

ACTS 16:9-15 (p. 898)

MAY 22, 2022

JOHN 14:23-29 (p. 875)

BLAINE

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Teach us Lord, as we open up your Word. Touch our hearts and minds, so that we will apply your Truths to our daily lives. And send us your Holy Spirit, please, so that all that we say and all that we do, will bring Honor and Glory to you. We ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

“TEACHING MOMENTS”

We have what appears to be a “Teaching Theme” today. Maybe you noticed? Not only are we celebrating our teachers this morning, here in the Church, but our Scripture Lessons are all about teaching as well! Our reading from Acts, for instance, talks about the Apostle Paul being taught by the Holy Spirit in a vision. And then he, in turn, starts teaching the Macedonians. And in our reading from John, we find Jesus teaching His Disciples in the Upper Room, on the night before He was Crucified. Promising, by-the-way, that same Holy Spirit Paul encountered, who will “teach you all things,” says Jesus, and “remind you of what I have already said”!

There is a definite “Teaching Theme”, isn't there! And we are in a “Teaching Season” as well. Graduations are unfolding all around us! Seniors are deciding what they'll do next! And in case you haven't noticed, “Educational Controversies” are all over the News! “What should we teach” and “at what age”? “How should we teach it”? Is “in-person better than on-line”? “Should Higher Education even cost”? “How about for those who already took out loans”? Are you with me? Is it fair to say teaching is important?

Last week we talked about Peter, up on a rooftop, being taught who is welcome at the Table of the Lord versus who is not. Who is welcome to hear the Gospel, to be taught the Good News of Jesus Christ! And today, we have an almost mirror image of last week's lesson. Instead of Peter sharing the Gospel with Cornelius though, a Gentile, after having that sheet-lowering vision—we see Paul reaching out to Gentiles, including Capitalists and Merchants, even women! It's almost scandalous!

Everyone is welcome, like we talked about last week! Again, that's pretty clear! Everyone is invited! "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching", says Jesus. "Anyone"! It's simple really! God loves you! All of you! So much so, in fact, that He sent His own Son as a Sacrificial Atonement for your sins! All you have to do is claim that gift as your own!

It's a "Universal Offer"! One that comes with a Promise, a Big Promise! "If you love Me, and keep my commands, I will ask the Father to send you an Advocate in my Name, the Spirit of Truth"! "He will not only remind you of everything I have already taught you, but also teach you even more"! "We will come to those who obey my teaching, and make our home with you!" "And I am telling you this ahead of time, so that when it happens, you will believe!" The Welcome Mat is out! Everyone is invited! Only apparently, not everyone is "Teachable"? Did you notice that part? "Not everyone will obey my teaching," Jesus continues, "specifically, those who do not love me."

Teaching then, is critical, isn't it! And you can't teach what you don't know, right? Oh, you can share information, but you can't teach! So, think back for a moment to someone who has shared an important life-lesson with you. Mrs. Smith, your beloved First Grade Teacher maybe. Or Mr. Jones, from High School Biology. Mrs. Johnson, your favorite Sunday School Teacher? Maybe a Foreman on your very first job?

I remember my first "real job". Not mowing lawns, or delivering papers, not working for someone my dad knew. This was a real job! I was a Busboy at one of the top-ten restaurants in the State of Michigan, at the ripe old age of fourteen! I had to ride my bicycle to get there, and then home again, late at night. This was a classy place, with multiple forks and spoons on each side of the plate. There was even a little knife up at the top, with a little plate all of its own! The Head Busboy taught me a lot there! Like how important it was to kill all the cockroaches in the salad bar before you put the ice down!

I remember a Master Electrician who would kick me in the backside, hard, every time I touched an electrical box with the front of my hand instead of the back. It was his version of Safety Training. I remember a gifted crane operator who taught me all the secrets, and how to weld, and track deer, and shoot a bow. He was the smartest man I have ever known, bar none, even though he never finished High School! He even tried to teach me how to bend Neon on several occasions!

So, who has mentored you? And who have you mentored in return? A close relative maybe, a trusted friend? A Youth Leader, or Camp Counselor? Your Band Director, or Football Coach? A Pastor maybe?

I remember the Reverend Ray Gaylord, who I met at camp, and all that he taught me! I remember the Reverend Al Waterworth, who taught me so much about people and life, not to mention theology! Deb's grandpa, by-the-way! And I remember the Reverend Robert Collier, a fiery Southern Baptist Preacher from Mississippi who went by the name of "Pastor Bubba"! And believe me, he embodied all those stereotypical images that just went through your mind!

Several years ago, Pastor Bubba shared with me one of his favorite teachers, Mahatma Gandhi. I assume you've heard of him. Gandhi is credited with founding the Non-Violent, Civil Disobedience movement. People like Martin Luther King Jr. took their cues from him! Gandhi was a prolific writer, and a masterful theologian! He studied most of the Holy Books of most of the world religions, diligently! He was a deeply pious man, who prayed all the time! In fact, he was on his knees so much, that over the years thick calluses formed!

He was a Mystic really, a strong man of faith, who incorporated all kinds of Spiritual Disciplines into his life, including Fasting. Gandhi went for long periods of time without eating or drinking anything except water. He did this in order to achieve clarity in thought and prayer.

This practice took a toll on his health, though. Over time, he became very weak, and quite susceptible to disease and infections. Even when he did eat, Gandhi was a strict Vegetarian. This too brought on a number of health issues, the most notable of which was something like Trench Mouth. Those close to him often complained that he had terrible breath! Pastor Bubba, one of my mentors, shared with me that Gandhi, one of his mentors, was not only a Gifted Teacher, but also a “Super Calloused, Fragile Mystic, Hexed with Halitosis”!

Teachers are a gift, aren't they? A good teacher can touch your heart, as well as open up your mind to Truth! And they will do it in such a way that it comes alive! A good teacher will not only take the time to get to know you, but also allow you to get to know them! Today, Jesus is sitting in the midst of His Disciples, His Students, His would-be Followers, and He says, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching, and the Father will send to them another Teacher, the Spirit of Truth”.

Now think about that! Or maybe question yourself on that! Do you love Jesus enough to obey His teaching? Because if you do, and I quote, “My Father will love you, and we will come and make our home with you!” “My Father will send you an Advocate, the Holy Spirit, in My Name! Who will teach you all things, and remind you of everything I have said to you”! It's a Promise! A Big Promise! So, do you love Jesus enough to obey?

Do you realize that liturgically speaking, the Church is “in-between” right now? We are sandwiched between Easter, where we received the Gift of Salvation—and Pentecost, where we receive the Promised Comforter and Guide? The parades of Palm Sunday are over, including the shouts of “Hosanna” as Messiah rides into town in Honor and Glory! The agony of the Crucifixion is over as well! As are those brief moments when we stood outside of the Empty Tomb in confusion, or maybe in awe! We’ve had our time of being scattered in fear, like the first Disciples! Or holed up, locked away, hiding! And before we know it, we will arrive at the Day of Pentecost, the Birthday of the Church!

And that’s important, so stay with me. Because I want to teach a little bit about Jewish Holidays, and Christian parallels. I mean, it’s Teaching Season, right? On the third day after Passover, where the angel of death passes over the household of the Faithful, the Celebration of Freedom from Slavery and Bondage—on what we call Easter, the day Jesus conquered death—is the Celebration of First Fruits in Israel, the Barley Harvest. And fifty days after that, is “Shavuot”, the “Feast of Weeks”, Pentecost in the Greek, the First Fruits of the wheat harvest. Listen for the echoes?

It was on Shavuot, according to Jewish calendars, that Moses received the Law on Mt. Sinai, fifty days after leaving Egypt. And on Shavuot, Pentecost, that the Church received the Holy Spirit, fifty days after leaving that locked Upper Room! Seven weeks after being released from Bondage in Egypt, the People of God received God’s Teaching at Sinai. And seven weeks after being released from Bondage at the Cross of Calvary, the People of God received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who promises to teach us even more!

The Disciples went from a group of about one hundred and twenty back then, locked away, cowering in fear—to over three thousand, out on the streets of Jerusalem, boldly declaring the Good News! God’s Teaching, through the Power of the Holy Spirit, began to produce First Fruit!

Teaching is absolutely critical! And so, apparently, is obeying what the Lord has taught us! And the reward for that is huge! The Holy Spirit of God will come and reside in our heart! That’s quite a tradeoff. Obedience, in exchange for Supernatural Power and Wisdom and Peace! It is the same promise, by-the-way, given to us in the Great Commission! Matthew 28 says, “Go and make Disciples of all Nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you! And I will be with you always, even to the end of time!”

So, how are we doing with that charge? Are we teaching others what Jesus said and did? Are we teaching them to obey? Are we, as a Nation, honoring the Lord’s values, as opposed to those of the world? Are we, as Parents and Grandparents, neighbors or friends, sharing what we know to be true? How much time and energy do you think we put into that? How much learning, and teaching, do we actually do? Have you read, personally, every jot and tittle of God’s Word? Do you know what it says? Are you trying, even now, to incorporate those truths into your life? Do you share these with your family? How about with your neighbors and friends? I mean if you love them, why wouldn’t you want them to know? “Anyone who loves me, will obey my teaching! And anyone who does not love me, will not!”

It's kind of "in your face", isn't it? But then, it's Jesus doing the teaching! This obedience thing is not an "add on" to Christianity! It's not just for the super pious! It is the very basis of who we are, and what we believe! If we love Jesus, we will do what He says, which includes passing on that truth to others!

Let me give you an example. Lydia, in our first reading this morning, is a "God-Fearing" woman we're told, a "worshiper of God". She is currently in the city of Philippi, but comes from the city of Thyatira. She is also a dealer in purple cloth. And what all that means is, she believes in the One True God, but does not yet know Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, personally. She owns her own business. She is not reliant on anyone else for her financial support. And she travels for work. The fact that she deals in purple cloth tells us that she rubs elbows with the wealthy. Only the Rich and Famous could afford purple cloth, and therefore, purple was the color of royalty!

Lydia is a somebody, a somebody who knows a lot of some bodies. She is also a woman who knows a lot "about" God, but has not ever seen Him in the face of His Son! It's only after Paul shares the Gospel with her, teaches her about Jesus Christ, and only after God opens up her heart to receive the Good News, that Lydia begins to understand the Truth! Only then does she meet God personally!

And there is more teaching happening around this lesson too! There is teaching directly from the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus promised! Prior to this encounter, the Spirit of God actually changed Paul's travel itinerary, two different times! Did you know that?

Paul and his companions want to go preach in the province of Asia, but the Holy Spirit prevents him from doing so. Then they tried to enter Bithynia, but “the Spirit of Jesus would not allow us to”. Paul wants to go east, and then north, but in a vision, God sends him to the west! The Spirit is teaching Paul! And Paul is open to that teaching! And then, he is obedient in following! Paul leaves Troas, a port city in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey—and travels to Neapolis of Macedonia, modern day Greece. Big picture wise, what that means is, by the teaching of the Spirit, the Gospel crosses yet another boundary, and moves from Asia Minor into Europe!

Now watch! It’s a Sabbath, so Paul and his friends go out of the city and down to the river, and talk with a group of women! Again, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit a boundary is crossed, a social boundary, men talking to women, and treating them as equals! It’s amazing really, how, if we just listen to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, we will know right from wrong! And if we are obedient, wonderful things happen!

Have you ever had a time in your life when you felt “nudged by the Spirit” to do something, or not to do something? If so, were you obedient to that nudge? I remember a few times when I wasn’t. There was a man’s house that I drove by every day. I didn’t know him. I had never even met him. I didn’t even know his name. But I often felt that God was telling me to stop and introduce myself. I didn’t. A couple of months later I heard that he had died.

When Deb and I were first married, one of her friends, Joleen, was a Ballet teacher, who toured with a Professional Dance Company. Well one day Deb came home and said, “I feel like we should give our car to Joleen”. I thought she was nuts, and I told her so! We didn’t have an extra car, nor the money to buy another one! Besides, Joleen hadn’t asked for a car, let alone ours! Joleen was in her early twenties at the time, a Professional Dancer in top physical condition! About three weeks after our conversation, Joleen died of a massive heart attack!

I also remember a few times when I did listen to the Spirit nudging my heart. There are several stories around the selling of our business. But one in particular almost seems like a testimony. We had bought our house downstate from my parents. It was a wonderful, boyhood home, out in the country, at the end of a quiet road. Adjacent to our property was a gorgeous, sixty-six-acre, parcel of land! One that I had wanted since I was young! One side of it abutted Fort Custer State Park, and another, the Kalamazoo River. On the third side there was a beautiful stream with two ponds. And on the fourth, it backed right up to ours. There were two small creeks running through the back of the property, lots of deer, and hundreds of Purdue Walnut trees, specially planted and trimmed, that would one day be worth a fortune! There was even an underground irrigation system that watered each and every one! It was perfect!

Well, I talked the owner into selling it to us. We agreed on the terms, far less than it was actually worth. The bank approved the loan immediately, over the phone, and at a fantastic rate! Everything was set, except the signatures.

Deb and I always pray over such things though, usually for a day or two. So, we did. The very next day we talked after work. We both wanted the property very much! In fact, I still do! But we both were feeling as if God was telling us “No”! It was clear in our hearts, even though the desire and the means to buy it were there! So, with some regrets, a whole heap of regrets really, and a ton of questions on both of our parts, we backed out of the deal.

My banker was actually mad! The owner of the property was furious! And I’ve got to tell you, I was extremely disappointed myself! But less than twenty-four hours after we made that difficult decision, a little church in northern Michigan named Blaine Christian Church called, and asked us, out of the blue, if we would like to be considered to share in their ministry! Just look at all the blessings we would have missed, had we not listened to, and obeyed the Spirit’s teaching! And just think about how meaningless this true story of ours would be, and how quickly it would die, if we didn’t periodically share it with others!

We are currently standing between Easter and Pentecost, between the Promise and the Fulfillment! It wasn’t that long ago that we witnessed the Empty Tomb. And in just a while more, we will experience the Birth of the Church with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit! So, what do you say? What have we learned? How should we spend our time, in the in-between? How about we try our best to obey what the Lord is teaching us, and just see what happens as Pentecost unfolds! And all of God’s people said, Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

O Lord, thank you for being present with us through your Holy Spirit. Thank you for the teachings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and for the counsel of His Spirit in our hearts. And thank you for moving all of the human teachers and mentors in our life, enabling us to become all that we were designed to be.

You have given us so much Father, and for this we Glorify your Name. We sing your praises in song, and exalt your Name above all names. We honor you with our gifts Lord, and commune with you in prayer. And we lift you up above all the worldly idols around us!

Lord, we call upon you today in prayer, beseeching you for Gifts and Graces, and petitioning you with our Worries and Concerns. It is in trust and confidence that we lay these burdens down before your Altar of Grace. So, Father, please hear our prayers. Please touch the lives of Please strengthen those who are weak, and heal those who are broken. And please, love those who need your Unconditional Love right now, and help us to do the same.

Please also be with this Church, Lord, as we strive to transform ourselves into who you are calling us to be. Please guide us, as we attempt to discern your voice calling us to your future. And please heal our hurts, so that together, we might more fully serve your world. These things Father we ask in Jesus' Name, through the power of the Holy Spirit, as we pray together now the very prayer that He taught us saying, Our Father...