses thought. From overdoses to twenty-somethings in AA, from unwanted pregnancies to dying alone because you are too stubborn to say you are sorry for a life of scarring those who should have been closest to you, that's where the sinful human nature gets all who know better than God. And I'm not even talking about the eternal destination of people who do not want any part of God. God will give them what they want.

But Jesus doesn't turn away. The best teacher reaches everyone. He teaches the eternal Gospel, that for his sake, God the Father has declared the entire human race not guilty of sin. This is the Father's pleasure, that this knowledge gets out. And it does. God the Father reveals it, John's Gospel tells us, through the Word. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1.14)." That's Jesus. Jesus is God's mouthpiece, his spokesman in this world, the teacher sent from the Father. Jesus reaches everyone, "little children," Jesus says.

Now if a teaching is so clear that even little ones can understand it, you've got something. Peddling caviar? Going strike it rich getting Americans to eat haggis (meat and stuffing baked inside a sheep's stomach)? You are going to have trouble making your product catch on. But "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so," that's pure gold. Even before they can speak you will see a little one folding their hands in imitation of their parents in prayer. God bless you mothers and fathers. I see you opening a hymnal and helping your little ones track the lyrics on the page during the songs. That's because the Gospel here, the message of God's love for us in Jesus, touches every one of us. Jesus is the best teacher because he reaches everyone with his teaching.

Jesus is also the best teacher because he knows his stuff.

"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him (27)."

Who knows what heaven is like? Jesus does. He's been there, as the one in charge, the Son of God from all eternity. "In the beginning was the Word (John 1.1)." Who knows how to get to heaven? Jesus does. That's why he came to this earth, "that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3.16)." He even knows his stuff so well, he can tell what is going to happen before it happens. When he's been teaching a mob of over 5000 people in the wilderness all day and their stomachs are starting to growl, he asks his disciples "Where are we going to get something to feed all these people?" He knew what he was going to do. He was going to miraculously feed them. But he said this to his disciples so they would turn to him for the answer. When he gets word that his friend, Lazarus is sick, he tells his disciples this illness "will not end in death." No, because Jesus would raise Lazarus, who had been dead for four days, from the grave and bring him back to life!

Already from the start of his preaching and teaching, he left people amazed. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount the people were amazed, “because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law (Matthew 7.28).” In Capernaum’s synagogue, after he drove out an evil spirit heckling him during the sermon, they said, “What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out (Luke 4.36)!” It never stopped. On the very last day of teaching, the Wednesday he spent in the Temple, it got to the point where none of his enemies “dared to ask him any more questions (Matthew 22.46).” Have you ever won an argument with a college professor? Me neither. But Jesus silenced a boatload of theologians who had spent all their lives telling people, “Some rabbis teach this, some say that...” and then their voices trail off as they turn their attention to another person.

And don’t believe any preacher who makes things sound convoluted and muddy. Those are not the teachings of Jesus. Jesus knew his stuff and it was clear. If a religious teacher or preacher is saying something really confusing, he is either incompetent, a false teacher or you were daydreaming. Jesus knows his stuff. He’s not going to be like one of my friends who got an emergency call to teach religion to seniors in high school and spent half the night trying to keep a day ahead of his class. Faithful, that he was. Know his stuff? Eventually. Jesus never said, “I’ll get back to you later on that one.”

But here’s the real proof of the best teacher. Jesus teaches what works.

I have a gripe against American education. No, it’s for none of the reasons you might have. A lot of people’s gripes against our educational system is because they read the paper and all it has is bad or twisted news about what is going on. Children can do very, very well in our school systems. I know that from personal experience. But in every case, my children’s instruction failed them in foreign languages. The way Americans teach foreign languages does not work. Europeans speak at least three languages apiece. We barely speak one (according to the Brits), English, American style, don’t ya know?

People may burn three years in a Spanish class and not know *abierto* means open, but you will never waste time listening to Jesus teach. Jesus teaches what works.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (28-30).”

Jesus promises rest for our souls. Through faith in him, we will find rest for our souls. We know we need that rest. Our world is built on the restlessness of guilt from the dirty deeds, hateful words and twisted thoughts we have authored. Our greasy, sinful fingerprints are on everything we have touched in our lives. How are

we going to find rest from that nagging voice of conscience? Through faith in Jesus we will find rest for our souls. Jesus teaches what works.

The other night I was thinking if you are not a Christian, and you look at Christians, you have to come to the conclusion that it isn't fair. Christians can do something that would lead others to suicidal despair and they just turn the corner and it's like it never happened. Guilt slides off them like water off the back of a duck. And it's true! Look at a believer you know--King David.

King David made Richard Nixon look like a Boy Scout and Bill Clinton look like a nun. He murdered one of his own generals to cover up his affair with the man's wife, who bears David a son and David pretends suddenly nobody knows how long it takes to have a baby. Then Nathan the prophet confronts him with his sin and David repents. And Nathan says, "The Lord has taken away your sins. You are not going to die (2 Samuel 12.13)." And what is the subsequent story of King David? Is he an object of scorn? Is he an abject failure, a man broken by the sins of his past? No! He goes on to conquer an empire. Jesus Christ will be called "Son of David." His symbol, the star of David, adorns the flag of the nation of Israel! Forgiveness works. David found rest for his soul. He says so himself. "Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you (Psalm 51.12-13)." Jesus teaches what works.

But you know that. Ever felt terrible after you flew off the handle at the kids? Afterwards you went to them and apologized for acting the way you did, asked them to forgive you and they did. And they didn't disrespect you for it! Why did that work? That's what Jesus taught. Jesus teaches what works.

Ever done something so incredibly stupid that you think you should lose every single one of your friends, that everybody should treat you like a house burning down and stay out of the way and you think that you are absolutely worthless and this is the end? Then you remembered Jesus' parable about the Lost Son, the Prodigal Son. You remember no one can out-sin God's love, no one can out-run his forgiveness. So you pray to him. You ask God to forgive you, because Jesus died for that sin, too, when he died on the cross. And you were able to get to sleep that night and the people you loved still loved you.

Ever worry that you are not doing enough, not doing enough for the kids, you aren't doing all these wonderful things your friends say they are doing on Facebook, your life isn't as wonderful as theirs, you don't take as nice a picture as they do, you don't love Jesus as much as they do because they are always bringing up religion, be it Jesus marching with a suitcase to the White House after the November elections or the latest Bible diet that helped them lose thirty pounds? Ever feel like you have to earn God's love and you are falling behind? Where in Jesus' words does he say "try harder?" Where in Jesus' words does he say "this is the minimum amount of holiness and good deeds I will accept?" Where is the link where Jesus has posted

the entrance test to the kingdom of God? No, he says everyone who is weary, everyone who is burdened, come to him. Find rest in him. What is his burden? What is the light load Jesus puts on us? His love. His forgiveness. His acceptance of you and me which gives us real worth, unchanging worth. We don't have to prove ourselves. His choice of us proves everything.

These are the reasons Jesus is the best teacher.

The Best Teacher

1. Reaches everyone (25-26).
2. Knows his stuff (27).
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Teachers. Many of us are still benefiting from great teachers we've had in the past or trying to cover the scar tissue the bad ones left on us. Many of our children will be dealing with a new set of teachers in but, what, twenty-one days!

Here at Green Valley Evangelical Lutheran Church we are keeping the teacher we have. Our teacher is the best teacher. Our teacher is Jesus Christ. Through our worship services, our Sunday School, Teen Bible Class, Sunday Adult Bible Class, Wednesday Adult Bible Class, Preschool and Kindergarten, School Staff Meetings, Catechism and Adult Information Classes, Jesus will be teaching us exactly what we need to know exactly when we need to know it and put it into practice. Don't let his words be hidden from you.