



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

www.goodshepherdwi.org

Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost

October 4, 2015

“Baptizing and Teaching”

(Mark 28:19)

Rev. David K. Groth

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you Mark 28:19

COLLECT: Merciful Father, Your patience and loving – kindness toward us have no end. Grant that by Your Holy Spirit we may always think and do those things that are pleasing in Your sight; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, Now and forever. **Amen**

So a disciple of Jesus is made by doing two things: baptizing them and teaching them. The baptism side of the equation is quick, easy, fun even. Such great gifts God gives us without cost! A few handfuls of water, a few words, and if they're hollering you try to keep their mouths away from the lavalier mic. Done!

But then there's the other side of the equation. He said make disciples by "baptizing them and *teaching* them." There's the rub. Teaching is hard work, and we never get to say "Done!" But it's part of the mandate. Baptism by itself is not magic. Sometimes we Lutherans give the impression that all you have to do is get wet and you're covered. But in reality if there's no faith, there is only condemnation because unbelief has emptied out the gifts given in baptism. So baptism needs to be followed up with careful instruction in God's Word, which itself creates and sustains faith.

Now, there's no sense in procrastinating with the baptism or the teaching. When you get a puppy, you don't wait until they're three years old before teaching them how to walk on the leash. Similarly, a child should never remember his first time in church. Procrastination on the teaching side of the equation only makes things more difficult.

So at Good Shepherd, we start right away. Not too long after the baptism, someone from Good Shepherd will stop by the house with some devotional materials and even simple Christian books to start reading to the child. Then follows Little Lambs on Sundays, and pre-school during the week. It continues with Sunday School on the weekends and VBS in the summers. 6th, 7th, and 8th grade confirmation on Wednesdays, small group home Bible Studies, Adult Bible Studies, Men's Bible Study, a Women's Bible Study.

Remember, we never get to say “Done!” with Christian education. So the baptism part is easy. Just be sure to get the name right and not drop the kid. The teaching part, however, that’s where the blood, sweat and tears and expense comes into play.

I should tell you one of the goals of Ignited is to invest in our youth groups, so that the instruction can continue seamlessly through middle school and high school. We know this is a need at Good Shepherd. We want to identify and employ on a part-time basis someone who’s really gifted in engaging youth in the study of God’s Word, while also engaging their families.

In any event, years ago Good Shepherd decided the best way for us to follow up on this mandate to teach the faith is through the ministry and mission of a Lutheran School. I’d like to focus on that for a bit. First, what a difference it makes in the lives of our member families. This church becomes a real home for those kids. They spend more time here than they do any other outside their own homes. And it’s a good place to be, a loving, caring, safe place to be. They know every square inch of it, and feel very comfortable in it. They own it, and I’m glad they do. Many of them will become the future leaders of their churches. But would argue our school is making an even greater difference in the lives of non-member children.

Did you hear what that kindergartner said to Karen Schempf, her teacher? She came to us from a family that had no connection whatsoever with this or any other church. After some time in our school, she told Mrs. Schempf, “I don’t think I would ever know *anything* about Jesus if you hadn’t told me about him.” **That’s why we have a Lutheran school!** That’s what makes it all worthwhile. That’s why we must continue to operate this school, and that’s why we must support our faculty. Realize, this is part of your ministry. You are, in part, responsible for that little girl’s knowledge of Jesus Christ. Every year we get more kids enrolled who have had no former exposure to the Word of God. They’re exposed to all kinds of other crud, but not

to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Some time ago Mrs. Gromowski was teaching the story of Noah's ark to the second grade class. Surprisingly, one of the kids in that class had never heard of it before. It surprised her, scandalized her, but also intrigued her. She had all kinds of follow-up questions. But remember, Noah's Ark is the stuff you and I grew up on, right? It was in the children's books in the doctor's office. It was told again and again in VBS. It was in the crafty wall hangings. Bill Cosby retold it in a humorous way. It was the most popularized story in the Bible.

But this is not the Wisconsin you and I grew up in. The landscape has changed. The fastest growing religious segment of our society are those who are called the "Nones", because when asked what their religious affiliation is they check the box next to the word "None". They tend to be of child bearing age, so some of those Nones are enrolling their kids in our school.

Now, let's get real. They're not coming here because all of a sudden they want their kids in an LCMS school to learn the six chief parts of the catechism. Not at all. They're choosing Good Shepherd because they've heard good things about the faculty, or they're impressed with how our kids score on the standardized tests, or because we're making it affordable for them. They're choosing Good Shepherd because they like the small class sizes, and the bright, clean, secure facilities. They're okay with basic Christian values being taught their kids, like sharing and humility. But they're not really interested in the details of Christian education: infant baptism, Lord's Supper, Paul's missionary journeys. They'll tolerate it, so long as we provide all those other things . . . a caring faculty, academic excellence, plenty of computers, etc.

And you know what? That's a trade-off I for one am willing to make . . . so that we can teach Christ to their kids, even if we don't anticipate seeing many of their parents worship. The parents . . . they've made and are making their choices and it's tough to gain access to them. But thanks be

to God, they're leading their kids by the hand right into the loving instruction of our wonderful faculty. And I promise, those kids hear the Gospel here every day. And in Isaiah, **God** promises, my word "shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Is. 55:11). "Faith comes by hearing" echoes Paul, "and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

The days of the parochial school (and by that I mean a school intended for and composed of members of the church), those days are over, and in some ways, that's a big loss, right? On the other hand we have entered a new era where the Lutheran school is on the front edge of mission work. What a huge opportunity God has given us!

Who are our school families? We've talked about the members and the "Nones." But we also have many young couples in Watertown, living in a gritty apartments, often not married. They have a young child or two and no money, a job but not a career, no relationship with the Lord or his church. There may be a heroin addiction. We have kids in our school from homes like that and we wrap them up in the love of Christ and make a real difference in a child's life.

There's a growing population of immigrants in Watertown . . . hard working men and women just trying to get established, sending down roots, working multiple jobs, very family oriented, wonderful kids! They come to us specifically looking for a Christian education, and I am so pleased (and I know our teachers are too), that we can provide that for them. We also wrap those kids up in the love of Christ and make a real difference in their lives.

As you might have guessed, many of our school families do not have the financial means to pay full tuition. Because of your generosity and our school endowment, we're able to reach out to these kids with the love of Christ. But financially, it's only going to get harder for Lutheran schools in the years to come. We see the impact already at Good Shepherd. Every year we're paying our faculty less and less of what the district suggests we pay them for this

area. Last I heard we were down to about 75% of district scale, which even if we paid 100% of district scale is still significantly lower than what a public school teacher earns. If we change nothing, and just keep doing what we're doing . . . we're done, finished with this mission and ministry called Good Shepherd Lutheran School. It would only be a matter of time.

If, however, we believe that the Christian education of children is important . . . if we agree that the Lutheran School is one of the best ways to follow up baptism with instruction, and if we want to reach out to more and more children who have no former exposure to the Gospel, we must be willing to give generously. I know what this school did for my children, and I know what it's doing for the children of others. Supporting this school is something I want to be a part of through this Ignited initiative.

A lot of what we learn as kids is soon forgotten, but our kids at Good Shepherd will never forget the message of the Gospel. They may turn their backs on it for a time, but they will not forget it. And they will not forget the faith and love of their teachers.

Growing up in Delavan, my home congregation didn't yet have a Lutheran school. We had a pastor, and a man we called Teacher Theiss. He was a teacher by training and an excellent organist, but I mostly remember him for who he was, not what he taught me. He was everybody's grandpa, so kind and gentle. My parents asked him if he would give us piano lessons after school, all three of us one after another. I remember even when we didn't practice he'd still give us a German chocolate. So in terms of the piano, it was a spectacular failure and he had little impact. But I do remember him for who he was . . . a Christian teacher whom God used to reflect his love onto us. The sun shone down on Teacher Theiss and it was as if he were a big mirror who just bounced that light right on to us.

Our teachers here will have a lasting impact not just by what they teach but by who they are. By the way, that's why I'm so glad we have plenty public school teachers who

are members of our congregation, because their Christian faith, their Christian witness doesn't go unnoticed. *Wherever* Christians teach they have a lasting impact, not just by what they say, but by who they are. Every child should have a caring adult in their lives. Even in Watertown, it's not always the parent. It may be a neighbor. Often times it's a teacher.

Here's a quote from Luther: "A diligent and pious teacher who faithfully trains and teaches [children] can never be sufficiently repaid. Yet this work is shamefully despised among us as if it were nothing whatever. Still we want to be Christians. If I myself could or should be obliged to leave the office of the ministry, I would rather have the office of schoolmaster or teacher than any other. For I know that next to the ministry this work is the most useful, the greatest, and the best. In fact, I do not know which of the two is the better; for it is hard to tame old dogs and to make old rascals pious. Yet this is the task at which the preacher must labor and often labor in vain. [Don't I know it!] But one can bend and train young trees more easily even if some of them break in the process. My friend, let it be considered one of the greatest virtues on earth faithfully to train the children of other people. Very few people – in fact, practically none – do this for their own children" (*What Luther Says*, p. 1338f).

So one last time, a disciple of Jesus Christ is made by baptism and instruction. The baptism part is easy, quick, and without cost. Any Christian can do it if they have to, because it's the Lord who does the work of baptism. The instruction part, however, must be done very carefully. It requires education, wisdom, faith, patience, and a deep love for God and his children. And it requires the best of our resources. Amen.

