

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH
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SERMON: *The Teacher*

Acknowledgement to Gary Moon [Apprenticeship with Jesus] and Dallas Willard [The Divine Conspiracy].

Good morning Five Forks Church, I'm glad for this opportunity to worship Jesus with you this morning!

I like to begin by asking you a question: As you look back over your life, do any **“Missed Opportunities”** come to mind? Anything you had a chance to do, but failed to take advantage of?

Back when I was finishing up my Senior year of college, I was chosen to be a part of a team that would travel across the United States. There was a man who was a paraplegic, confined to a wheelchair, and it was his aim to wheel himself across the United States...from the east coast to the west coast in order to promote something...I have no recollection of what it was.

I was chosen to be part of a 2-person advance team...our responsibility would be to travel one town ahead of the rest of the team, meeting with local newspapers and tv stations in order to promote the fact that this man would be soon passing through their town.

There was a part of me that was pretty excited... I love traveling and had only been as far west as Saint Louis,... and so here was an opportunity to see the country.

Not long after I was selected to be a part of this team, I was offered a job in Harrisburg that I felt that I really couldn't pass up, and so I ended up declining the invitation and was not a part of this cross country venture.

I don't regret that choice, but it was a missed opportunity. Fortunately, looking back over my life, it would be hard for me to pinpoint many other "big" opportunities that have passed me by.

Having said that, while it's not as easy to pinpoint, I imagine I've missed more than my share of opportunities to follow Jesus more closely.

Here at Five Forks, I've said that we are - above all else - a group of Jesus followers. And it seems as if God has our attention right now, and so we have this opportunity before us...to follow Him more closely.

This morning's message is titled "The Teacher". At one point in Jesus' ministry, He said to His closest followers:

John 13:13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am."

And so this morning, as we turn our attention to Jesus, our Teacher,, I'd like to ask you a few questions:

First, **Who Is Your Teacher?** Who is or who are your primary teachers at this point in your life? Next question, if Jesus is your Teacher, and I hope that He is, **Are You Going Deeper?** Are you looking for Him to help you grow in your understanding of what it means to follow Him and be used by Him. And then, in light of whatever Jesus reveals to you this morning, I'd like to ask you to consider what **Your Next Step** will be.

So...to get started...

1. WHO IS YOUR TEACHER?

Who has your ear, your attention? Who is teaching you?

One thing is sure, we are all students, we all have our teachers and it's been this way from the time we were born.

For many of us, we were first students of our parents, adopting similar mannerisms...eventually most of us headed off to school, where we became students of our teachers, but not just our teachers, but also some of our classmates. We learned things – both good and bad – from our peers. Adopting similar language, attitudes and behavior.

As we moved out of childhood and into adulthood, the influence of our peers became even more strong, and not just our peers, but many of us found ourselves also being taught by public figures such as musicians, political pundits, writers, athletes. These public figures convey a message through the songs they sing, the words they say or write, the attitudes they display. And we pick up on these things, and these public figures play a role in shaping our views on how we see ourselves, how we see others, how we see God.

One of the most important things we must do is recognize who our teachers are, and then evaluate the results.

What has come about in my life due to the teaching, the influence of this person or persons on my life. And it's vital that we be honest with ourselves when doing so.

Of course, for those of us who have made the decision to follow Jesus, He becomes *The Teacher*.

As you know, people addressed Jesus with different names..."Lord" ..."Master"...but of the 90 times that Jesus was addressed in the gospels, 60 times He was called Teacher. This was the word that His followers used.

As we saw earlier, it was a term that Jesus used to identify Himself when He said...

John 13:13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am."

It was near the beginning of Jesus' ministry, when Nicodemus, a religious leader, met privately with Jesus, saying...

John 3:2 "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God."

As a group of Jesus followers here at Five Forks, we want to be sure that He is in fact, our Teacher. And if you can say, "yes, He is," then the next question is this:

2. ARE YOU GOING DEEPER?

It was last year at this time that we were making our way through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, 3 chapters in the book of Matthew where Jesus is doing nothing but teaching. What a great opportunity we had to not only receive solid teaching, but teaching on deeper, more advanced level.

And if you wonder what I mean by that, let me explain.

When we are young, in the early grades, we have this amazing ability to memorize basic information. We memorize the a, b, c's...our times table...the names of Presidents and State Capitols. Our minds are like sponges, and we just take in and retain all kinds of names and numbers. No idea what it all means, but it's up there.

As our brains continue to develop, within a few short years we are able to dialogue, to talk about and ask questions about these names, places and numbers we have memorized.

And finally, our brains develop to the point where we are capable of a more advanced level of learning....we begin to grasp the full meaning of certain concepts...and we gradually begin to understand things so well, that we are actually in a position to teach others.

I love raspberries, about 10 years ago I grew tired of paying what seemed to be a lot of money for a small box of raspberries, and decided to grow my own. Planted about 20 bushes and I love the whole process of planting and pruning and picking. Unfortunately, the birds in my neighborhood love my raspberries as much as I do, and so about two weeks ago I decided I

was going to do something about it. I would build a frame and cover it with a net in order to keep the birds out.

The first step was simply the basics. My internet teachers taught me that I would need some net, some PVC pipe (what size), a saw, measuring tape and some connectors. The basics.

Once I had the basics covered, I began to ask questions..."Okay, what do I do with these?" And I began to learn how long to make the pieces and how to attach them to one another, how to attach the net. Began talking about the process with Karen. So far so good. But I still had to do it.

And as I began putting all that I had learned into practice, I came to the point where I understood things so well, I could easily pass on to anyone else how to go about protecting their raspberries.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' teaching is so good...He begins by taking His students back to the basics. Time and time again Jesus begins by addressing different topics with these words, ***"You have heard that it was said..."***

Those sitting on the hillside and those of us who have been following Jesus are familiar with the basics...we are familiar with that was said: "Do not murder...Do not commit Adultery..." And so Jesus is saying, "You have heard these things, you *know* these things. You've got the basics down."

But then what does Jesus do next? He takes His followers - you and I - to the more advanced level by saying, ***"But I tell you..."*** And then our Teacher, He takes us deeper.

"You have heard that it was said do not murder, but I tell you that anyone who condemns another in his or her heart is just as guilty. If it's in your heart, it flies in the face of the two greatest commandments, to love God and to love others. And the damage that can come about is real."

"You have heard that it was said, do not commit adultery, but I tell you that anyone who lusts inwardly after another persons' spouse is just as guilty. Because if it's there in your heart, it

flies in the face of loving God and loving others. And again, the damage that eventually comes is real.”

As followers of Jesus, we not just looking for Him to teach us facts, the basics. We’re looking to grasp why Jesus teaches as He does...we want our understanding to grow so that we are in a position to teach others, both by the words that we speak and the lives that we live.

A few decades after Jesus did this teaching, the apostle Paul wrote a letter to a congregation that had sprung up in a city called Corinth, and at one point in the midst of his letter, he laments over the fact that they seem to be making little progress in their spiritual development, saying,

I Corinthians 1:2-3a “I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly.”

Early on, Paul gave them milk...the basics you might say. And he was hoping that by the time he wrote this letter, that they would be ready to move on to more solid food...to grasp not only what Jesus said, but why He said it and how to put it into practice. But it wasn’t happening.

I don’t want what was happening in Corinth to be happening here at Five Forks. I want us to be a group of Jesus followers, looking for Him to teach us and take us deeper. To live as He would live and do the things that He would do. I like how Dallas Willard puts it:

*Whether it is making ax handles or tacos, selling automobiles or teaching kindergarten, investment banking or political office, evangelizing or running a Christian Education program, performing in the arts or teaching English as a second language... **“It should be done as Jesus Himself would do it.”***

That resonates with me, and so these days, as I do things, I find myself looking to do them as Jesus Himself would do.

On Memorial Day I borrowed a truck in order to go get a load of mulch to spread around the house. When I turned the radio on in the truck, it was set to a station playing a Shania Twain

song from back in the 90's called "Any Man of Mine." If you're familiar with the song, you know it's Twain singing about this incredibly high standard that she is looking for in a man...*"When I cook him dinner and I burn it black I better hear him say "mmm, I like it like that."*

There's also this line: *"If I change my mind, a million times, I better hear him say, "yeah, I like it that way...and that way...and that way."*

As I'm driving and thinking about the words to that song, I hear Jesus talking to me about what kind of husband I should want to be. A husband that is understanding and patient and kind...

I get to the house and it's not only mulch day, it's flower planting day, and so Karen and Olivia are overseeing the placement of the plants. And I know from past experience, it's not going to be a quick process. We're going to start by planting them here, but there's a good chance that for some of the flowers, one of the girls is going to change her mind and decide they would look better over there.

But this year, after listening and learning from Jesus, I was determined to spread mulch and plant flowers as Jesus Himself would do. I imagine that Jesus would just enjoy being outside, taking joy in working, being productive and appreciating how nice the mulch looked once it was down.

I was determined to dig holes and plant flowers and maybe re-plant flowers as Jesus Himself would do. And so I remember at one point Karen expressing how she was unsure of where to put some of the flowers, and I remember saying in a genuinely pleasant voice, "Wherever you like..." And I was prepared to dig – with a joyful attitude - as many times as was needed.

And by looking to Jesus to teach me how to live, it turned out to be a much more enjoyable experience...instead of being uptight, annoyed, impatient which then becomes my day...I was much more relaxed and ended up really enjoying the whole flower planting experience.

I want Jesus to be my Teacher, above and beyond all others. I want to look to Him to challenge me, to take me deeper, and more and more, do things as He Himself would do it.

Time for the third and final question. In light of what Jesus has revealed to you this morning, what do you see as...

3. YOUR NEXT STEP

I said a few weeks ago, for those of us who follow Jesus, there is always a next step for us to take. And just as I did back then, let me suggest a number of possibilities.

I know that it's possible, even likely, that there are some who are watching right now, who Jesus is not your Teacher because you have never made the decision to become a Christian, or more accurately, one who follows Him. If this is you, then this is without question your next step, to **become a follower of Jesus**.

When Jesus would teach, He loved to use imagery in order to make a point, and there was this one occasion where He spoke about a Shepherd watching over His flock, the sheep. He was using this imagery to help us see His relationship to us. He is our shepherd, and at one point He said these words:

John 10:27 “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”

All that to say, Jesus cares deeply about you, and this morning He is inviting you to follow Him, and if you do that...*He will watch over you (God Himself will watch over you)...He will call you by your name (He is personal)...He will lead you* through all of the obstacles and challenges are sure to come your way throughout the course of your life. Your next step is to decide to follow Him.

And if you do, please reach out and let me know. I would love to walk those first few steps of your journey with you.

Now I know that a lot of you out there have already made a decision to follow Jesus, but maybe your just not sure if you're where Jesus wants you to be...then maybe your next step is to **Recognize Your Teacher(s) and Evaluate the Results**.

I believe this is so important that we answer this honestly, because of how easy it is to be taught and influenced by both peers and public figures. Those of us who are older lament the negative influence that some of today's entertainers have on our children and grandchildren, and we long for better role models.

At the same time I believe our children and grandchildren look at us and lament over the influence that certain public figures have on us. The political pundits, the talking heads on cable tv and talk radio for instance...on both sides of the aisle. Our kids see for themselves the impact when it comes to our attitudes, how we come to express our opinions when talking in our homes or posting on social media...and so should we be surprised then when our children and grandchildren question how seriously we take our decision to follow Jesus.

Again, for those of us who are intent on following Jesus, the question is this: Who is my teacher? Am I sitting under the influence, the teaching of Jesus, or the teaching of man? If we recognize that those we are listening to and learning from are impacting our lives, our words, our heart in a way that is inconsistent with the teaching of Jesus, then I think He would be telling us to leave that classroom, don't you think?

It's not enough to say we follow Jesus...we actually need to do it.

For some of you, perhaps your next step is to **Move on to more advanced teaching**. By now you've mastered the names and the places. You know where Jesus was born, the name of his earthly mother and father and the town He grew up in.

But maybe it's time to move on to more solid food. To talk among your family and friends about what you learned from the Sunday sermon, and what you didn't quite understand.

It's makes my heart rejoice when I get an email early in the week from someone telling me that the family discussed the sermon the whole way home from church, or over Sunday dinner.

This is what following Jesus looks like, not just resting on the basics, but you're talking, asking questions, sharing what you think...and of course, moving on from there and putting it into practice.

Recall our main Scripture verse for this morning?

John 13:13 “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am.”

I wonder how many of you might be able to tell me where Jesus was, and what was happening at the time when Jesus spoke these words? If you're not sure, let's see what Jesus said next:

John 13:14-15 “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done.”

Upper Room. The night He was betrayed by Judas and arrested. The basics.

But let's go deeper: The lesson that Jesus was teaching was about serving each other with an attitude of true humility. Not just knowing what Jesus said about humility, but actually putting into practice.

Which leads to the 4th and final suggestion.

For some of you, your next step is to intentionally go about this: **In whatever you do, do it as Jesus Himself would do it.** Whether you're making eggs, choosing a station to listen to or a movie to watch...whether you're playing a round of golf, posting something on Facebook...or spreading a truck load of mulch...you do it as Jesus Himself would do it.

Let's go to prayer and each of us look to Jesus to show us what our next step – or steps – should be.

PRAYER