

## Jesus Speaks in the Christian Classroom!

*delivered by Pastor Michael Woldt*

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When I was invited to preach for your Christian Education Sunday here at Faith, my thoughts turned immediately to some of the familiar Scripture texts I might use for the sermon. There is, of course, Proverbs 9:10, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Or also from the book of Proverbs 22:6, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not turn from it." How about some of the verses from Psalm 78: "O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. ... I will utter hidden things, things from of old --- what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord! Or how about the invitation of Jesus recorded in the Gospels: "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." Or the encouragement the risen Lord shares with Peter and with us, "Feed my lamb. Take care of my sheep." Or what about the Great Commission, "Go and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Then there are the inspired words of the apostle Paul, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children. Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4). We could speak about all the forms of Christian education and how the elementary schools, the high schools, the Sunday schools and other Bible classes we hold for the young all assist parents in their God-given task. The list of Christian education texts could go on and on. The Bible speaks frequently and passionately about Christian education in the home and through the church.

But I didn't have to look any further for a text on Christian Education than the Gospel lesson for the fourth Sunday after Epiphany. **[Read Luke 4:20-32]**

As we consider this portion of Jesus' public ministry recorded by Luke, we are going to see why Christian Education is such an amazing blessing. Christian education is truly amazing because Jesus speaks in the Christian classroom. This Gospel lesson helps us understand that Jesus' message is not welcome everywhere. However, when Jesus does speak, his words are filled with true power from God!

Before we look at the text, let's reaffirm that we treasure Christian Education precisely because we want Jesus to be speaking to our children at school as well as at home. Jesus is speaking whenever and wherever his Word is used. He told his disciples, "Whoever listens to you, listens to me." How much effort and money would you spend if you heard that Jesus himself was appearing and putting on a special presentation for children or teens? How much would you be willing to spend on that ticket? More than you do for a Bucks or Packer game? More than going to see a production of "High School Musical Live?" What an awesome experience it would be to hear Jesus live and in person! Well, Jesus speaks in the Christian classroom everyday! That's what makes Christian education such a blessing. And that's not something you can find everywhere. In fact in many places, people don't want Jesus speaking at all.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus was in his own hometown of Nazareth. He was in the synagogue preaching and proclaiming that he was the Christ. At first, they were amazed at his words. However, not everyone wanted him to continue speaking. In fact, many people in Nazareth developed a hostile attitude. They became furious, thinking, "What right does this guy have to say the things he's saying? This is the carpenter's son!" Jesus didn't seem all that special. In fact, he appeared rather common. Some people were thinking, "Let's see a dazzling display of glory! Then maybe we'll listen and pay attention, but until then, we don't want to hear anymore of your claims, your words. Jesus' words offended the unbelieving, challenging their presuppositions about Israel, challenging their authority. His words weren't welcome in his home town. They were ready and willing to throw him off the cliff.

Jesus' words aren't welcome everywhere today either. Sadly, we know that all too well. People don't want Jesus speaking in public for a variety of reason. Jesus seems too common to some people. Jesus seems too much like any other prophet or religious leader. Others don't want Jesus speaking because they understand what he is saying and they don't like it. Jesus' words challenge the popular opinions and commonly held beliefs of our day. When Jesus speaks through his word he says, "There aren't any other true religions. No one comes to the Father except through me." When Jesus speaks, he says, "You are not the master of your own fate and the captain of your own ship. You don't get to call the shots." When Jesus speaks he says there are certain "so-called" lifestyle choices that are an abomination to God. When Jesus speaks, he cuts all people to the quick with the law. Through his apostle he reminds us "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ... and the wages of sin is death."

Instead of listening to Jesus, repenting of sins and turning to Jesus for forgiveness, the unbelieving hearts want to stop Jesus from speaking. The hostile mind wants to throw Jesus off the cliff for good. His words aren't welcome everywhere. You yourselves see what happens when Jesus no longer speaks to the hearts and minds of people. Without guidance from God's Word, people today enter into endless and human-centered debates about what constitutes a marriage, when life begins, whether or not children should even be exposed to the Ten Commandments in public settings. Everyone seems to have a different opinion but no true foundation for beliefs other than their own heart, mind and feelings. What a blessing it is to have Christian education, where Jesus speaks! Yes, Christian education is an amazing blessing, because through Christian education Jesus continues to speak. And when Jesus speaks, his words carry true authority.

After Jesus left Nazareth, he began to speak in Capernaum. The people in Capernaum were amazed at Jesus' teaching because he taught with authority. When Jesus taught his words weren't wishy-washy or open to debate. They were the very words of God. What a difference from the endless debating of the Pharisees which led to man made laws, and unfortunately led people further and further away from the truth.

Jesus speaks God's law, which condemns us all with equal power and authority. When Jesus speaks we learn how utterly and completely we have failed to keep his holy law. God isn't pleased with a slice of our life and or a tithe of our devotion. He demands complete honor and respect. He wants our every thought to be pure, and it is not. He wants our every word to be filled with love, and so often we use our tongues as a weapon to hurt or express anger. He wants us to be satisfied with our daily bread and so often we grumble and complain. We turn our wants into needs and then act as if God has forgotten completely about us. Jesus speaks words of clear law and condemnation through Christian education. Every student who listens to Jesus speak through Christian education will hear that they deserve eternal punishment.

However that message of law is not the final word Jesus speaks. When Jesus speaks he also proclaims God's grace, forgiveness of sins and eternal life. When Jesus speaks this Good News, it is backed with authority derived from his own perfect life and innocent death. Jesus met every standard of God's holy law without a single lapse or flaw. His entire life was an unblemished offering of praise to his Father in heaven. Then, in the greatest act of love and self-sacrifice in all of history, the perfect Son of God shed his blood on the cross. He suffered the torments of hell in our place so we could live in heaven forever. He became sin in our place, so that through him we would become righteousness and perfection in God's eyes. His resurrection from the dead proclaims his complete victory over sin.

Every day, Jesus speaks through Christian education and reminds students that God has delivered them from the curse of sin and death. Every day students are reminded that God, has given them an eternal home in heaven. And as Jesus speaks, faith is strengthened and hearts are renewed. Grateful children of God learn to say with the apostle Paul, "He died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again." Troubled children of God are strengthened by Jesus' promises as his Word proclaims, "All things work together for good to those who love God, who have been called according to his purpose." As Jesus speaks, children are prepared not only for this life, but for eternity as their eyes are lifted from this world to the next. Jesus says, "In my Father's house are many rooms ... I am going to prepare a place for you! Because I live, you also will live."

What's so great about Christian education? We don't support Christian education simply to give our children a safer environment in which to learn. We don't support Christian education because our children will wind up with higher test scores than going to a non-Christian school. We don't support Christian education primarily as a place to keep our children safe from the cruel world out there. The sad truth is that the devil and the sinful world enter the doors of our school with every student, every teacher and every pastor that walks the halls, because we all have a sinful nature. Christian schools aren't always free from bullying and sexually impure words. Christian schools don't always have the best and latest technology and the widest range of courses. But Christian schools have something of far greater value. Jesus is speaking.

There are a lot of passages in Scripture that proclaim the benefit of Christian education. Let's remember today that the true blessing of Christian education lay in this: Jesus speaks in the Christian classroom. Lord, preserve this tremendous blessing among us, for the sake of your children, and to the glory of your name. Amen.