

Rev. Lynne Ogren  
January 28, 2018

Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany

Mark 1:21-28

Let us pray.  
Grant us, O God, to hear your voice,  
and in hearing your voice to love your word,  
and in loving your word to do your will  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Tonight the music industry will celebrate the Grammy awards. I don't pay much attention to the Grammys anymore because I'm so out of touch with the current musicians. But this year I was made aware of an award I had not heard of before, the Grammy Music Teacher of the Year award. Friday morning, CBS This Morning announced the winner, Melissa Salguero who teaches elementary music in the South Bronx of New York.

Ms. Salguero built the music program from nothing, which she said she began by singing with the kids and playing her guitar. This school is in one of the poorest neighborhoods of New York, and they now have instruments the students can play without having to buy them. They come before school for band class, and they do it willingly because through music and this dedicated teacher the children are finding a sense of purpose and value.

One student said about this teacher, "She makes us feel special about ourselves. She doesn't care how we sing." Now, in the video I watched she was teaching the students proper techniques for singing and playing instruments. She has to be teaching them how to read music and the language that tells us how to play louder and softer and quickly and slowly.

Even as Ms. Salguero teaches the information and the techniques of making music, she is also building up the children—individually and as a community—transforming them and opening up new possibilities for their lives.

As we each think back on the teachers we have had, the ones that stand out are usually the ones who taught us something deeper than the subject matter.

Whether you have taught in a formal school setting or not, we have all taught someone something at one time or another. Parents teach their children how to make their beds, do their chores, and any number of other life skills.

But we also teach our kids life lessons, like how to navigate struggles with friends, dealing with disappointments, and working toward a goal.

Maybe you can think of situation in which you were a teacher. Maybe you trained a new employee in your workplace. Or you lead a Bible study here at church.

Part of the task of teaching is the passing along of content or developing skills or techniques. This was the work of the scribes in Jesus' day. Their job was to teach the traditions of the faith. They taught their students the Law given through Moses—which, if

you read Leviticus, was much more than the Ten Commandments. There were food laws and marriage laws and laws for trade and commerce.

The scribes also taught the traditions of worship, including festivals and rituals. Does all this sound familiar? In our modern churches we also teach our children—and adults—the Ten Commandments, The Creeds, The Lord's Prayer, the books of the Bible, and other religious knowledge. How many of you had to memorize some or all of Luther's Small Catechism in order to be confirmed?

When we asked this year's confirmation class what they hoped for from their time over these two years one thing they said was that they wanted to know how to use the Bible, to know what was in it so they could use it in helpful ways in their lives. I was pretty excited about that answer!

Because here's where we cross from the "what" of religious education to the "so what?" We need to know what is in the Bible, who the key people are, and what the important events were so that we can also receive God's promises that are the foundation of faith. These promises have sustained and built up believers for generations.

There's nothing wrong with information. We need to learn content and the how-tos of life. It is when that knowledge and those skills are then used to make a difference, to transform someone, that content then takes on meaning.

And here's where Jesus' teaching was so different and amazing. Jesus' purpose for teaching wasn't so much about information as it was about transformation. Jesus taught with the authority that changed people's lives, just as he did with the man who was possessed by an unclean spirit.

That unclean spirit had knowledge. It knew who Jesus was—the Holy One of God! There are many people in the world who have heard of Jesus and they have many interpretations of who he was historically. I had a family member who told me he had read the Bible from cover to cover, but knowing about Jesus was not enough to bring that person to faith.

Knowing Jesus is more than knowing that his parents were Mary and Joseph and that he had twelve close friends who followed him around for a few years. To know Jesus in a way that transforms our lives is to know the power of God that Jesus brought into the world—a power that is active and living within us today.

To know Jesus by faith is to hear his words and to recognize his presence with the authority that these listeners heard and felt in our gospel reading today.

We experience the power and authority of Jesus Christ in two places in our lives of worship—at the font and at the table. The baptismal font has central place in our worship, reminding us of God's claim and promises made to us in Holy Baptism.

Here we were given the name Child of God. Here we received the gift and power of the Holy Spirit—just as Jesus did at his baptism. And when we begin our worship each week, making

our confession before God and one another, we hear again the powerful assurance that God forgives us of all our sins.

That message of forgiveness is repeated in the Meal. We have learned the facts of Jesus' last supper, how he blessed the bread and the wine, how he shared it with his friends, and that he told them to repeat this practice every time they gathered to worship.

This meal becomes a ritual of transformation when we hear the words, "The body of Christ given for you. The blood of Christ shed for you." This teaching, received by faith, transforms us from people in need of God's grace to people who have been released from the unclean spirits of this world—spirits of guilt, shame, anger, or despair.

Freed and forgiven, we are sent into the world to bring Jesus' words of transformation to others.

The information we have to teach here in the church is important. The stories and events and people we encounter in the Bible are important to know. But it is when this learning shows us how the power and steadfast love of God can free and transform us that we are then empowered to carry that love and mercy into a hurting world.

We are not all preachers or official teachers of the faith we have in Christ. But God works through the knowledge and skills and occupations and passions we have to bring transformation to others.

We carry the authority of Jesus into the world. And we are sent to care and serve with the generosity and grace of God.

May God guide you in the way of Christ. And may the grace and mercy of the Lord be your strength and comfort, now and always. Amen