

## JESUS WAS A TEACHER: STILL IS

Mark 6.1-13

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A sermon preached by the Reverend Theodore S. Atkinson  
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**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.**

Jesus was a teacher. He still is. Mark tells us that Jesus “came to his home town and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, ‘Where did he get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him?’” I imagine they spoke with a sophisticated sneer. “Who does this guy think he is?” Mark suggests that one reason they rejected him was that he was a carpenter. He wasn’t a professional. He <sup>hadn’t taken</sup> ~~didn’t~~ take the academic track. He went to vo-tech. He wasn’t *educated*. He was working class, a member of the Carpenter’s Union. “Isn’t this the carpenter?” There was a little bit of class snobbery in their rejection of Jesus. We still live in a class society. Many people still think working class people don’t have much to teach us.

The Presbyterian church is the best educated denomination in the world. We have a higher percentage of college graduates than Episcopalians or Lutherans or Methodists or Unitarians or anybody. As Beatty Campbell use to say of us, “You guys are real smart fellers.” Sometimes with all our learning we look down on working class people. “Oh, he’s only a carpenter.”

Presbyterians emphasize the importance of an educated ministry. Last year at Presbytery we debated whether to exempt a prospective Hispanic minister from learning Hebrew and Greek required of all Presbyterian ministers. He had over twenty years experience in mission work and new church development. He was fluent in English and Spanish but he didn’t know Hebrew and Greek. The Presbytery decided that we couldn’t compromise our principles. He has to take Hebrew and Greek if he wants to be a Presbyterian minister. We would not exempt him. Now what do you think the chances would be for our church to call a pastor who is a real good carpenter and has been known to heal people but has no college or seminary education?

Too often Presbyterians who’ve been to college not only speak a different language and like different kinds of music than carpenters, we label them as “rednecks”, unsophisticated, and vulgar. Tex Sample

After Jesus preached that Sabbath morning *some* people left saying, "Who does this guy think he is. He's just a carpenter?" Others listened and learned and went out into the neighboring villages preaching that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

And now we're going to baptize two babies. Jesus requires that we teach them and nurture them to follow the Lord. They will need mentors. Parents, friends, brothers and sisters in Christ from whom they can learn what it means to follow Christ and be his faithful disciple.

Let us pray: God of the covenant, in our baptism you called us to proclaim the coming of your kingdom. Give us courage like you gave the apostles, that we may faithfully witness to your love and peace in every circumstance of life, in the name of Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

specializes in ministry to working class people. He writes, "I talked recently with a pastor starting a new church in a large suburban area. When I told him that a large number of working people lived in the area, he told me flatly that he really had no interest in them. He wanted a *first class* church made up of top business and professional people, the kind with whom he could work." Tex Sample, a little disgusted with the preacher's class snobbery, congratulated him on his ambition and told him, eventually, he'd have a great opportunity to continue his ministry in hell.

Now think of all the teachers you've had, formal and informal. I've been to the finest schools and I've had some world class teachers but my greatest and most influential teachers didn't even have a high school degree. I don't mean to denigrate education. I've never been criticized for being anti-intellectual. I pride myself on my education. But I treasure the wisdom I've learned about God and Jesus and faithfulness and integrity and honesty from auto-mechanics, janitors, railroad engineers, and carpenters.

"Jesus was a man, a carpenter by hand." And he was a teacher. He still is. Jesus teaches primarily by doing. He didn't quote a lot of authorities other than the Bible. The disciples of Jesus learned primarily, not through book study, but through apprenticeship. They learned from Jesus the way a carpenter's apprentice learns from a master carpenter. They spent hours living and working alongside their teacher. They traveled with him. They watched him. They imitated him. Then he sent them out on their own two by two to actually practice what they'd learned.

One of the best ways of learning who Jesus is and what he wants of us is through hands on mission work. For example, *Habitat for Humanity* is a mission that clearly has a theological basis; what Millard Fuller calls "the theology of the hammer." Last week Jesus sent out (Jim Sumner, Helen Stewart, Marybeth Ross, Laura Claypoole, Josh Davis, Kay Atkinson and myself) seven of us to Philadelphia to practice some things we've learned about how Jesus relates to the poor. We worked on an abandoned row house in the inner city of Philadelphia and helped give a working class poor person the opportunity to own their own home. Our job was putting up dry wall. We were *dry wallers for Jesus*. Except for Jim, none of us knew what we were doing. We learned by doing. We learned, not only about dry-walling, we learned something of what Jesus is doing in the

city and what he's teaching and whom he's teaching. Jesus taught not only long ago, he's still teaching people today how to live in relationship to God and neighbors through such mission projects as *Habitat for Humanity*. More of us need to hear the call of Jesus who sends us out to minister in his name.

So much of our work in the church involves teaching people *about* the faith and *then* asking how this can be implemented. I was talking to a Presbyterian minister from Mexico. We were talking about training for ministry. I didn't realize there was such a contrast between the way we Americans and Mexicans train ministers. The minister said, "In the U.S., when you feel called to the ministry you go to college and then to seminary. You read lots of books. You learn Greek and Hebrew. You write lots of papers. You take ordination exams. You'll do a little field work ministry teaching Sunday School and leading a youth group. After you've studied and passed your ordination exams the Presbytery affirms your call to the ministry."

But, he said, "We do it differently in Mexico. In Mexico, if you feel called to the ministry you apprentice with your pastor for a year. If you learn well your pastor says, 'Great! If you still feel called to the ministry go into our neighboring village and start a church. We can't pay you anything. If after two years you've started a church that's a pretty good sign God really has called you to the ministry. Then we'll give you a few books to read and ask you some questions before we ordain you.'"

"Jesus went around teaching from village to village. Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits." The teacher is not one who answers all your intellectual questions but one who sends out her or his students to carry on the mission of Jesus.

*Jesus has been teaching us this morning & now he sends us out*

Now what I'd like you to do this week is chose somebody and go out on a mission. Visit somebody in the hospital or in jail. Tell somebody about Jesus. Visit a resident at Ware Presbyterian Village. Pray with them. Take cookies to a new neighbor and invite them to church. Invite your neighbors for a living room Bible study. Deliver a meal to someone recuperating from a hospital stay. Comfort the grieving. Thinking about the CROP walk in October. Bring someone to the church picnic tonight. Volunteer for the Oxford Educational Foundation mentor program. Deliver meals on wheels. Learn from Jesus by following and obeying him.