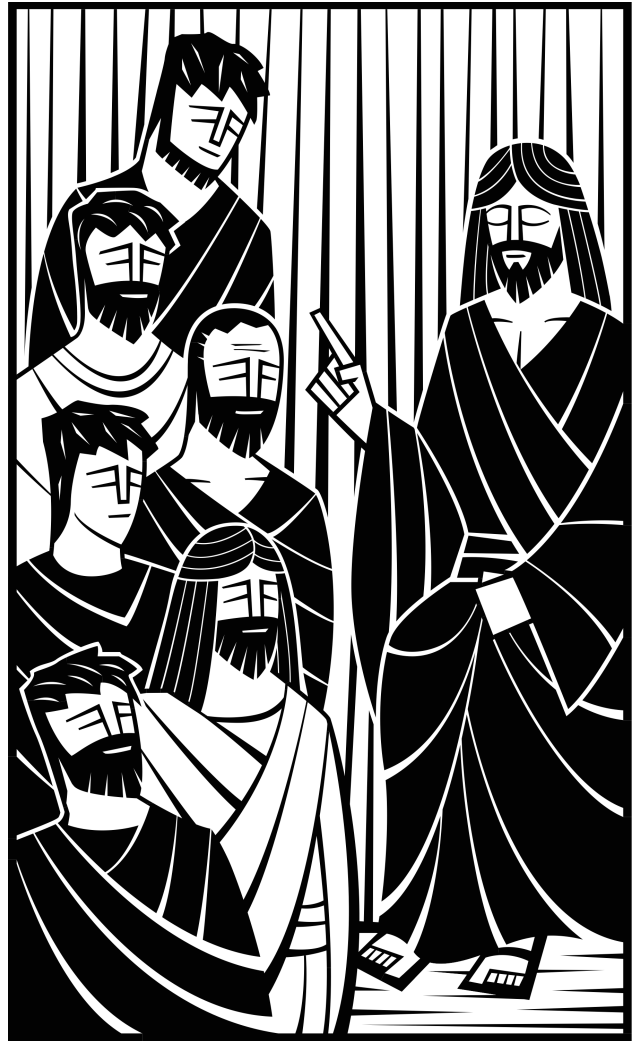


JESUS TAUGHT
THE WAY OF
LIFE —
AND SO DO
WE



*Jesus teaches a new commandment to his disciples.
Photo credit: Ian Welch, paramentics.com*

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Foreword

With this paper, the author was tasked with the following:

Evangelize, baptize, teach: this is the process Jesus calls his people to carry out in their worldwide ministry. This essay focuses on the purpose and value of Christian education as a process that follows conversion. The author will describe Jesus, the master teacher, his qualifications and attitudes toward learners, and his methods of instruction. The essayist will move beyond Jesus to other biblical teachers and offer examples that help to establish the place, purpose, and patterns of Christian education in God's plan of salvation and in the modern parish.

Three aspects were understood:

1. Examine Jesus' aptness and qualifications to teach.
2. Explore Jesus' teaching methods.
3. Enumerate other Biblical methods as appropriate.

This paper addresses the first two points.

A tip was phoned in to the police department. The third man down on the FBI's most wanted list was allegedly sitting in the back room of a restaurant.¹ He was wanted for being the bookkeeper to a notorious mobster in the Midwest. The responding police officer arrived in an unmarked car, dressed in plainclothes. Two rookie FBI agents were already on scene trying to assess the situation.

What do you do? The methods quickly become extremely important. Lives are at stake. Unfortunately the novice FBI men were stumped. They had no idea how to proceed. Seeing them flounder, the seasoned officer walked into the restaurant and approached the back room. Above the din of the room the law man respectfully asked if a man was present — using the suspect's legal name, not his alias. When the man instinctively looked up and answered affirmatively, the officer simply approached and manipulated him out of the back door of the restaurant without incident.

But that wasn't the end. The two FBI men wanted the arrest (and the credit). As the agents began to take their prized collar, they noticed the criminal had a cast on one arm. "How do you cuff a man who has a cast? The hand cuffs won't fit," they questioned. As the rookies sat and scratched their heads again, the local officer rolled his eyes, went back to his vehicle, and brought out a hobble. The hobble is a versatile device able to restrain a person in such circumstances.

The difference between the key players above is the word *apt*. The FBI agents had badges and book knowledge, but no practical, adaptable way to use their authority. It goes to show just having head knowledge does not guarantee a practical understanding of people and situations. Likewise, understanding people and situations doesn't mean you have the appropriate knowledge base from which to teach. Inevitably, such deficiencies will be visible in the results — or lack thereof.

In 1 Timothy 3, Paul gave the church her teaching qualifications. Candidates were not to lack them if they wished to shepherd the flock. Just having an internal desire to do this noble work was not enough. Overseers, Paul wrote, are to be "above reproach, honoring the marriage bed, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, not given to drunkenness, not violent but

¹ This is based on an actual case from Marana, AZ.

gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, good managers of their family, obedient children, and a good reputation with outsiders.”² Comparatively, every one of these moral qualifications listed for overseer is exactly the same for every single Christian. There is no distinctive moral quality separating teacher from student. The only distinguishing characteristic in Paul’s list for the Christian church marking an individual fit for ministry is *apt to teach*. What does that mean? C.F.W. Walther explained this aptness as:

“The teaching contains nothing but God’s Word, pure and unalloyed.”³

“It correctly applies God’s Word.”⁴

Like the FBI agents, Christian teachers must have a foundational level of understanding of the Word of God from which to teach. This isn’t merely factual information, such as content, dating, background of the book and author. Walther wrote that it must be *pure* and *unalloyed*. For teaching to be true teaching, the teacher needs to see Jesus throughout the Scripture. It is to Jesus every sacrifice of the Old Testament pointed. It is Jesus Moses described in Deuteronomy 18 when he prophesied a teacher like him would come. It is Jesus of whom God himself testifies, “Listen to him.”⁵ It is Jesus John saw in Revelation 1, “someone like a son of man.”⁶ Earlier in life John wrote, “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.”⁷ Without the Key of David — no matter how great the methodology and information is — the Word remains locked, the teacher remains false, and the students remain in their sin.

Just as important as the preceding, Walther writes, is the correct application of the Word. The teacher needs to know the audience. Trying to use handcuffs as a method when the hobble is needed creates frustration and distrust between teacher and audience. It also delays the intended results. It may be humorous to consider the pastor who fumbled away his connection to any sci-fi lovers in his Bible class when he said, “Use the force of faith. That illustration was for all you Trekkies out there!” But on a more serious level, consider the following:

² 1 Timothy 3:1-6; summarized from the New International Version, 2011.

³ C.F.W. Walther. *Pastoral Theology*. (New Haven: Lutheran News, 1995), 61.

For further treatment on this, see Jonathan R. Hein’s WLS essay file paper, “Treasure in Jars of Clay: The Synergy between the Instrumental and Ministerial Causes of Salvation.” <http://wlsessays.net/files/HeinTreasuresSBL.pdf>

⁴ Walther, 63.

⁵ Mark 9:7

⁶ Revelation 1:13

⁷ John 20:31

The class had been dealing with Romans 8:28, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” John asked, “So, class, how have you seen God work for good in your life through difficult situations?”

Nancy spoke up and told her struggles. She expressed that at the moment she wasn't so sure God was working for her good. She told of her doubts and pain. After a few minutes, John interrupted Nancy and said, “Nancy, I don't think we can solve your problems here today. We really need to move on in our study if we are going to finish Romans by the end of the quarter. Maybe we can talk after class?” Nancy nodded, the class ended, and Nancy slipped out without a word. She has not returned since that lesson.⁸

The knowledge of the Word and ability with it seemed to be there. The interest among the students was present. But what was lacking was aptness. An interest in and love for the student was absent. An inability to apply the very passage to a struggling soul displayed callousness. Time constraint trumped applied truth. Content trumped the student. Imagine if Jesus interacted with people similarly! Would you continue to follow him?⁹

My definition of apt to teach, then, is a knowledge of and ability with the Word, a genuine interest in and understanding of people, and the skill to connect them both.

We also need to keep in mind that while aptness is something that can be gained through training, it is also something that can be lost. The goal of aptness is the clear communication of the Word to the soul of the listener. That communication fails where growth in the Word turns stagnant and the Word isn't mined to bring *new* treasures as well as old. Communication additionally falters when our desire plateaus for people in general or age groups with whom we no longer try to relate. The result will invariably be that the distance increases between pastor and parishioner, shepherd and sheep, because our teaching isn't reaching the heart.

The Aptness of Jesus Christ

The Prophet

Jesus had no earthly diploma to demonstrate his teaching credentials to the world. We know of no schools he attended. He authored no books. Unlike the Greco-Roman or Judaistic models, he was never a disciple or student of any other philosopher or rabbi. Remarkably, he had

⁸ Richards, Lawrence O. and Bredfeldt, Gary J. *Creative Bible Teaching*. (Moody Publishers; Chicago, IL. 1998), 109.

⁹ Paul similarly warns us against being *resounding gongs* in 1 Corinthians 13.

one of the shortest time spans of teaching compared to any other famous teacher. Yet even a glancing look at history up to the present indicates a more significant and lasting impact on people than any other teacher in time. Without a formal education under a formal educator, how could he accomplish all that he did? Before we examine his methods, let us re-examine the man.

Prophet from Birth

When Moses spoke to the heirs of the Promised Land, he made a significant announcement about a pending prophet. “The Lord said to me: ‘What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers.’”¹⁰ Israel’s past fear at hearing God’s voice and seeing his fiery presence while tenting at Mount Sinai prompted a humbling request — a change of classroom and teaching methods. God allowed it. The horrifying picture of a consuming fire would turn into the purity of penetrating words from a person *like Moses*. The voice of God that towered from above would still remain the voice of God, but now it would emanate from the voice box of a man on earth. The Lord promised, “I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.”¹¹ There would be no breakdown in the delivery of this message. From the intent to the content, to the use of words, to setting it on the soul of the listener — everything would go as God desired. The prophet would tell *them*. The only portion out of his hand is whether the people would listen to the same message *from above* now packaged and delivered from *among us, as one of us*. Or would the one like Moses be rejected by attitudes similar to the people who at one time stood in front of Moses?

Isaiah added to what Moses described, saying:

Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations:
Before I was born the Lord called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name. ²He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver. ³He said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.”¹²

Luther describes this scripture as the boast of God over against any intelligence of man. “He did not call Me on the basis of any preceding merits nor when I was 30 years old, no, when I

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 18:17

¹¹ Deuteronomy 18:18

¹² Isaiah 49:1-3

was in My mother's womb, He designated Me a Preacher."¹³ We evaluate candidates for ministry on various levels for aptness in order to maximize a pastor's use in the field: preaching and teaching skills, writing, personality, people abilities, organizational and time management, and even family and spouse — to name a few. These evaluations are done by observation and assessment *over time* and *in time*. When Isaiah writes that Israel was called *before* birth, it is God's miraculous boast that this individual — before he takes his first breath, before any human being sets their eyes on his abilities and works — already meets every criterion and passes every assessment in the sight of God for performing his prophetic work. John Schaller similarly states:

While all other true prophets of God were called to their office at some period of their adult life, the prophetic office of Christ, began an integral feature of the Messianism (sic), *began with his birth* (sic), in the same real manner as his priestly and kingly offices. Therefore his human nature was fully endowed with prophetic prerogatives in the *incarnation*, and not at some later moment of his life.¹⁴

To emphasize the extent of the prophet's ability, Isaiah didn't stop with his description merely at the mention of the weapons: *sword* and *arrow*. By inspiration of the Spirit this prophet would be *sharpened* and *polished*. He is ready for service from the start. His ability would have impact and effect. A sword or arrow in the hand of a trained soldier is for the sole purpose of striking where it counts. So too the weapon of the Word incarnate would accomplish his work with striking and purposeful words. They would spiritually reach right where it counts — and noticeably without any unfortunate or unintended consequences: *a bruised reed he will not break*.¹⁵

God in the Flesh: The Incarnation and Earliest Years

Of all the miracles Jesus did, none compare to the miracle Jesus is.¹⁶ The Apostle Paul wrote about Jesus, "Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a

¹³ Luther, M. (1999). *Luther's works, vol. 17: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*. (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.). Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 170.

¹⁴ Schaller, John. *Biblical Christology, A Study in Lutheran Dogmatic*. (Milwaukee, Northwestern Publishing House, 1919), 93.

¹⁵ Isaiah 42:3

¹⁶ Becker, Siegbert. "God Manifest In Flesh: The Mystery of the Personal Union." Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, 2. <http://wlsessays.net/files/BeckerIncarnation.pdf>. As of this writing there were two versions on the essay file. This is from the eight page updated version.

body...”¹⁷ From the vantage point of two natures in one person for the purpose of the world’s reconciliation — the mystery is already great. The mystery deepens when the teacher, called from birth because he is perfectly apt, is at the same time limited on earth, because he first needs to learn, study, and grow. Paul wrote about Jesus, “But (he) made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”¹⁸

The eye, which with a glance takes in heaven and earth, is not deprived of the ability to see when it steps into the dark or closes its lid, it just curtails its wide-ranging efficacy. Thus, on earth, the Son of God closes his all-seeing eye and steps into human darkness, and he opens his eye as a child of man, as the gradually dawning light of the world of men, until he lets it shine in full glory at the Father’s right hand.¹⁹

Schaller writes:

He became man *like all other men* (cf. Hb. 2:14), not in the magnificent manhood of Adam when newly created, but in the “fashion” of the human nature as weakened and made infirm thru (sic) the fall. Hence his κενωσις [emptying] did not consist in the incarnation itself, but in the fact that his human nature came into existence and developed in precisely the same fashion as that of sinful men. This was intentional on his part, and was done with a purpose.²⁰

Flesh out what the Word made flesh yet emptying himself means! Schaller wrote, “*To hide* is not to *empty* one’s self... That the *kenosis* was a reality even before God himself: ‘And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.’”²¹ The Teacher who knows human nature by both his perfect creation and consequent fallen curse must now learn it anew from life experience. The Master who parsed tongues at the tower of Babel must now master languages, and do so in order to master the Word. The teacher must be taught. Harry Houdini restricted himself when he used strait jackets, handcuffs, and restraints — but he kept his keys close by hiding them for personal use in various places for escape. That’s not *emptying*. Jesus didn’t just hide, he emptied himself. No, he didn’t give up

¹⁷ 1 Timothy 3:16

¹⁸ Philippians 2:7

¹⁹ Sartorius. Quoted in a footnote by Besser, William. *Bibelstunden*. It is a study of Luke 1-2. Translation by Rev. John Sullivan and emailed to me in Nov. 2010.

²⁰ Schaller, 57.

²¹ Schaller, 58. Bible reference is John 17:5.

being divine. He restrained the full use of his divinity to be subject to the Word *as key*²² in humanity. Luke says that's exactly how Jesus was humanly developing when he wrote, "And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him."²³

As we proceed through the next two sections we are confronted with a paradox. We are clearly told how Jesus grew in wisdom through every stage. Yet scripturally we know his divine personality does not change or grow at all. Because of this some contend that Jesus never needed to learn anything due to his divine personality. That is possible, though speculative in and of itself. Better yet, Scripture doesn't speak that way. *Jesus* grew. Such growth in wisdom, even scriptural wisdom, doesn't need to do injury to his unchanging divine personality. While Jesus always enjoyed moral perfection and full union and communion with God after the incarnation, it is at the same time not imperfection to lack in wisdom and to be growing in wisdom. A type of example is during creation when the earth on day one was good yet not complete until day six.²⁴ Admittedly, some of what follows in the next two sections is put forth as possibility, because full insight into the development of the God-man is not given. But Scripture allows the following understanding, which sets the stage for Jesus' aptness and methodology.

Nurture and Nazareth

Edersheim posits that children in Jesus' day developed through no fewer than eight designations of Jewish child-life.²⁵ Though the Bible is silent on these stages of development, unquestionably the Nazareth years were impressionable years. The location and limitations of his upbringing would have direct implications for his teaching, both positive and negative. Consider the following:

²² The point here is that Jesus truly emptied himself, not merely *hid* his glory — yet was always true God and man from the incarnation. In his humiliation, he was dependent on the Word. We see that especially in Matthew 24:36, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Jesus' method was to say what the Word said, which to this subject, it reveals nothing about the timing of the last day.

²³ Luke 2:40

²⁴ Hebrews 2:10 & 5:9 emphasizes that Jesus reached his goal through his cross and resurrection, though Jesus declared he was always one with the Father. This point is a reflection of studies on the words: τέλος and אָב.

²⁵ Edersheim, A. (1896). *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 221.

It was a common saying: ‘If a person wishes to be rich, let him go north; if he wants to be wise, let him come south’—and to Judea, accordingly, flocked, from ploughshare and workshop, whoever wished to become ‘learned in the Law.’²⁶

There was a general contempt in Rabbinic circles for all that was Galilean. Although the Judaeon or Jerusalem dialect was far from pure, the people of Galilee were specially blamed for neglecting the study of their language, charged with errors in grammar, and especially with absurd malpronunciation, sometimes leading to ridiculous mistakes. ‘Galilean—Fool!’ was so common an expression...

Galilee was to Judaism ‘the Court of the Gentiles’ —the Rabbinic Schools of Judaea its innermost Sanctuary. The natural disposition of the people, even the soil and climate of Galilee, were not favorable to the all-engrossing passion for Rabbinic study. In Judaea all seemed to invite retrospection and introspection; to favor habits of solitary thought and study, till it kindled into fanaticism.²⁷

It would be easy to understand then why Joseph would want to bring his son up in Judea.²⁸ Instead Jesus grows up a Galilean, an independent learner, likely with a dialect, maybe even with the stigma of someone who exchanged a life dedicated to religion for wealth. How else was a Galilean, a Nazarene, to become well versed in the Scripture when he is so distant from the center of learning at the Temple? Edersheim even adds “we do not even know quite certainly whether the school-system had, at that time, extended to far off Nazareth,”²⁹ meaning it is very possible there was no synagogue school. The two references in Luke 2 we have for Jesus’ physical and spiritual growth under such circumstances deserve additional appreciation when we consider how the odds were stacked against him — in a manner of speaking.

With respect to Jesus’ family the Bible informs us in Matthew that Joseph was a carpenter.³⁰ Mark adds the only biblical reference noting even Jesus had a reputation as a carpenter, at least within the community of Nazareth.³¹ It seems Joseph followed the general rule of thumb, which was to teach sons how to make their living by a trade. Boys did not learn trades in a school, but in the shop at home.³²

²⁶ Edersheim. 222

²⁷ Edersheim. 223

²⁸ In Matthew 2, Joseph is afraid to go there because of Archelaus. Then he is warned in a dream so that he would not go there. It appears his original intent was to live somewhere in Judea.

²⁹ Edersheim. 227

³⁰ Matthew 13:55

³¹ Mark 6:2b-3 “What’s this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! Isn’t this the carpenter?”

³² Klinck, Arthur. *Home Life in Bible Times*. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 133.

With a carpentry background Jesus would have learned precision and adaptation. You need to hone listening skills to meet the needs of a customer, trouble shoot problems, while at the same time be able to work with another's time table. For instance, making a doorway in Nazareth not only involves carpentry but masonry. Two trades needed to work together. Making yokes or plows as Justin Martyr states Jesus did³³ would place him in the field and around animals to understand design and implementation. Generally we could state that the job of carpentry would involve him with nearly every other type of occupation. Jesus would have grown up a student of how life worked.

Compare all this to what we know about Jesus' methodology. Please point to the lesson Jesus had on woodworking 101. Where in the chapter of lost things (Luke 15) does Jesus include the parable about the lost tool? Why doesn't he use a parable — even a proverb — about carpentry at all? Why isn't there anything on sanding, sharpening, cutting, planing, staining, bending wood, or at least something about working in the shop? *There is absolutely nothing on carpentry.*³⁴ Jesus' methods were not because he was affected by culture but because he was a student of it and understood its effect. He framed God's theology in parables and illustrations to reach the people within their own context. Never once do we hear a childhood story from his lips, a glorious vicar styled story, or especially a story about past sin (if that were possible) in his methods. He didn't speak to his own end and for his own benefit, but to the benefit and godly end of the listener. With the methods he chooses (and recorded for us in Scripture), he speaks with full consideration to *how is this truth best conveyed for my neighbor*. He doesn't speak from the standpoint of his own earthly experiences but to the experiences of those in his audience.

Jesus' ability with people isn't merely from an occupational standpoint. He intimately knew people from the standpoint of the sinful nature. During Jesus' ministry we are told:

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"²² Jesus

³³ Martyr, Justin. *Dialogue with Trypho*. Translated by: Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson. Chapter 88. <http://www.logoslibrary.org/justin/trypho/088.html>

³⁴ Some may argue that carpentry is still present, for instance, when he speaks about a yoke in Matthew 11, the person who puts his hand to the plow while looking over his shoulder in Luke 6, or the speck and plank in Matthew 7 or Luke 6. The difference is he's talking about these things from their proper use and not from a craftsman vantage point. He's using the illustrations not to promote carpentry, but to speak to the people using the most common occupations or visible situations of the day: farming, working with animals, dust most likely from reaping or threshing, and finally load bearing beams in the roof of a house. Carpentry for Jesus just never rose to that level.

knew what they were thinking and asked, “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?”³⁵

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. ⁸ But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, “Get up and stand in front of everyone.”³⁶

Consider the way Jesus later read Nicodemus’ late hours approach and firmly dealt with him in John 3. Remember how he aptly addressed the Samaritan woman in John 4 — and that while completely fatigued and thirsty. Or ponder how he warned his disciples of their desertion in Mark 14 — which was not merely to predict the future. It was clear evidence that Jesus understood their sinful nature and how it reacts under pressure from the world. Did Jesus know these things because he was true God and tied together the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture (from Zechariah 13)? Absolutely. Yet we can also add that Jesus understood these things according to his humanity because he perfectly grew as a student by *reading the Word and understanding people* through life experience. He taught that the eyes were the *lamp of the body* in the Sermon on the Mount. He could read body language. He was a master of reverent posture — even teaching helpful techniques when praying. Can you name a time Jesus was caught off guard by someone’s sinful nature? Is there a situation where he didn’t know what to say, he didn’t have a parable, an answer, or *I am* statement at the tip of his tongue? When he did use a teaching method, was there ever a time where it wasn’t exactly in line with the question and what the questioner needed to hear? At all times he remained lovingly dedicated to man while being completely objective with respect to man — because he perfectly understood people. Trying to find a gap in Jesus’ teaching and ability with people is as difficult as trying to prove him guilty of sin! John says, “But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man’s testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.”³⁷ He knew it perfectly, both as God and man.

While Jesus never worked the various major occupations, we can certainly say that through the nurture of life in Nazareth he worked to understand the strengths and weaknesses in

³⁵ Luke 5:21-22

³⁶ Luke 6:7-8

³⁷ John 2:24-25

people. Do the people in our communities and congregations deserve any less? While you and I may have all the *sedes* passages memorized for our confirmation classes (as did Jesus) so that theological preparation is no longer a necessity, is our presentation of them diminishing by the years, because our *carpentry-esque* illustrations are further removed and lacking connectivity to the kids? Our 7th and 8th grader's ages and spiritual needs always stay the same, but their experiences change. And we become further removed from both their age and experiences. Do we work to understand the various vocations of God's people to better utilize law and gospel and develop a lesson? Home visits are more relevant and essential than ever! One of the best pieces of advice given me was from Rev. Joel Gerlach. During his years in the parish, a member purchased a few subscriptions for him to several culture and arts magazines — areas that were not his strengths. He stated that faithfully reading those helped shape him to gain a much broader perspective of life, as well as to be able to relate to more people. While I haven't taken him up on purchasing any subscriptions, the next best thing was to dedicate a few hours a month to the library for its selection of journals and magazines. Each of us has our own experience that can easily make us myopic. We may certainly be telling the theological truth while missing the heart of the hearer. In Jesus' methodology, he drew from the Word, from nature, and from the culture around his audience. He seemed to avoid his own early years experience in order to best speak to his neighbor.³⁸

Thus Nazareth was where Jesus was nurtured. It was his training ground to grow in righteousness toward God and neighbor. It was where he learned his trade. It was where he established a reputation as a worker. Little Nazareth was everything Jesus needed. And there Luke reveals Jesus thrived.

From Pre-Teen to Public Servant

Mary and Joseph minus one trekked from Jerusalem with their family after celebrating the Passover. After a day of travel, their glaring oversight was revealed and they returned immediately to find Jesus. Upon locating him several days later in the temple, the parents heard from the boy's response that Jesus was very aware of his responsibility...to his Father, his

³⁸ There is no criticism here for teachers telling personal stories, as will be made clear later in the paper. This is a caveat regarding the intent and goal for why the teacher is using the story.

heavenly one. What they didn't quite understand is that Jesus was very well aware of his divine roots. When that cognizance officially took place the Scripture remains silent. What we can glean is that the education the child had received — or had learned on his own — in Nazareth was already impressive. From the context, by Mary and Joseph's lack of understanding of Jesus' words, it seems they *hadn't* revealed this to him, probably because they didn't quite fully understand it themselves. If that's really the case, can you blame them? When exactly do you tell your child that he is the Messiah? If anything, it seems Jesus is making them aware for the first time that he knows. This kid has it together. The child was aware of his divine mission. And still at the end of Luke 2, he's very aware of his earthly *submission*. Jesus goes home to give eighteen more years of perfect obedience to his parents.

Setting aside the interaction between son and parents, what is critical is that Jesus at this point recognizes the unique relationship he has to the Almighty. Such a knowledge tips us off to how he would be searching the Scriptures for the next eighteen years. To reiterate a point made earlier, you are no teacher of the Word unless Jesus is seen through the entirety of Scripture. At twelve years old the boy certainly had this perspective.

And he put that perspective to work. Luke wrote, “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”³⁹ The word *grew* is an imperfect indicative literally meaning *cut forward* or advance. As an imperfect the action of the verb is in focus, not necessarily the end point. What Luke wishes to set before our eyes is that for the next eighteen years the path Jesus forged is one of personal growth in the Word. It's not a picture of yet reaching a particular goal, but of constantly reaching for it. The kind of wisdom and stature he pursued was the kind that brought favor with God and men. The significance again is that Jesus was constantly growing in the Word. While we don't hear where or even how he was educated, we hear his attitude toward the Word. We also hear about his standing with others. He grew in favor with God and men. Thus he duly held and displayed the moral qualifications needed for his pending ministry during these years. Additionally through obedience to both his fathers, earthly and heavenly, he grew into the ministerial credentials needed for aptness: knowledge of the Word and understanding of neighbor. And when the time came his Father publicly and fully supported Jesus' perfect growth

³⁹ Luke 2:52

at his baptism and transfiguration. So did the people. They acknowledged it either by their amazement or by public proclamation, “He has done everything well.”^{40, 41}

Jesus grows as an obedient student of both the Word and people. And at God’s appointed time, he steps into ministry as the world’s one righteous Teacher.

Jesus Our Great Teacher⁴²

The Goal of All Methodology

Care needs to be taken when evaluating and determining which teaching methods to employ.⁴³ A Czech adage warns every mushroom is edible, but some only once.⁴⁴ All of us have learned this the hard way in teaching, haven’t we? We picked a phrase, used an illustration, or tried a teaching method that missed the heart of the hearer because we didn’t understand the learning situation. As we survey Jesus’ teaching methods, there is a danger that we survey the smorgasbord of possibilities and sink our teeth into certain methods without comprehending what we have in our hands. Then in turn we offer something to learners for their digestion without full consideration of how this helps the person toward the ultimate goal: the saving of souls. While the teaching method may be permissible, it might not be beneficial for consumption. Careful assessment and discernment are needed. In every case Jesus displays the heart of a *seelsorger*.⁴⁵ He understood the goal, the individual, the event, the problem and the solution. He didn’t just ask questions, he asked the questions necessary for people to consider grace — or evaluate whatever was holding them back from considering grace. The methods he used were not grab bag — but what fit the person, crowd and situation for the ultimate goal of enlightening or furthering the gospel within them.

⁴⁰ Mark 7:37

⁴¹ Jesus grew through both *formational learning* and *informational learning*. God prepares candidates for ministry through both today. In your opinion, how much of our educational system is based on giving information (classroom)? How much is based on forming students through life experience to know people?

⁴² Rabbi means *my great one*. It is interesting that the leaders of the Jews publicly wouldn’t acclaim Jesus as Rabbi. They called him διδάσκαλος. Nicodemus privately called Jesus *Rabbi* in John 3, but he was the only one.

⁴³ “In simplest terms, a method is a learning activity. Methods are selected for the purpose of engaging students in the learning process. It stand to reason, then, that the key issue in the selection and use of a teaching method is student learning.” Richards and Bredfeldt, 184.

⁴⁴ Wikipedia: mushroom hunting. wikipedia.com

⁴⁵ Seelsorger is a German word meaning: one who cares for souls.

The aim of all Jesus' methodology then is to bring the propositional truth of a forgiving God to the student, and a student to trust their forgiving God.

*Method: Law and Gospel*⁴⁶

Law and gospel are distinct messages to share. Against the rot of sin Jesus proclaimed God's timeless truth, "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news."⁴⁷ But law and gospel are not only messages, they are God's divine psychology toward mankind. It's how he approaches people and deals with them. It should be no surprise then that it is also Jesus' mindset and methodology toward mankind.

Jesus' use of law and gospel can also be described as a method within a method, or the method behind the method. As you reread the gospels in the future, don't just note *parables, figures of speech, I am statements, questions, answers, lecture, etc.* Observe how law or gospel stands behind, within, and in the outcome of the method for the benefit of the audience.

Basic Methods from The Sermon on the Mount

Schaller reminds us that no new revelation of the law ever occurs after Mount Sinai.⁴⁸ The law certainly needed to be taught, explained, understood, and put into practice. So later in the Old Testament we notice Israel rereading the law. But the law God handed to his people in the Old Testament was all encompassing and never required any further revelation from him. On the other hand the gospel took thousands of years to unfold from promise to pinnacle. What was visible during the old covenant were shadows until fulfilled in Christ. Complete law, incomplete gospel (though not a lesser or insufficient gospel). So when Jesus preaches regarding the law in the Sermon on the Mount he is not unveiling or adding anything new, but explaining something old. *The law was given through Moses.*⁴⁹ Jesus' purpose then was to help people understand God's law and their responsibility as disciples to adjust their lives appropriately. Where better to

⁴⁶ Law and gospel receives a basic exposition in this paper. The intent was deliberate. In 2014, a symposium paper was written on Jesus as preacher. It extensively addressed law and gospel. Interested readers are encouraged to see Rev. Michael Jensen's paper: <http://wlsessays.net/files/WLS%202014%20Preaching%20Symposium%20-%20Christ's%20Preaching%20-%20Jensen%20-%20Final.pdf>

⁴⁷ Mark 1:15

⁴⁸ Schaller, John. *Biblical Christology*: 97, 99.

⁴⁹ John 1:17

start with a crowd of disciples than with something they would already be familiar with — the Law. *Jesus started with a known in order to lead them to spiritual unknowns.*

In this instance he *began to teach* them while seated. The word for teach is ἐδίδασκεν, and has at its base the meaning “to accept or extend the hand to.”⁵⁰ The teacher imparted knowledge to further understanding, or for people to grab onto with their hands. As much as the Bible indicates he used his voice to educate, would you consider his method of presentation a *lecture*? My computer dictionary defines a lecture as *an educational talk to an audience*, coming from the Latin root *to read*. From the response of the people at the end of his teaching, they were engaged. They recognized weight in his words. They were *amazed* and called it *authoritative* teaching. That authority isn’t merely a recognition of words spoken, but of words that reached the heart. This then wasn’t merely recited knowledge. He began speaking in order to entrust teachings to them. His method certainly involved *talk* and *lecture*. That already was what the Pharisees and teachers of the law could do and were doing. Jesus’ teaching style was clearly something more and distinguished from theirs.⁵¹

Reaching the heart involves piquing the interest of the mind. To do that Jesus used *contrast*: salt vs. saltlessness, dark versus light, heaven versus hell, hypocrites versus godly (money, prayer), eternal storage versus earthly storage, God versus money (masters), people versus birds (worry), wide versus narrow gates, good versus bad fruit production. Each involves the listener in an evaluation. Jesus approached his subject matter *explaining the abstract with the concrete*. The eye (concrete) is a lamp of the body (abstract). Love (abstract) your enemies (concrete). Blessed (abstract) are you when people insult you (concrete). There is a definite preference for *the concrete over the abstract* as he spoke plainly and specifically about divorce, remarriage, lawsuits, oaths, adultery, love, fasting, and judging. He interspersed *questions*: Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? And why do you worry about clothes? Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? He constantly *claimed the authority* of the seat from which he taught by

⁵⁰ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, by K.H. Rengstorf, 2:135. Also quoted in Zuck, Roy B. *Jesus as Teacher*: 29.

⁵¹ What is hard to describe here is the heart behind the teaching — a heart not to be confused with mere emotion. These were spiritual treasures being shared *for treasuring*, not just outward commands to obey.

repeatedly using the phrases *I tell you the truth* or *but I tell you*. Interestingly he employed the *hook* method when he opened with repetitious beatitudes. And although he didn't pass out a closing survey of how effective his teaching had been that day, he concluded by sending the crowds away with a contemplative *parable*. Jesus' words needed no survey. Instead the parable pleaded with them to survey their own lives and adjust them accordingly. How would they be able to remember his words? Jesus' *direct 2nd person* (singular and plural) *language* put it right in the hand: you hypocrite; that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; if you do you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. His frequent use of *figures of speech and visual or mnemonic aids* would have placed it on their mind: look at the birds; babbling like the pagans; giving dogs what is sacred; you are the light of the world.⁵²

How might we strive for the same results in our teaching? Start with yourself and objectively evaluate your own teaching style, preparation, and methods of communicating.

- Is it well memorized or outlined? Good memorizing keeps your face toward the people and a good outline keeps focus.
- Is it thoughtful? Do people come away with recognizing you put personal consideration into the lesson?
- Do my words require a dictionary? And if they do, can the audience glean the meaning from the context? Text studies are critical, but does the congregation come away knowing Jesus better or like they just came out of Greek class?
- Do you have someone in the congregation who can tell you when you are falling into homiletical leg-holds? It's a type of trap where you have the body secured but the mind drifts. How about these, "Again and again and again" or "King of kings and Lord of lords." Either may work the first time, but if that's your phraseology every instance thereafter students get frustrated. An audience's mind begins to wander because no one is led into new territory. The Sermon on the Mount proves there are better ways with better results.
- Look at the varietal words Jesus used for sinner: adulterer, enemy, persecutor, pagan, tax collector, men, babblers, hypocrite, your own eye (plank), dogs, pigs, false prophets, wolves, and fool. Are you linguistically diverse?

The goal is not merely to use varietal methods and figures for their own sake. Through your varied linguistics can everyone from visitor to member see the goal of God's grace — even if they don't realize it? One parishioner dating an agnostic privately approached his pastor

⁵² Frequent Bible references are all from Matthew 5-7.

saying, “I asked my unchurched girlfriend what she thought of the last few worship services here, and she replied, ‘I’m not sure. The pastor makes me feel so bad, but then he makes me feel so good.’” The parishioner laughed and responded, “He’s doing exactly what he’s supposed to do,” and then began a discussion with her on law and gospel. The methods were serving the goal. It wasn’t the methods remembered, it was the substance. And without even knowing, she was wrestling with the truth of Jesus Christ.

Leading people is what retains attention. Flowery filler generally loosens your homiletical grip and permits the mind or heart to slip away. Read through Matthew 5-7 for yourself and evaluate Jesus’ figurative language. How does it serve the main point without letting me drift? How do his sentences lead me? Does he restate and explain without losing me? How do the words he uses reach my level? Since it is most likely not your first time reading this section, do the words he chooses speak more to you now than 10 years ago? 20 years? Why? His words and the Word haven’t changed. If you understand your own weakness of the past as well as positive spiritual development, how can that not help you apply it to others in need of the same?

Method: Parables

1 John 4:10 says, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

In the backyard is a nest that was assembled by a dove about a month or two ago. We watched as it was built over a week. Then we observed the faithful dove sit there week after week. Only about two or three weeks ago did we realize she laid an egg and hatched a chick. One day I forgot the birds were there and came too close to it. The mom swooped down making a terrible noise and flapping wildly. Looking closely at the bird, she was badly injured. She could barely walk, let alone fly. Quickly she scampered as far away as she could and sat in the corner of our enclosed property. I couldn’t believe my foolishness at forgetting the birds were there. Quickly peeking, the chick was still in the nest. For the next few days, my family had been racking our brains at how on earth the dove became so injured. We soon found out. The neighbor’s cat at dusk walked our property wall and crawled right up in the tree, just as it secretly did days before. Can you imagine the initial battle: the flapping, the clawing, the screeching, the valiant effort to defend the nest, the mother bird standing its ground taking the abuse? *That’s love!* But it’s a love that came up short since neither of the birds survived.

Did you hear what John wrote about your heavenly Father? God didn't protect his Son, his only one. God didn't arm him with powerful claws or physical weapons to battle the devil. God didn't even rescue him or try to save him when he cried out in emotional agony in the garden, or in physical agony from the cross. John says God deliberately sent him. God made him to be a sacrifice, even as you well know forsaking him while he was on it. Can you imagine the audacity John has to call that *love*? But he's right. The kind of love God was demonstrating in giving up Jesus is unconditional love. Jesus perfectly labored and toiled, innocently sweat and bled, and so selflessly gave his life and died...*to forgive you and protect you from sin.*⁵³

Parables are a power tool in the figurative language workshop.

When a word is employed in other than its primary meaning, or when it is applied to some object different from its common usage, it is called a figure of speech, figurative language, or a trope. The word "trope" is from the Greek "tropos," a turn, that is a word turned from its primary use to another meaning. No language could possibly have a separate word for every separate idea that might arise, so the same word is often used to stand for many different things. There may have been some relation between the two uses, but often in the course of time that relation is forgotten.

Figurative language results from the natural inclination of men to make comparison, and the very words "figure" and "figurative" indicate the picture language which helps to make our speech more intelligible and more interesting and vivid.⁵⁴

The word parable literally means *to throw* two things *alongside* each other in a comparison, as earthly love was compared to God's love in the prior example. One is a known (usually) and the other an unknown. With careful study of the comparison or contrast, the unknown is apprehended and the learner advances in wisdom and understanding. In a world of five second sound bytes and pithy jet-ski statements which only skim the surface of issues, parables slow the matter down. They permit an audience to take their time, by scuba diving to explore a subject. And if we are blessed to grasp the comparison, we come away deeply impressed and enriched.

This method of teaching — if used appropriately — has many advantages. "The people among whom Jesus labored are especially partial to figurative speech and language and prefer it to a plain logical point by point presentation of matter."⁵⁵ Why do people generally prefer this

⁵³ Taken from my Mother's Day sermon on May 13, 2012. The text was 1 John 4:7-11.

⁵⁴ Raabe, John. "Figurative Language in the Bible." Presented to the Minnesota District Pastoral Conference, April 8, 1959. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File: <http://wlsessays.net/files/RaabeFigurativeLanguageBible.pdf>

⁵⁵ Eggert, Rupert A. "Form Of The Sermon In Early Instruction Of Peoples Of Different Cultures." 1974. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File: <http://wlsessays.net/files/EggertForm.pdf>

method? It speaks to both cognitive and affective domains, involving the whole person in the learning process. To point back to the past example, as a listener you were considering what it must be like for that bird to live in a nest. You appropriated the time this creature invested raising her young, protecting offspring all the while being nearly defenseless against a fierce adversary, and finally the tragic end of giving up your life. To that end, a parable is extremely *relational*. If you looked in the footnotes, it was particularly useful given it was Mother's Day, a day our society celebrates life and relationships. Statistically it is the third highest visitor attended worship service of the year. It was a real life story, personal to the speaker and drawn from nature. In Tucson, doves are a common sight often seen around the home or taking a drive through town. *It is a known to the audience*. The parable isn't an argument or a debate, so the defenses stay down. "It allows for the speaker to get behind the defenses of his listeners in order to drive a point home."⁵⁶ Most importantly though, the parable threw alongside our hearts and minds the work of Jesus Christ and the unconditional love God has for all of us, which is greater than anything we see in nature. Of course, I could have just said that last sentence to the congregation too, "God loves all of you unconditionally through the person and work of Jesus Christ. He loves you greater than anything we see in nature." While true, it doesn't have the same reach. But when an abstract proposition is placed alongside the concrete, the reach lengthens. I could have done the same thing to you with this section of the paper. I could have begun with a discussion of the forty to sixty plus parables Jesus told, why they are difficult to measure, a chart of his subject matter, pros and cons of parables and why you might cognitively find them useful. Instead we began with an example to experience a modern parable so that this last evaluative paragraph might be more helpful.

There certainly are shortcomings to our use of parables. Too much use of the 1st person singular as subject wearies an audience and can quickly display arrogance, especially if the same style is served up to God's people Sunday after Sunday. Jesus didn't speak that way in his parables. He also varied his teaching methods — even adjusting his parables to suit the occasion.

⁵⁶ Patterson, Donald W. "Teaching Like Jesus." Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File. Pastor Patterson recently (Spring 2015) presented a paper in California on learning to create modern parables for your preaching/teaching.

Another danger is when the comparison fails to compare. Usually that stems from the teacher neglecting to understand the text or trying to force a text to fit a story. Such prodding is like a person trying to fit a used foam mattress back into the original packaging. Everyone can uncomfortably see it isn't ever going to fit. Finally, it may not be your skill set. The writer to the Hebrews encouraged us to imitate one another's *faith*,⁵⁷ not each other's teaching style or methods. What aptly works for another in the same situation may not be suitable for you. Audiences easily recognize when someone isn't genuine.

Method: Questioning

There's no denying Jesus tapped into omniscience and made use of it during conversations. While omniscience is an obvious shortcoming for us, there is a simple antidote in trying to discern what we don't know. Just ask. Questions open up conversation to all sorts of avenues, and the savvy teacher can steer the discussion. Jesus used questions to start conversation: *Will you give me a drink* or *who do people say I am?* He used them to push for assent: *Do you believe this?* Questions can confront spiritual deficiencies, reveal motives, gain the authority in a situation, and guide someone to the desired goal. Jesus utilized questions with regularity, "asking 225 different ones."⁵⁸ He used levels of questions: a type two recall question with someone he hadn't met when he asked, "Who touched me?"⁵⁹ He employed comparison at the end of the good Samaritan when he asked, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"⁶⁰ Near the end of his ministry it was an evaluative question put to the chief priests and elders, "John's baptism —where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?"^{61, 62}

"Studies show we tend to hit our questioning peak around age 4 or 5, and then ask fewer questions as we get older. Not that we've lost the ability to question—we just don't exercise it as

⁵⁷ Hebrews 13:7

⁵⁸ Zuck, Roy. 237-238,

⁵⁹ Luke 8:45

⁶⁰ Luke 10:36

⁶¹ Matthew 21:25

⁶² Rev. David Kuske's taxonomy of questions is being referred to here. For another more detailed option, google: Bloom's Taxonomy of Questions.

much. Teachers and bosses generally want answers, not questions.”⁶³ Why do you suppose we peak in questioning at such a young age? Are we shushing aside our children’s questions and diminishing creative questioning? Have we cultured our classrooms the same? How do you elicit a contemplative zeal for life and the creative questioning of God’s world and Word? “Jesus, how did you know what Solomon dressed like?” Or, “Jesus, what made you think of comparing him to flowers in the first place?”

The right question, open or closed, affects the entire learner. For instance, what do you call a person who prays the second petition but doesn’t work to bring it about? Answer: *A hypocrite*. If you say that seriously to a group of seasoned Sunday morning people in Bible study, how will it not get them thinking about their own hypocrisy in prayer? Or how about this one on Ash Wednesday, “There are only two kinds of people who go to church: one who is sorry for his sin, and the other — someone who ought to be. *Which of the two are you?*”⁶⁴ That one slices straight through to the heart. Isn’t that the confrontational comparison Jesus was making with the pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18? How about the preacher who began his teaching by saying, “What in hell is going on?!” He then proceeded to detail what Jesus described hell to be like. Provocative questions stimulate thinking because their answers develop further questions.

“Thinking is not driven by answers, but by questions... Questions define tasks, express problems and delineate issues. Answers on the other hand, often signal a full stop in thought.”⁶⁵ If we accept the preceding as true, shaping logical questions leading to the goal of the lesson is critical. Look how Jesus led people to the climax of his *I am* statements. And even when he gave them an answer, it incited even more questions as they tried to plumb the meaning.

Keep in mind that “good questions do not just happen.”⁶⁶ If you believe they will come to you *on the teaching fly*, your question(s) will most likely miss the mark. Focused questions are

⁶³ Berger, Warren. *How to Cultivate the Art of Asking Good Questions*. In the Wall Street Journal, March 5, 2014. <http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2014/03/05/how-to-cultivate-the-art-of-asking-good-questions/>

⁶⁴ Thanks to Rev. Wayne Mueller and Rev. Daniel Deutschlander for these, in that order.

⁶⁵ The role of Socratic questioning in teaching, thinking, and learning: <https://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/the-role-of-socratic-questioning-in-thinking-teaching-learning/522>.

The danger with questioning is overuse. Questioning does drive thinking, and thinking is work. Too much questioning wearies students. Also too many type 1 and 2 questions for adults comes across as basic and simplistic.

⁶⁶ Richards and Bredfeldt: 191.

the best when dealing with application. Open ended imaginative questions are ideal for student response.

It can't be underscored enough. Methods serve the teaching goal and direct the student to it. The mark of a good teacher is that he knows where he's going.⁶⁷

Method: Listening to Answer the Greater Problem

It's not just the right questions that need to be asked. The right ones need to be answered. In his online apologetics course, Ravi Zacharias frames his classes with the motto, "Behind every question is a questioner."⁶⁸ He relates that early in his career he was approached by a young mother after one of his seminars. She asked rather matter of factly, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Ravi was about to respond with a technical, dogmatic response when he looked down into the baby carrier and saw her deformed child. He abruptly realized she wasn't seeking a cognitive or propositional answer, but an applied one. She was really asking, "Why has a good God allowed and given this challenging situation *to me*?" The experience that day changed him in how he responds to questions. In his course he now encourages Christians to *answer the questioner, not just the question*. Often what is being asked of the teacher is not necessarily the answer for which the questioner is searching.⁶⁹

There are two types of questioners we are including in this scenario. One is asking a poorly worded question with good intent. The other is asking a possibly well worded question with wicked intent. In response, Jesus regularly answered individuals either by answering the right question or by asking the right question in the first place.⁷⁰ The following are two examples of poorly worded questions with good (even if misguided) intent:

⁶⁷ Rev. Randy Hunter is the first one who taught me *APSBAT*. It stands for: All People Should Be Able To. Ask yourself that question as you are framing your next Bible study so that you frame a tangible realistic goal for God's people.

⁶⁸ At the writing of this paper, this motto is highlighted at: rzimacademy.org

⁶⁹ Zacharias, Ravi. The story is adapted from his online course.

⁷⁰ Two class assignments from an online course emphasized listening skills by having students interview people with a different worldview. I interviewed two people I had never met, but were connections to people from church: an older non practicing Jew as well as a younger practicing atheist. We were taught to ask four distinct questions *and listen without offering the person a facial or verbal critique*: what is your perspective on life's origin; what is your perspective on life's meaning; what is your perspective on morality; what is your perspective on destiny? It was a test case in having a discussion without losing touch that you are still speaking with *a person*. Try it sometime and test how well you do at listening to someone of a very different worldview. At the end of both interviews, each person still ended up asking my worldview, which became a gospel opportunity.

1. When distracted Martha went to Jesus to plead her case for sister support, she said, “Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” Jesus didn't answer according to her cares and house work, but according to the more needed cleaning when he said, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:40-42)
2. When the disciples exhaustingly asked, “Teacher, don't you care if we drown?” Jesus first addressed nature before he addressed his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” God's care for his people was never *in question* to Jesus. That God's people doubt *his care* was the greater question. (Mark 4:38-40)

The way to recognize questioning with wicked intent is by its unspiritual outcome. The ultimate end will be that God and his goodness are diminished so that evil may reposition itself in his place. We face foolish questions frequently: *Doesn't God want me to be happy? Then let me get a divorce. Why do we have to memorize this? Where does God say I can't be a professional gambler? Do I have to worship every Sunday?* The way to handle wicked intent is to do what Solomon did. Gather needed information. Ask more questions if needed. Then draw out the sword of the Spirit and cut it apart. Display the dramatic conclusion of how disgusting wickedness looks in the end. Motives will be exposed. God's people will learn.⁷¹

Method: Approach to Confrontation

Jesus faced conflict daily, and he did so without ever giving *sinful* offense and needing to repent. There was the hidden conflict: “Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!”⁷² There was theological conflict: “On hearing it, many of his disciples said, ‘This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?’”⁷³ There were open threats toward him from the leaders which even the people recognized, “At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, ‘Isn't this the man they are trying to kill?’”⁷⁴ Finally there were sinful agendas and ambushes set by the religious leaders, “They were using this question as a trap in order to have a basis for accusing him.”⁷⁵

⁷¹ This is a method Paul uses in his letters. Take 1 Corinthians 15 for example. “What if Christ has not been raised.” Through the chapter he takes the idea and follows it through to its logical end. He does the same in Romans 3.

⁷² John 6:70

⁷³ John 6:60

⁷⁴ John 7:25

⁷⁵ John 8:5

The fact that we can read about Jesus' words and actions in response to these scenarios is a stern reminder to try and approach every interaction as if it is being recorded or will be made public at some point in the future. When you are always on the record there can never be any *gotcha* moment. Recently at a pastors' conference a situation came to light of a LGBT individual who approached two WELS pastors in church. She sought to inquire about our theology on those issues. It turned out it wasn't a setup. Even if it was, are you prepared to go on record with all your words? Jesus did. He upheld theology and lovingly spelled it out for the souls of those before him.⁷⁶ *He did not retaliate...no deceit was found in his mouth.*⁷⁷

Method: Kinesthetic Learning

Come. Follow. Preach. Teach. Do likewise. Watch. Pray. Give to Caesar and God. Turn the other cheek. Find a donkey. Go and sin no more. Feed my sheep. He sent them out two by two. You give them something to eat. Work. Jesus stimulated more than mind and heart. He taught people to participate in the lesson and in turn to perform works of service.

Some things just have to be memorized, as our freshman MLC professor told us before learning the Greek alphabet. He was right, they did. But maybe there is a better way. By the time we learned the Hebrew alphabet there was a song to go with it. My 7th grade confirmation pastor had us memorize the books of the Bible and recite them while walking the rows of desks in the classroom in front of all the other students. If we stutter stepped, we had to sit down and try again the next period. I haven't forgotten the books since. Or the same pastor sounded a loud blow horn at the beginning of the church service during End Times. Then he announced, "I will blow this horn again sometime very soon." He continued to carry the horn throughout the service, relating it in to the text, picking it up and setting it down as a visual for Jesus' return. The congregation paid rapt attention throughout and appropriated Jesus' point.

Kinesthetic teaching utilizes visuals (not necessarily flash cards, but actual objects), audience participation, take home projects, songs, crafts, and games to further learning. The results are sometimes instantaneous. Put yourself in Mary's sandals as an angel appeared to her.

⁷⁶ While the goal was the salvation of the soul, Jesus didn't shy back from exposing the sinful motives of those approaching him. See: Mark 12:15

⁷⁷ 1 Peter 2:22-23

Who wouldn't ponder that afterwards? How about Jesus' use of physical touch when he healed the people? In the lesson of the woman caught in the act of adultery, his seeming aloofness combined with his writing activity appears to catch all the accusers off guard and tone them down. Jesus took a little child to himself and then spoke about welcoming children. He told the Pharisees to *go and learn* what this means, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."⁷⁸ Maybe the greatest visual of them all (besides miracles) was the transfiguration.

Method: Tone (Prosody) and Non-Verbals

Statistics vary on the percentage of communication that is non-verbal, but research suggests at least 60% of communication is.⁷⁹ If that is true, a majority of what we are saying is not verbal.⁸⁰ Critical for teachers is that learners are hearing and taking to heart more than the words. Behind the spoken word are a supporting cast of methods, such as hand gestures, voice inflection, posture, and eye contact. For instance, too much eye contact implies stubbornness or a challenge. Too little signifies embarrassment, lack of preparation, or lack of confidence. Overactive hand gestures can weary an audience, display nervousness, or imply an overzealous speaker. Voice inflection can draw out a different message from the actual words spoken, punctuate the sentence as a statement or question, or enhance a point. Sometimes Scripture reveals non verbals and sometimes it doesn't. What is the distinction between the following?

1. Jesus looked at him and loved him.⁸¹
2. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.⁸²

Context shades Jesus' words and adds weight, such as urgency or seriousness to them. While Jesus wasn't sinfully enraged twice overturning tables in the temple, he certainly wasn't being righteously gentle. Nor was he while verbally standing up to the Pharisees and pronouncing *woes* on them. In the bread of life discourse of John 6, the obstinacy of the audience coupled with a determination to make him a bread king on earth seems to set Jesus' words on a

⁷⁸ Matthew 9:13

⁷⁹ It is also noteworthy that up to 93% of communication can be non verbal. The Non-Verbal Group. www.nonverbalgroup.com/2011/08/how-much-of-communication-is-really-nonverbal

⁸⁰ In several places I read it is very hard to lie to a deaf person. They are so tuned in to reading non-verbals.

⁸¹ Mark 10:21

⁸² Luke 22:61

sharper edge. When non-verbals, tone, and confidence in the message are combined, teaching is often etched in the memory of the learner. As situations in life unfold, teachings are recalled by both students and critics. Consider:

1. “Sir,” they said, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’”⁸³
2. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.” And he broke down and wept.⁸⁴
3. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you.⁸⁵

What Paul said still rings true. *Speak the truth in love.*⁸⁶ How we say what we say speaks volumes. The things we aren’t saying when we speak also speaks volumes. Learners may not always be able to remember exactly what we said, but through non-verbals chances are very likely they will remember the *way we said it*. If Toastmasters recognizes the importance of breathing and inflection in public speaking,⁸⁷ how much more shouldn’t those who publicly strive to communicate the things of God.

Methods: Various

There are so many more methods of Jesus to consider than are included in this paper. Take for instance:

- When Nicodemus approaches late into the night, why does Jesus speak sharply and abstractly to him?
- When the Canaanite woman begs for Jesus to cast out her daughter’s demon, why is Jesus repeatedly short and standoffish with her?
- Before Jesus speaks again about his crucifixion and death, why does he begin with, “Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you?”⁸⁸
- For what reason does he use frustration and exasperation as his method in expressing, “O unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I put up with you? Bring your son here.”⁸⁹

⁸³ Matthew 27:63

⁸⁴ Mark 14:72

⁸⁵ John 16:4

⁸⁶ Ephesians 4:15

⁸⁷ See Toastmasters International, “Your Speaking Voice, Tips for adding strength and authority to your voice”: <http://www.toastmasters.org/~media/B7D5C3F93FC3439589BCBF5DBF521132.ashx>

⁸⁸ Luke 9:44

⁸⁹ Luke 9:41

- In describing the downfall of Satan, why did he draw the comparison to lightning?⁹⁰ Have you ever described an opponent's downfall in such terms?
- Why does Jesus hold back information from his disciples even though he has much more to tell them?
- Why did Jesus boldly invite himself over to Zacchaeus' home before they even had formal introductions?⁹¹
- On Palm Sunday, why doesn't Jesus tell his disciples who the owners of the donkeys are, instead of saying, "tell them the Lord needs it"?⁹²
- Why does he rarely defend himself from accusation but he goes to great lengths twice to defend his Father's house and keep it a house of prayer?⁹³
- What was Jesus modeling for the disciples when they were physically watching people give their offerings during Holy Week?⁹⁴
- Why does he squash the disciples' joy over the beautiful construction of the temple and turn the discussion toward its destruction?⁹⁵
- When Jesus answered the spies about Caesar's image on the coin and giving the government what rightfully belongs to it, why didn't he expound on *what rightfully belongs to God*?⁹⁶
- Why does he respond to some with parables and others with pithy proverbs?

It's an astonishing variety of techniques! Jesus championed such assorted methodology for the benefit of his neighbor in the learning environment. That's exactly what was needed to emphasize God's grace. Such diverse methodology proves there is no single silver bullet method for us as we teach people. As we continue to grow in the Word and get to know the people around us, these methods of Jesus are there for our contemplation. They are there for our stimulation. They are also there for our apt adaptation and emulation.

One of the worst road clean up situations for police officers occurs when a cement mixer overturns. The drum that is supposed to rotate on the back of the mixer can no longer spin. That

⁹⁰ Luke 10:18

⁹¹ Luke 19:5

⁹² Luke 19:31

⁹³ John 2:15, Luke 19:45

⁹⁴ Luke 21:1

⁹⁵ Luke 21:6

⁹⁶ Luke 20:25

leaves the concrete on the inside of the drum to harden. Once it does, there is no getting the concrete out. The only remaining option is to cut the drum away from the vehicle and haul the oversized dead weight away.

Jesus once used an illustration about another dead weight, except his was a millstone. He didn't cite it for its normal use. He creatively gave it a new one. It was for those who scandalize the *little ones who believe in Jesus*. Whatever the scandal was, it caused a blood-bought soul to spill the load of faith and harden against the truth. The person no longer rotated around the Word.

As teachers we need to keep watch. We need to take great care that we don't harden students from the Word because we've hardened ourselves in how we teach. By grace we've been given a trust to handle the Word of truth faithfully. Public ministry is still a noble task deserving of our best teaching efforts. Shouldn't we keep *mixing it up*, brothers? Doesn't love for neighbor lead us to strive to grow in aptness? If we cement ourselves into ruts, predictability, cliches, creative-less lessons, constant sports illustrations, egoistic stories or ones that no longer relate, use of various *-ism* ending words for the law sections in our speaking — our teaching is suffering. So are the people we're trying to serve. And if we're going to be honest, so are we. While a millstone could certainly still do the job today, the concrete-hardened drum of a cement mixer tied to one's neck is a modern weighty warning to any soul.

Let the Teacher teach us! What miraculous teaching God has given even to those who teach! He hammered his carpenter son to the woodwork of the cross for us. By the active and passive obedience of this teacher, Christ Jesus, even our teaching sins he covers. Let your soul drown daily in repentance and constantly be renewed and revolve around your justification. Let his grace daily amaze you as it did the Apostle Paul. Near the end of his ministry he was *still* overwhelmed at his conversion and call into ministry: *Grace was poured out abundantly. God considered me faithful.*⁹⁷ No less grace is yours in Christ.

God has called us to aptly teach the truth about Jesus. To do that, revolve around and reflect on the Word. Grow in your heavenly Father's wisdom. Love your people. Learn your culture and community. Soak in your surroundings. Grow in favor with your fellowman. Then teach the way of life. Teach like your brother Jesus. + SDG +

⁹⁷ 1 Timothy 1:14,12

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Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
2015 Symposium

Reaction to Pastor Aaron Mueller's Essay
Jesus Taught the Word of Truth—And So Do We

Let me start out by thanking you, Pastor Mueller, for your work in getting this Symposium on the Pastor as Teacher off to a great start by placing before us the perfect model for teaching: Jesus, the master teacher. You provided much food for thought by laying before us Jesus' aptness to teach and the variety of methods he used in teaching.

I've often heard it said (and said it myself) that a pastor needs to love people, love God's Word and love sharing God's Word with people. That probably best expresses what needs to be there for a man to desire the pastoral office. You rightly point out that in order to actually serve in the pastoral office a man needs to be "apt to teach." To paraphrase your definition, "apt to teach" involves knowing people, knowing God's Word and knowing how to communicate God's Word to people. I appreciate the way you expressed the need for continued growth in all three aspects of this aptness.

The goal of aptness is the clear communication of the Word to the soul of the listener. That communication fails where growth in the Word turns stagnant and the Word isn't mined to bring *new* treasures as well as old. Communication additionally falters when our desire plateaus for people in general or age groups with whom we no longer try to relate. The result will invariably be that the distance increases between pastor and parishioner, shepherd and sheep, because our teaching isn't reaching the heart. (p. 3)

You continued returning to this basic definition of "apt to teach" throughout your essay and gave admonition and encouragement to us to continue our growth in knowing people, knowing the Word and knowing how to improve our communication of the Word.

To that end, you led us into the mystery of Christology as you helped us see Jesus as our model for aptness to teach. The way you explored the truths of Christ's divine and human natures, his state of humiliation and the communication of attributes applied to Jesus' upbringing and preparation to be a teacher was fascinating. The way you expressed these aspects of Christology was thought-provoking. To cite just one example: "The Teacher who knows human nature by both his perfect creation and consequent fallen curse must now learn it anew from life

experience. The Master who parsed tongues at the tower of Babel must now master languages, and do so in order to master the Word” (p. 6). The paradox of our Savior’s person is clearly held in tension in your discussion.

While you admittedly speculate a little regarding Jesus’ growth during his thirty years before he began his public ministry, you make some applications (and admonitions) that deserve highlighting. While speaking about the background in carpentry, you note:

He framed God’s theology in parables and illustrations to reach the people within their own context. Never once do we hear a childhood story from his lips, a glorious vicar styled story, or especially a story about past sin (if that were possible) in his methods. He didn’t speak to his own end and for his own benefit, but to the benefit and godly end of the listener. With the methods he chooses (and recorded for us in Scripture), he speaks with full consideration to *how is this truth best conveyed for my neighbor*. He doesn’t speak from the standpoint of his own earthly experiences but to the experiences of those in his audience. (p. 9; author’s emphasis)

There is no questioning the importance and value of good illustrations and stories to drive home a point to our students. Jesus himself used illustrations and stories from nature and everyday life. While we may not fully know the reason we have no record of Jesus telling a childhood story, it is most appropriate to recognize that we need to choose our own illustrations carefully. Are we elevating ourselves and our experiences or redirecting people to the truths of Christ? Do we run the risk of our teaching (and preaching as well) becoming a string of funny stories akin to a stand-up comedy routine? What time is left for leading your students into the treasures of the Word?

A couple of pages later, you make a related point.

While you and I may have all the *sedes* passages memorized for our confirmation classes (as did Jesus) so that theological preparation is no longer a necessity, is our presentation of them diminishing by the years, because our *carpentry-esque* illustrations are further removed and lacking connectivity to the kids? Our 7th and 8th grader’s ages and spiritual needs always stay the same, but their experiences change. And we become further removed from both their age and experiences. Do we work to understand the various vocations of God’s people to better utilize law and gospel and develop a lesson? Home visits are more relevant and essential than ever! (p. 11)

Since Jesus is perfect, the stories he employed never get outdated. In fact, the divine genius of Scripture is that our thinking is stimulated every time we read it. But do we find ourselves

referring to movies from the 1980s, athletes from the 1990s, and issues from the 2000s when we're teaching catechism class in 2015? Do we stay with the standard applications we've used since we graduated from the seminary? The importance of continued growth in knowing people and knowing how to communicate to people is emphasized again.

Perhaps most helpful for the practical work of our teaching is the way you place before us a smorgasbord of methods employed by Jesus. As you review each method, you provide a helpful application for our own teaching. The list of questions to ask while preparing a Bible class (or sermon) is worth taping to the computer monitor (p. 16). Your discussion of Jesus' different types of questioning and the way he listened to questioners point to the importance of thorough preparation (p. 20-23). Jesus' thoughtful and careful approach to confrontation is especially needed as a model in our day of cell phone cameras and handheld recording devices (p. 23-24). You demonstrate how Jesus understood the importance of active learning and activity to learn (p. 24-25). The list of questions regarding a whole host of various methods Jesus employed (p. 26-27) will get us thinking as we tackle these portions of the Gospels in sermons and Bible classes. Throughout your essay, you even model for us ways these methods play out in communicating the Word (e.g., the introductory story about the inept FBI men [p. 1]; the wounded bird story and the way you used it [p. 17-19]; the extended cement truck illustration in the conclusion [p. 27-28]).

But there's a lesson to keep before us in the various methods Jesus used in his teaching.

Jesus championed such assorted methodology for the benefit of his neighbor in the learning environment. That's exactly what was needed to emphasize God's grace. Such diverse methodology proves there is no single silver bullet method for us as we teach people. As we continue to grow in the Word and get to know the people around us, these methods of Jesus are there for our contemplation. They are there for our stimulation. They are also there for our apt adaptation and emulation. (p. 27)

We all bring different gifts and experiences to the classroom as pastoral educators. Those we are teaching—whether children or adults—are unique and varied individuals with a variety of learning styles and experiences. The same powerful Word is taught for the same reason: to save souls. But how that teaching takes places—that is where there is room for variety and growth.

And that's where your conclusion was especially valuable. In a vivid way, the law convicted us of our less than best efforts in teaching. "Doesn't love for neighbor lead us to strive to grow in aptness? If we cement ourselves into ruts, predictability, clichés, creative-less lessons, constant sports illustrations, egoistic stories or ones that no longer relate, use of various *-ism* ending words for the law sections in our speaking—our teaching is suffering. So are the people we're trying to serve. And if we're going to be honest, so are we" (p. 28). Then the gospel of our Master Teacher was brought to bear on us to forgive us, to encourage us, and to strengthen us for our calling as teachers of his holy Word. "What miraculous teaching God has given even to those who teach! He hammered his carpenter son to the woodwork of the cross for us. By the active and passive obedience of this teacher, Christ Jesus, even our teaching sins he covers. Let your soul drown daily in repentance and constantly be renewed and revolve around your justification" (p. 28). Thank you, Pastor Mueller, for your instruction in our Savior's teaching so we continue to be apt to teach his Word.

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21 September 2015*