

The Tablets of Our Hearts

His name was Jim Petric. He was my Jr High youth leader at McCabe United Methodist Church in Bismarck, ND. I don't really remember too much about him during those years. I don't remember the lessons he taught. It was Junior High...it is a blur. But when I was attending the local Junior College, Mr. P asked me to help with him with his ministry. For two years I helped with the weekly meetings and retreats. I don't remember one lesson we taught. What I remember was that it was the first time an adult treated me as an equal. My opinion mattered; my ideas were taken seriously and implemented. I felt empowered and my self-confidence soared. I don't remember anything he said, but I remember everything he taught me: he wrote it on my heart.

This week we studied Chapter 22 in Brian McLaren's book, *We Make the Road by Walking*. It is entitled, Jesus the Teacher. McLaren expresses the many styles of teaching that Jesus employed to get his message across. He talks about six of them:

- 1) Jesus taught through lectures
- 2) He used impromptu objects lessons while travelling or dining with his disciples.
- 3) He used retreats and more private instruction for his disciples.
- 4) He taught through parables
- 5) He taught through what McLaren calls public demonstrations
- 6) He taught through signs and wonders

Let's examine these a bit. Jesus used different styles of teaching because he understood there are different ways of learning. Today I just want to focus on two of them; explicit learning and implicit learning. By explicit instruction, we mean teaching where the instructor clearly outlines what the learning goals are for the student, and offers clear, unambiguous explanations of the skills and information structures they are presenting. Implicit learning is the acquisition of knowledge that takes place primarily outside of conscious attempts to learn it. It takes place normally in the absence of knowing that it was learned, and how it was acquired. I believe that implicit learning is the most powerful and the way that things most often get written on our hearts.

1) Jesus taught through lectures

- This was explicit teaching: examples of this are the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 or his lectures in the synagogues. Hasn't it been fun to try to understand what he was trying to say? Don't you marvel at how a certain phrase will jump out at you with new importance and meaning? Explicit learning, exercising our thinking skills is a powerful way for the Spirit to reach us!

2) He used impromptu objects lessons while travelling or dining with his disciples.

- We humans sure love metaphors! That's why Children's Moments are so fun for adults! I think that object lessons combine explicit and implicit learning. How often, during a children's sermon are you trying to figuring out my point before I state it...how often are you still trying to figure out my point even after I've stated it? Jesus made learning fun.

3) He used retreats and more private instruction for his disciples.

- We had an overnight with the youth this last week. I love overnights. There is time for going deeper – deeper into topics, deeper into relationships, deeper into fatigue. I cherish the time I get with our Youth. I imagine Jesus felt the same way about those alone times with his disciples. He could go deeper.

4) He taught through parables,

- Stories touch us the way object lessons do - they give his listeners “Aha” moments as they figured out the point he was trying to make. Stories are so much easier to remember. They engage our imaginations, create imagery and often elicit an emotional response. The lessons are most often implied as our characters face the consequences of their choices. Though if the story hits too close to home... denial creates confusion. But those who are open to repentance and growth have “ears to hear.”

5) He taught through what McLaren calls public demonstrations

- He cites Palm Sunday, as the crowds following Jesus into Jerusalem grew in number and volume.
- This has been a week of public demonstrations for our nation. The streets of Washington have been filled. First with those who came to show their support for our new president. They cheered, hearts filled with hope and pride for America. I appreciated President Trump’s words: "Because this moment is your moment. It belongs to you. It belongs to everyone gathered here today and everyone watching all across America. This is your day. This is your celebration. And this, the United States of America, is your country. What truly matters is not which party controls our government but whether our government is controlled by the people."
- It was prophetic because the next day the streets were filled with people exercising their right to do just that. When I first heard about the Woman’s March, I wondered about their desired outcome. So I went to their Webpage, www.womensmarch.com. Their initial purpose was to respond to the issues that arose from the election. But I think it has grown into something more. Their comprehensive mission statement included these phrases:

“In the spirit of democracy and honoring the champions of human rights, dignity, and justice who have come before us, we join in diversity to show our presence in numbers too great to ignore. The Women’s March on Washington will send a bold message to the world that women's rights are human rights. We stand together, recognizing that defending the most marginalized among us is defending all of us. We call on all defenders of human rights to join us. This march is the first step towards unifying our communities, grounded in new relationships, to create change from the grassroots level up. We work peacefully while recognizing there is no true peace without justice and equity for all.

Of course, there is much more specific to Women’s rights. And they talk about how this movement expanded their own focus to include all of us who seek liberty and justice for all. I suggest you go to womensmarch.com to read the full statement.

Jesus was not beloved by those who used their wealth and power for their own selfish gain. What we now celebrate as Palm Sunday was received by some as negatively as some have felt about modern day marches and demonstrations. And so how do we as Christians respond? I can only answer with an object lesson. (Puppet) My sister, Julia Peltz, wrote a single line about a break-up with her boyfriend. Some of you have heard it before:
“I would let you go, but it’s hard to cut strings when you don’t know what holds you up.”

I have many strings that I believe hold me up. But when it comes to fundamental decisions, I pick up my imaginary scissors, and I start deciding which strings hold me up. I can cut my pride string...painfully. I can cut my political-leanings string. I can even cut my love for chocolate string...maybe. But I cannot cut my love for God string. I cannot cut my commitment to “thy kingdom come, thy will be done.”

In Chapter 22, McLaren offers the thought that the heart of Jesus message is that God’s kingdom, eternal life starts now. We have the choice to live God’s way of love now. And once we have made that choice, we have the responsibility to challenge anything within ourselves and within our world that blocks it. Now, if we could all just agree on what the kingdom of God looks like...we’d have it made! But we don’t. We disagree about the details. I get that. But can we agree to hold sacred the walls of one another’s hearts?

And here is where explicit and implicit communication comes back into play. We are fortunate to live in a country where freedom of expression is valued. It is good to discuss differing viewpoints. The wise ones will listen and grow from it. If you share your views and opinions with me, I will explicitly learn something. If you do so with love, respect and openness to my views, you will implicitly write on my heart that you value me and the Spirit of God within me. But if I very explicitly share my views with you with contempt, ridicule and disrespect, I will implicitly write on your heart that I devalue you and the Spirit of God that is within you.

In the days ahead, we who follow Christ hold in our hands the hearts of everyone we encounter...in our home, in public, on Facebook and Twitter. It’s not easy to balance the responsibility of love and justice. But let’s hold each other up.

I get to preach next week as well. I have a few more thoughts on this chapter that blend nicely with Chapter 23, Jesus and the multitudes.

Jim Petric was my Jr High Youth Leader. He’s home with God now. But I will forever cherish the love, respect and empowerment that he wrote on the tablet of my heart.