

Everyone fully trained will be like his teacher

The gospel of the Lord according to St. Luke:

Everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.¹

The word of the Lord.

Grace, peace, mercy be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ, the word that would deliver Jesus to you this evening is the gospel assigned, just read, which witnesses the Lord in his sermon on the plain. In it, we hear the historical record of Jesus, the teacher, teaching the disciples who would be teachers to the gentiles. We hear Jesus, the preacher, preaching the disciples who would be preachers. And so in fine form just a few generations later, we who come to be catechized by preacher Luke, once again hear the words of the Lord delivered to us, into our eyes, into our ears, into our mouths and hearts and minds and bodies and long-term core memories to receive the gifts our Lord has to give in the way he chooses to give them.

And how very appropriate that our brother, the Rev. Candidate Joshua Palmer, catechized and trained in the way of his teacher should hear this good news this day that HE has been appointed, supplied, trained, provided for, *katartizo*'ed is the Greek verb, by preacher Luke, preacher Matthew, preacher Mark and John and Paul, who delivered Jesus to him. And how very appropriate that he should hear the Good News this day, that all those who have been trained by their teacher will be like their teacher. Jesus is delivered to you this day in this word of the Lord, dear friend in Christ—and also to you, Candidate Palmer, in a special way today.

It's not just because I'm a professor at Concordia that I hang on this word, this verb, this promise from St. Luke this evening, about how everyone who is trained *will be* as their teacher – no disciple greater than his teacher. As if there's some sort of competition to come in first, like James and John asked Jesus, “When you come into your kingdom, can we be on your right and left?” Some competition over public approval and civil righteousness. You remember the Pharisee looking down his nose over the tax collector and saying, “Lord, I thank you that I'm not like this guy.” Some competition over outdoing one another in a climb to the top of the food chain, the pyramid, the rat race of the kingdom of this world.

¹ Luke 6:40b

“Who would be greatest?” the disciples ask, and we see Jesus face-palm again and hear him say, “This is how the gentiles act, lording it over one another. That’s not how it is to be with you. Don’t you remember how I said, ‘Blessed are those who mourn, who hunger, who are meek and lowly, like this child I place in your midst? Don’t you see how in my kingdom, my topsy-turvy, upside-down, politics how you’d never imagine it. Don’t you see that this kingdom that’s totally alien to this world’s kingdom. How in my kingdom where the first are last and the least are the greatest, how in this kingdom every hearer-of-my-word, every disciple, everyone who is trained will be as his teacher?’ ”

Friends in Christ, there is promise for you there—promise that has nothing at all to do with looking inside yourself to try and discover your abilities and gifts, your spark, your potential. Promise from God never has to do with that. But promise only and absolutely in looking to the teacher into whose image you are being molded, crafted, prepared, trained, re-created.

There’s promise there for you, Candidate Palmer, and there’s promise there for me, and there’s promise there for all who would come humbly to the Lord’s Word and there hear there not simply information to be dumped into an empty vessel like my brain until it’s had its fill, and so toddle off to get refueled, or recharged with the next fad, quick idea, energy boost, or spiritual pep talk every Wednesday and Sunday. Teaching in the mouth of the master is not filling a blank drive with a data dump or a drained battery with a spiritual boost. Nope.

Teaching in the mouth of the master is formation of a person who’s met the Lord and was never the same again. Like the woman who stared agog at Him by Jacob’s well and heard Him tell her everything she ever did—changed forever. Like the man who had demons cast out of him and now sat in his right mind, with his hair combed and his clothes clean, pleading to go with Jesus after he’d sent pigs into the lake of the Gerasenes—never the same again. Like the woman of Bethany who sat at the feet of Master while her sister did the dishes, choosing the one good thing that would not be taken from her. Teaching in the mouth of the master is *formation* of a person who’s met the Lord and will never be the same.

Formation. That’s what we call it. Catechesis. Spiritual formation. Seminary. Pastoral formation. Frankly, I see it and live it all the time as a teacher whose call is also not to data dump ancient history into undergrads in Irvine, but rather to raise up another semester’s worth of wise, honorable and cultivated citizens. I do care. I care about whether they know that Napoleon and

Caesar didn't hang out in the same taverns on the same nights. And I care whether they can distinguish a genitive absolute and a gerund-gerundive switcheroo when I'm teaching the ancient languages.

But I care so much more about whether they get the difference between neutral, meaningless and ephemeral values and timeless objective virtues, whether they're good at being people, whether they're good at being citizens in the US, in California or whatever their state of residence happens to be. And especially citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Formation. That's what the teacher is about. And that's what the Teacher with a capital T is about.

How much more the teacher who teaches the teachers, the preacher who preaches the preachers, the master who sits and teaches on the plain in Luke Chapter 6? He's not giving disciples, catechumens, these hearers of the Word, he's not giving them *information* as much as he's giving them *formation*. SHAPING them. Fitting them. Molding them. Everyone who loves like the teacher, everyone who lives like the teacher, he WILL BE as the teacher. There's a promise. You can count on it.

Candidate Palmer, and all friends in Christ, there's a way we can screw this up. We can read this Word from the Lord as a simple instruction to just try and be like Jesus, do-gooding our way through life under the mistaken assumption that God honors contractual, transactional religion, and that we'd better take out those What Would Jesus Do bracelets and plod through another finite number of pious tasks, ticking off one after the other until "our work" on earth is done and we can enjoy a heavenly retirement. This way of receiving the gift of the Lord's Word empties the gift of what the Lord would give. The Lord has a gift to give. He would give formation in this gift, which is good news to those who would receive it. It may not look like good news at first, but let's take a closer look at this gift.

After all, consider the teacher, the goal, the promise: "You will be as the teacher." Well, what does this teacher look like? A dusty-footed itinerant preacher, a young upstart rabbi of 30 years old, a man whose closest friends knew more about fishing than about theology. A man who eschewed the finest parties and social circles, in favor of poor weddings, dinners with tax collectors, prostitutes, sinners, and (get this!) even a lawyer or two. A man who associated with – and bodily touched! – sick people, dead people, and people between dead and sick, the leprous and lifeless and the low.

If this is a leadership model for mentors and prodigies, Jesus obviously never read “21 habits for purpose-filled evangelism.” But that’s because in his kingdom, that stuff—and everything like it, without exception—is a load of lies and garbage. This is a harder teaching, not the lifestyle of the rich and famous, but a darker road, the road to peace with God, the way of the cross.

The theologian of glory calls good evil and evil good, but the theologian of the cross calls the thing what it is. And this is what it is. Fingernails dirty, body exhausted, life poured out for the least and the last and the lost, those who are the greatest and the first and the found in God’s kingdom. Is this, could this be, is it really *good* news?

This is no good news unless it’s FOR YOU. And it’s FOR YOU, because Jesus is that Lord who walked that way on your behalf. For you, dear friend in Christ, this Lord came – to your poor house, to your sickness, to your sorrow, to your poor excuses, to you in your sin and loss and misunderstanding. For you, our Lord Jesus became the one who was hungry and thirsty. For you, our Lord Jesus became the one who was poor in spirit and meek. For you, the master became the servant of all.

For you, our Lord Jesus chose to embrace sorrow. Not to make you happy, but to make you His. Not to make you successful, but to make you real. Not to make you brilliant and smart and good looking, but to make you wise unto salvation that never ends.

For you, our Lord Jesus laid down his life in the darkest hour, and for you He took it up again in glorious triumph, in history—for you.

Everyone who is well trained will be as his teacher.²

How do we know this teacher? He’s the one who was dead and is alive.

Candidate Palmer, you will be as your teacher—dead and alive and not just on the last day. But always, carrying about you the death of Christ in your body as you serve his death and life to those in your care. Dear friend in Christ, you will be dead and alive as you are catechized by the master, well-trained, supplied with the good gifts that Christ offers in his death and life.

Candidate Palmer, you’ve heard enough words in these last many years about pastoral formation, and you’ll likely hear many more. I know that, in just these last months, you’ve gotten some advice, some good intentions, some more directly intentionally shaping, and some laissez-faire allowance to grow into the kind of pastor you’re going to become.

² Luke 6:40b

You'll take your vows and you'll hear soberly the insistence on remaining faithful. In Lutheran parlance, we call this the preaching of the Law. Yes? Hmm. And let me tell you, as a pastor and professor, it's all I can do to rein my own passion and advice to admonish you this way too. All for wanting you to be the man of God that I'd want to have bury my grandmother. The man of God that I'd want to have confirm my children. The man of God that I'd want to kill me and make me alive again every time you speak the Word of God.

But you don't need to hear any more law imported into a text that already has a lot of imperatives:

*Judge not, lest you be judged. Forgive and it will be forgiven to you.*³

Hmmm. In the way of God's topsy-turvy kingdom these are the ways that Christ lives in you in His Life.

But I do call you in our last moment now, and with you, all of those whom you will serve in Christ, including me. Individually – dear friend in Christ, hear this word: *Everyone brought up in Christ WILL BE as Christ is, was, and ever shall be* – this word is for you. As you hear it, you will be like Christ. As you believe it, you will be like Christ. As you live it, follow it, do it, obey it, as you hear Christ's word and trust in Him, you will be as Christ. Believe it.

... But OK, maybe just this one piece: Today happens to be the feast day as we commemorate St. Irenaeus. We were chatting a little earlier about old, dead church fathers who still live on. And you know that Irenaeus was a great teacher of the church. But he had a teacher, too. His name was Polycarp. And he had a teacher, too, and his name was John. And John knew that he was loved. He called himself the disciple whom Jesus loved, because John had a teacher, too. His teacher was Christ.

Irenaeus in the fourth generation, his father was Polycarp. He was the grand student of John and that makes him the great grand student of Jesus. When I was in seminary, I was the student of Norman Nagel, Ron Feuerhahn, Robert Kolb, Paul Schrieber. That made me the grand student of men like Horace Hummel, Herman Sauce, the great-great grand student of men like Wynecken, Walther. The great-great-great grand student, as you are, of men like Luther, Melanthen, Kemnantz, Andre, Gerhardt, Hus, whose execution we celebrate this year—600 years—and others. All the way back to preacher Mark, preacher Mathew, preacher John, and tonight, preacher Luke.

³ Luke 6:37

Candidate Palmer, dear friend in Christ,

*All who have been well-trained will be as their teacher.*⁴

Not like just Mathew, Mark, Luke, John and Paul, but like their teacher as well, and for all of us, we will be as the teacher, Our Lord, the Master, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The peace of God that passes all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Trinity IV (LSB Historic One-Year Series)
Genesis 50:15-21; Romans 8:18-23; Luke 6:36-42
June 28, 2015

Rev. Dr. Clinton J. Armstrong
guest preacher, faculty member at Concordia University, Irvine, CA

Ordination and installation of Rev. Candidate Joshua S. Palmer (CSL, 2015)

Catalina Lutheran Church (Tucson, AZ)
Pastor Michael A. Morehouse, Senior Pastor, presiding
(for English District Pres/Bishop Stechholz)

⁴ Luke 6:40b