**Who is Jesus – part 2: Jesus as Teacher**

Do you remember your teachers from school?

Perhaps for some of you it was not too long ago.

Maybe you can clearly visualize the classrooms, where you sat, who was in your class, and perhaps even some of the lessons that a teacher taught you.

I imagine that many of you will probably have a particular teacher that stood out for you.

Maybe they were kind to you – perhaps they went that extra mile to help you with your studies – or maybe they were a teacher that you worked with outside the classroom in extra curricular activities like sports and music, and you created a special bond with them.

And, when you think about that special teacher, I hope you have fond memories of how they inspired you, encouraged you, guided you, and helped you to be the best that you could possibly be.

Jesus was called many names in the bible by those who knew him – but of the 90 times that he is addressed directly – 60 of those times he was referred to as “teacher’, “rabbi”, “great one” or “master” (as in the British term School master).

Jesus taught on hillsides, at lake shores, in fields, from the hull of a boat, at dinning tables, at weddings, and at campfires. His ministry was teaching.

In the one and only story that we have of Jesus as a child – it is no surprise that we find him teaching at the temple when he is just 12. His parents were frantically looking for him, thinking that he was lost, and when they retraced their steps they found him at the temple among the elders. Luke’s account of the story tells us:

“*He was sitting among the teachers, listening to them and putting questions to them.****47****Everyone who heard him was amazed by his understanding and his answers.”* (Luke 2:46-47)

Jesus knew from a very young age – that he was to be a teacher. He even tells him mother:

*“Why were you looking for me? Didn’t you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father’s house?”*(Luke 2:49)

Now some people feel that calling Jesus a teacher under states the presence of the Divine in Jesus. But we need to understand that the term teacher is translated into Hebrew as ‘Rabbi’, or ‘Rabbouni’, which in the first century did not mean ‘a Jewish clergy person’ as it does today. Instead, Rabbi was used only for one whose teachings bore spiritual authority – a sage, a storyteller, an insightful interpreter of the Law, someone who taught the Way.

Rabbi Jesus did all those things.

So, when we call Jesus, ‘Teacher’ – we are in fact referring to his spiritual authority.

But what exactly did Jesus teach?

Well, that is probably an easy question for most of us to answer.

You probably immediately think about the Golden Rule – a lesson that we are all taught in Sunday School –

*“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”* (Luke 6:31)

It is such an important lesson to learn that it can be found in various ways in all different faiths.

And in some ways, it encapsulates all the other rules in scripture …. And there are a lot of rules!

In the passage of scripture read for us today – Jesus is giving his famous Sermon on the Mount. It is perhaps one of the longest ‘lessons’ that Jesus gives. After the passage that Matthew read – which we now fondly know as the ‘Beatitudes’ – Jesus goes onto to talk about the rules and the laws of Moses.

He talks about the laws of murder, adultery, faithfulness in relationships, honesty, and retaliation.

We might not want to think of Rabbi Jesus as someone who lays down the rules, but he makes it very clear that he supports the Jewish rules saying:

*“Don’t even begin to think that I have come to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I haven’t come to do away with them but to fulfill them.*” (Mathew 15:17)

Yes, Rabbi Jesus is a rule maker – but the difference is that his rules are all rooted in love!

Diana Buttler Bass neatly sums this up in the phrase:

“Jesus did not teach rules. He taught that love ruled.” (pg. 35)

If you grew up memorizing Moses’ 10 commandments – then you will see how each rule can be read as an expression of love.

When you love others, you don’t want to kill them.

When you love your parents, you want to do things to make them happy.

When you love your partner, you don’t want to be dishonest in the relationship.

When you love God, then you enjoy taking a Sabbath to spend time with God.

Etc. etc.

Jesus’ teachings were not intended to undermine, overrule, or replace Moses’ laws for the Jewish people. Jesus simply invites us into an alternative and often innovative reading of the Jewish tradition – and he does this, by centering his teachings all on love.

Jesus’ lesson of the Beatitudes are lessons of love. (Matthew 5:1-16)

Some of the verses are hard to accept and understand – like

*“happy are those who grieve”* (v.4) or *“happy are those who are hopeless:* (v.3) and *“happy are those who are harassed”* (v. 10).

They do not sit well with our social conscience as we struggle to work for equality, and to lift up those who are marginalized.

But when you put the phrase “love God with all your heart and soul” (Matthew 22:37) before each blessing, then it takes on a new meaning:

Love your God with all your heart and soul, then you will be happy even when you are hopeless because the kingdom of heaven will be yours.

Love your God with all your heart and soul, then you will be happy even when grieve, because you will be made glad.

Jesus did not teach rules. He taught that love ruled.

And it is interesting that most of Jesus’ teachings were in the form of stories – not just a manifesto of rules and regulations. He taught through parables.

Of course, as a storyteller myself – I love the fact that Jesus taught through stories.

The meaning of the word parable is in itself interesting and paradoxical: it comes from two Greek terms – *para-* meaning ‘to come alongside’ and *ballein* meaning ‘to throw.’

Jesus’ stories both come alongside us and throw us into action.

New Testament scholar, Amy-Jill Levine writes:

*“Unlike rules, commands, or doctrine, Jesus’ parables challenge us to look into the hidden aspects of our own values, and our own lives. They bring to the surface unasked questions, and they reveal the answers we have always known, but refuse to acknowledge.”*

I think one of the beauty of Jesus’ stories is that they can be fresh each time we read them.

There is no one solution.

There is no one meaning.

There is an invitation to wrestle with the underlying principle.

There is an opportunity to go deeper each time.

They speak to us in new ways depending on life circumstances, and where we are in our faith journeys.

This week in the mid week Inspirational message, I invited you to reflect on the parable of the wedding banquet from Matthew 22.

In the Good news at Grace, I referenced the parable of the New Wine in Old Wineskins (Matthew 9:14-17, Mark 2:18-22 and Luke 5:33-39.)

I invite you think about one of your favourite stories that Jesus told, and to go and read it, and reread it, to see what Rabbi Jesus could be teaching you today.

Let the story come along side where you are, and then think about how it is throwing you into action.

Because when we follow the teachings of Jesus, then we are thrown into action. And Jesus taught by action too – he lived by example what he taught – he reached out with love and compassion, he was not afraid to stand up and speak out for justice, he was willing to be seen and be friends with the marginalized and called for unity in a world that was divided. Everything that Jesus did was an act of transformation – and it was all rooted in love.

Theologian Marcus Borg in his book ‘Jesus: A New Vision’ writes:

*“Jesus was not primarily a teacher of either correct beliefs or right morals. Rather, he was a teacher of a way or a path, specifically a way of transformation.”*

I began by asking you – can you remember a teacher who had an impact on your life? In our Young and Young at Heart, Dale shared his story of how Mr Bill Kipfer impacted his life.

And so I invite you now to consider – how has Jesus the Teacher impacted your life? How have you been transformed?

And, how do you continue to be transformed by his teachings.

I want to close with a story from Diana Buttler Bass. She tells of how she was at a church in July 2016, when the senior pastor called the children to the front.

The pastor asked: “Where is the candle? Do you see it?”

And the children looked around, and one sharp eyed boy said, “there it is.”

“Would you get it?” the pastor asked, so the boy retrieved the candle and handed it to her.

“Where is the white bowl?” she then asked. It too was located and retrieved.

“Where are the silver and gold beads?” Same thing again.

Finally, she asked – “Where is God?”

The children looked up and down, all around. There were a few bewildered looks and some shrugs of shoulders. Then one little boy in a plaid shirt, about 3 years old, said, “I know!”

The pastor said – “You do?”

The little boy looked excited and insisted, “Yes! Yes!”

“Where?” asked the pastor.

And the little boy replied, “I’ll go get God!”

He jumped up from the front and ran down the centre aisle. His father, obviously worried about the open doors at the back of the sanctuary, leaped out of his pew to fetch his son.

Before he got very far, the little boy had returned. He was holding the hand of a kind looking woman in her 60’s, literally pulling her down the aisle.

“Here!” he cried. “Here’s God! She’s here!”

The pastor looked puzzled. “Miss Jean?” she asked.

The boy pointed to his Sunday school teacher and said: “There she is! God! God!”

There was not a dry eye in the congregation.

Butler Bass says that ever since that time, she wonders if this was how people responded to Jesus – pointing to their beloved teacher, the one who instructed them in a way of love, and crying out, “Here! Here’s God! God!”

As you consider Jesus the teacher – may you also reflect on how his teachings have a spiritual and divine authority, and how Jesus the Teacher reveals God to us again and again. Amen.

Before we enter into a time of prayer, let us say together a segment from the Song of Faith, one of the United Church 4 pillars of our faith. The segment focuses on Who is Jesus

**Song of Faith (2006)**

We sing of Jesus,

a Jew,

born to a woman in poverty

in a time of social upheaval

and political oppression. ….

…. Jesus announced the coming of God’s reign—

a commonwealth not of domination

but of peace, justice, and reconciliation.

He healed the sick and fed the hungry.

He forgave sins and freed those held captive

by all manner of demonic powers.

He crossed barriers of race, class, culture, and gender.

He preached and practised unconditional love—

love of God, love of neighbour,

love of friend, love of enemy—

and he commanded his followers to love one another

as he had loved them.