

# And Gladly Teach

A communion meditation based on Mark 1:21-28

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Dorothy's sister, Alice, who passed away last summer, and whom some of our visitors from Quebec may know, was a teacher for many years. Children may not be aware of this, but teachers tend to collect stories of their students that are told and retold for years and years.

One of the stories Alice told us was about a young girl who is probably in her forties now! One day Alice noticed this girl was having trouble with mathematics. The little girl was shy, and Alice could tell she was having problems, so Alice went to her and helped her, and when she was done she said to the little girl, "You know, if you have any trouble at all, you just ask me for help. That's one of the reasons I'm here!" The little girl paused for a moment, then asked Alice, "What's the other reason?"

## Jesus as Teacher

It may be good to ask Jesus the same question now and again. We know Jesus as a daily companion, and as one who is present with us in difficult moments. He is, after all, our friend. That's one of the reasons he's here. But what's the other reason? And I daresay it is to be our teacher. The Scriptures certainly remember him that way. In Matthew's gospel, for example, a scribe approaches him and says, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." (Matthew 8:19) Another person came to him and said, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16) Another asked, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" (Matthew 22:36)

There are many other such references in the gospels (Matthew 10:25; 22:24; Mark 9:17; Luke 7:40; John 3:2; etc.) — too many to mention — but even those who opposed Jesus recognized him as a teacher. The Pharisees, for example, who weren't prepared for a moment to sit under his tutelage, asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Matthew 9:11; see also Matthew 12:38) They, along with the Herodians, said to Jesus, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality." (Matthew 22:16) Now, we know they were trying to trap Jesus, but their duplicitous preamble must have had basis in fact!

When Mark begins his gospel, he establishes Jesus' teacher status right at the beginning, and notes, too, that there was a different, striking quality to his teaching. The people "were astounded at his teaching," says Mark (Mark 1:22); he taught "as one having authority, and not as the scribes," adds Mark. (1:22) "They were all amazed," says Mark again a few verses later, "and they kept on asking one another, 'What is this? A new teaching — with authority!'" (1:27) Jesus' teaching was sufficiently striking and compelling that word about it began to spread throughout the region. (1:28)

## The Nature of Jesus' Authority

This morning we share Holy Communion in remembrance of Jesus, but in doing so we also declare our willingness to be students of his teaching. We declare ourselves subject to his authority, and so it may be well to reflect, briefly, upon the nature of Jesus' authority.

Some people exert their authority by "pulling rank". They love to drop names of important people they know, impressing us with their ability to network. Maybe Jesus pulled rank. Maybe he got his authority by referring often to his relationship with God. He might have said, "Now you'd better listen carefully to what I say because I know people who know people. In fact, I know the Numero Uno, so you'd better pay attention or else!"

Some people exert their authority by flaunting their achievements and degrees. That wouldn't really work in our church because if you look in our directory no one has any letters after their name. I'd be too embarrassed to put B.A. after mine; in fact, I've been thinking lately of giving it back! On the other hand, when we go to the hospital and put our lives in the hands of medical people, we like to be assured that they know what they're doing! The authority of those diplomas on their office wall speak of their authority! Maybe Jesus appealed to that kind of authority. Maybe he handed out business cards with "Jesus, S.O.G" embossed on them! S.O.G. — Son of God.

I don't think so! Jesus made clear that his authority was of a different nature. He said to his disciples, in effect, that some may exert their authority by "lording it over others" or by some other tyrannical means (Matthew 20:25), but it was not to be so among them. "Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant," he said. (Matthew 20:26) And then, drawing attention to his own example, he told them that he had come "not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28)

The phrase, "And gladly teach," comes from Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales," the full line reading, "And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach". As we prepare to share this communion meal in honour of Jesus' daily companionship and help, we also declare, in so doing, that Jesus is our teacher, that we are his students, and that we "gladly learn" at his feet. We gladly learn from his model of leadership. We gladly learn from his reliance on trust, love, and respect. We will gladly and willingly let him tutor us in the skills of forgiveness and faithfulness.

Come share the bread, and the cup, in remembrance of our Teacher, our Master, our Saviour and Lord.

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All quotations of Scripture, unless otherwise noted, are from the New Revised Standard Version.