

THE TEACHER: TAKE CARE HOW YOU LISTEN

Mark 4:1-20

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin

Lent 2 Weekend, February 27 & 28, 2021

TRUTH #1 – A good teacher seeks to touch the hearts and minds of every learner.

Fellow students of the Word of God. Fellow students of the Teacher. A good teacher seeks to touch the mind and heart of every learner. He or she may seek to do so by walking around the classroom, getting into the space of every student to engage them and draw them out and into the lesson. In the COVID world, we're Zooming for online instruction in Public School Confirmation. The classroom looks like this, which requires the Brady Bunch look on the screen to keep tabs on participants and engage them. My 8th graders are used to me saying, "Josh, I'm coming your way next, my friend! Michael, what do YOU have for us on THIS question?"

A good teacher always knows the lesson plan and the AIM of the lesson—WHERE we are headed and HOW we plan to get there. The good teacher uses a variety of pictures and applications in hopes of bringing the lesson home for each and every student.

Today, we are interacting with THE Teacher, our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith who was the voice at Creation to bring this world into being. He is the Good Teacher, always seeking to interact with us, his students. No matter where you are sitting in this worship space or chilling online with a nice cup of coffee, the Teacher will find you today. He is seeking us out one by one to help us grow in our faith--trusting him for salvation AND for our "faith walk"—our journey in life whether easy or hard. The Good Teacher is coming at us with a picture, and he will reveal truths about ourselves and about our God. He will teach with empathy and love (he's lived our life!)—he will speak to our hearts. Let class begin!

READ the TEXT.

TRUTH #2 – Jesus used parables as teaching tools and memory hooks.

Good teachers find memory hooks on which to hang the lessons—like your favorite jacket, on its hook, you know right where it is on a cold and blustery day. Jesus' memory hooks are parables—earthly pictures known to people, with a spiritual truth for us to ponder. "Remember the day Jesus taught the parable of the Sower and the Seed?" John probably said one day to Peter. They reviewed the story and asked the question: "What is the memory hook for the journey the Master wants us to know?"

Lessons often come in the pondering, don't they? Believers in the Teacher ponder...and grow...and when we do not understand the lesson, we go to the Teacher and ask him to explain. For the Teacher IS the secret or the KEY to the Kingdom of God given to us. Often it is his dying for sin and rising to life that IS the key to the parable. Other times we just need to ask, "Lord, explain the parable to us."

You probably noticed a curious comment from the Teacher about his teaching in parables. For those on the inside of the Kingdom—believers—these parables ARE memory hooks and lessons to ponder. For those on the outside of the Kingdom—unbelievers—these parables CAN be truths they have no time for in their rejection of God in their lives. Jesus began to teach in parables when the Jewish leaders, especially, no longer wanted to listen—they did not want him to BE their Messiah, their Savior! And his parables? "What are these foolish stories?!" Without the KEY, they were blind to the treasures.

TRUTH #3 – Old-time farming is a “key” to this parable.

“Earthly stories with heavenly meanings.” WHAT to make of this one, the *Parable of the Sower and the Seed*?

Jesus is ultimately THE KEY to every parable, but each parable has an *earthly* key, the picture that helps us grasp the lesson. With the parable of the sower, old-time farming is a key to understanding.

A farming friend of mine told me that today’s farmer has the option of a 48 or 54 or 72-row planter! The tractor has an onboard computer linked to satellite and GPS, AND to each planting head—for orientation of the planter and precise placement of each kernel or seed!

NOT SO the sower of seed in ancient Israel. He would sow by hand, pulling grain from a pouch suspended from his waist. Yet time and experience made him every bit as good at his craft as the modern farmer, spreading the seed in wide arcs that landed evenly and expertly across the landscape. He did not have a hydraulic, diesel-powered backhoe to wrest the rocks from the ground. He didn’t have herbicides to throttle the weeds, and the paths through his fields—the county roads of the ancient world—some seed couldn’t help but land on it! There you have it, the back story to the parable of the Sower.

TRUTH #4 – Typically, a parable has one, main point for the learner to “catch and carry.”

Remember, a parable typically has ONE main point for us to “catch” and to “carry” on the journey of life. The parable of the sower is all about listening appropriately to the Word of God as the good seed of the Word is scattered among the people of the world.

The farmer sows the word. ¹⁵ Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. ¹⁶ Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ¹⁸ Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; ¹⁹ but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²⁰ Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some 30, some 60, some a 100 times what was sown.”

#1—Some hear the Word...but don’t really listen. Like seed on the hard ground. Maybe they are a guest at a wedding or a friend at a baptism or a co-worker at a funeral. It is awesome that they are there for you, but as they enter the church they steel their heart—shutting it off to this church and its message. They are here for you—which is nice—but any message of sin and forgiveness, of life in Jesus, bounces off with no effect.

#2—Some hear and listen for awhile, falling in love with Jesus as their Savior...until it gets hard to listen AND to be accepted by their people, their world, their culture. “Don’t tell me you’ve found religion! YOU?!”

“Well, no not really. I’m still ‘one of the guys’. It’s just important to my girl.”

#3—Some hear and listen for awhile, but they imagine that they don’t need to give their undivided attention to God and what he is telling them. When Jesus says, “*No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money*”...God and sexual appetite, God and power, God and influence—they disagree! I can have both! And eventually they stop listening altogether.

#4—Some listen...and keep on listening...growing in faith and in trust for God and his Word. They grow in what we call a life of sanctification—a life lived for God—trusting that his blessings are found in his design for the world and in his the forgiveness through Jesus. Recognizing sin and the hurt that it brings. Loving the freedom of God’s forgiveness--inspired to trust his plan for things like intimacy within marriage, honesty in all our business, patience in all relationships—having our treasures in heaven.

TRUTH #5 – Remember the “Good Teacher? Seeking to touch the heart and mind of every hearer?

Remember the Good Teacher, always seeking to touch the heart and the mind of every hearer? What is this parable saying to you and to me? Did the thought cross your mind, “Where in the field am I sitting today? The hard ground? The shallow ground? Among the thorns? Or happily blessed?

WHERE was I standing yesterday? Where do I WANT to be standing tomorrow?

#1—Do we ever go through the motions of hearing God’s Word? Here, but not really, because the topic for worship has biased my heart before the pastor ever steps into the pulpit?

#2—Do we ever experience GREAT joy in our love for Jesus and his Word? His blessings are obvious and amazing and all was well, but then the bottom seems to fall out of life and with it the blessings of God? We cast our eyes heavenward—“Where are you, God? I am not feelin’ the love. What did I DO? I thought I signed up for blessings. I may just turn in my membership card and walk away.”

#3—Do we ever experience a season of life when the seed of the good Word of Jesus seems to be here, sown in our heart but we seem stuck? No growth in faith...faith is...eehh? Maybe we are too concerned about things and “enough” is not enough. Maybe we look to money to buy us happiness because God doesn’t seem to be coming through. Maybe the things of this world begin to determine who I am and the love of things becomes a root of all kinds of evil. Jesus’ words about the “*desires for other things*” is a loaded one—touching us all.

#4—The good soil. I pray that is where we are all sitting today. Our faith is healthy and growing in the Word. We have seen ourselves throughout this parable. We recognize “seasons” in our life when we took our eyes off of the Word and embraced the “spin” of this world and listened to its voice rather than to the voice of the Savior. I pray the good soil is where we are!

CONCLUSION Where is the comfort in this parable? “Is that all you got, pastor? For some reason, I am not feeling so good about me right now.” And I would agree! Do you think MAYBE we need to look again at the KEY to the Kingdom given to us? Let’s get down into the weeds and see what we can find! “*Listen, a farmer went out to sow his seed...the seed is the Word.*” Hmmm...

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1) Hang on to that thought...Jesus IS the Word that is sown...and ADD this thought:

During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and became the source of eternal salvation. We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. (Hebrews 5 and 4)

Did you catch that? Jesus IS the Word of God and he lived among the weeds, the distractions of life...and he bested them! ***“Father, not my will but yours be done”***...focus...focus. Jesus experienced the heat of persecution from the Jews, and the temptation from Peter to step away from his Father’s plan to die for sin: ***“Never, Lord! This shall NEVER happen to you!”*** said Peter.

“Get behind me, Satan!” said Jesus, ***“You do not have in mind the things of God but the things of mankind!”*** Jesus embraced the eternal for you and me—the life he had come to win for all! He focused on the cross and he paid for our sin. And along the way he taught us this parable about the farmer who sows the seed of the Word onto the paths and onto the rocks and into the weeds. Guess what?! When we find our spiritual lives bogged down by the distractions of life, or on life support due to the pressure of the non-believing world, guess who is standing there with us in the weeds and among the rocks? The Word of God himself! ***“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”*** He forgives our sin, course corrects our life and plants us fully in the good soil of his Word! And the fruits of faith begin to appear—the living for and the blessings of God!

He is the patient Teacher, sitting IN the weeds, speaking to our hearts and setting us free! This concludes his lesson. Amen.

Prepared by Pastor Nate Strobel
414-422-0320, ext. 293
nstrobel@stpmuskego.org