

2-17-08 Following the Rabbi - Pastor Draeger 10AM

Luke 6:40

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus, Amen.

Would you say that it's still true that Jesus is probably the most influential person who has ever lived on the face of the planet? Clearly more books are written about Him. The number 1 best seller for years and years and years has been the Bible - the Book that talks about Him. In fact His name is so influential that we hear it used in all kinds of situations, in all kinds of places. For instance, when was the last time you heard a golfer, a tennis player, or someone who made a mistake utter such as on this president's day, "Oh George Washington!" or "Abraham Lincoln", or "George Bush", or any such names? Have you ever heard anybody do that when they have done something that didn't work out for them? No, they're more likely to say what? They take the name of the Lord Jesus Christ as the expletive. Clearly His name is above every other name. It is so well known that it's used for worship and also for expletives. No other name is used in that way. Gandhi's name isn't used that way. Einstein's name isn't used that way. No one's name is used that way except the name of our Lord. His name clearly has made a difference.

And so I thought on this week-end as we are seeking to master life in this series, that we would think about this person -- Jesus as Rabbi. Born 20 centuries ago to impoverished people, a young Jewish couple. A few hundred people actually met Him personally, spent time with Him personally. Others, several thousand perhaps, heard Him speak as in the 5000 for whom He provided bread miraculously. And yet He was a man who never wrote a book. He never ran for political office. He never owned a home. In fact He said the Son of man has no where to lay His head. He didn't travel outside of His own region, so He was no world traveler. And yet to this day His name has been associated with the founding of universities and hospitals and medical centers. There are more songs written about Him than anyone else. People sacrifice significant amounts of their finances for Him. Some folks are willing to travel half way around the world to walk in the places where He has walked, and some of us are among those. More people have claimed that Jesus Christ has changed their lives than any other single human being. Perhaps it's good therefore, that we focus today on this theme, 'Mastering Life, Follow the Rabbi.'

In fact it's a good thing to follow this Rabbi; the words of our text for today suggest that. Would you like to read that with me? "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" Luke 6:40). In the days of Jesus, a child about age 6 years old would begin to study the Torah, and you remember what the Torah is, it is the first 5 books of the Bible -- that would be Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. And as you recall in those days they did not have copy machines. They didn't have the

printing press. All they had were scrolls. And they didn't have chapters and verses. So if they were going to find something you had to know Torah well. At age 6 boys would begin to memorize the Torah from Genesis to Deuteronomy. Have you got that memorized yet? Not yet -- you're in good company in this room and in the previous service. None of us have memorized the first 5 books of the Bible, can you imagine doing that? Do you remember back in the days of confirmation when pastor asked you to memorize some Bible verses and maybe some of Luther's catechism, and you grumbled and complained that you had to memorize that little, piddly amount? Anybody remember doing that, grumbling about your memory work?

Just to give you an idea, here is the first 5 books of the Old Testament. That's it; they memorized that beginning at age 6. And they would learn its content and they'd be asked questions about it. And then by age 10 they would grow further, if they had an infinity for the Torah they would be able to go into something called bet talmud, which was the house of learning. And so they would learn from the house of learning more about the scriptures. If they hadn't done so well with their learning of the book of the Torah, they would go back home and learn a trade. But for those who had more ability with the Torah, memorizing it, they would go into the next creative learning from the age 7 through 10. They would then begin to study the rest of the scripture, and so now they would memorize everything up through Malachi. Now how many of you are feeling sorry for yourself that you had to memorize stuff from the catechism? I don't suspect too many of us have memorized the full Old Testament, but they would be doing that as their next assignment. Morgan, do you have Luther's explanation ready to go for confirmation yet, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> articles? Not quite yet, did I ask too much of you to memorize those things? No, especially since I didn't ask you to memorize the whole thing, did I? OK, so you'll have that ready for Confirmation Sunday right? I just wanted to motivate you a little bit. I want you to know how nice I am. Think about that, that's a lot of pages guys.

Once you have come to the age 14 like some of our confirmands, the best of the best would be invited to go to bet midrash, that is the house of study. They were admitted because they knew the whole Old Testament from memory, and now they would affiliate with a rabbi whom they admire, and become his disciple. The student is not above his rabbi, if you can read that in there, his teacher. But everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher. And he would have to apply for this and answer tough questions. It would be like applying to go to Stanford or Harvard, and the rabbi would ask tough admission questions. And if you were accepted, now you would sit at the feet of the rabbi. You made application and you were clearly the best of the best of the best.

For Jesus on the other hand, He used a slightly different strategy. What was the occupation of a good chunk of His disciples? Fishermen, another one was a tax collector; we know that much about five out of the twelve disciples. What does that tell you? They probably dropped out at age 10, went back home and learned

a trade -- fishing, tax collecting. In other words, these were not the brightest and the best. And in fact His twelve disciples didn't come and apply for a mentorship under Him. Rather He would be walking along the lake, and He would see them cleaning the nets, and He would say, "Come and follow Me," that was so un-rabbi-like. He is clearly establishing a different kind of rabbinic ministry with these disciples. He is clearly saying, "It's not because of you, it's because of *Me* that you are my disciple." That sounds an awful lot like the Gospel doesn't it? That we don't sign up for heaven. We are called by God, and we even confess that. And for those of you memorizing the 3<sup>rd</sup> article of the Apostle's Creed, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him, **BUT** the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts and sanctifies and keeps me in the one true faith, just as He calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth. Does that sound familiar to any of you? It better. Luther's explanation, 3<sup>rd</sup> Article, saying it's not about me -- it's about whom? It's about the Rabbi. He calls me by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus picked His twelve, and He didn't pick the brightest and the best. The focus wasn't on how good they were but on how gracious He is. And that's the way it was with this Rabbi and His ministry. It was always a ministry of grace, not of qualification. You know that's really the way it still is. When you think about the ministry of grace, when Jesus is with the woman at the well in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's Gospel. And here's a woman who was living with a man who was not her husband, and this wasn't the first time. And what does He do? He recruits her, if you will, and engages her by asking her, as a Rabbi would, many questions. And she follows Him, and invites her friends to come and hear Him speak on the next day.

And then there was this woman who was caught in adultery and Jesus didn't condemn her, but instead He said what when those wanted to throw stones at her to kill her because that's what you did in those days; the penalty. "Let him with no sin cast the first stone." No one dared to and to her he said, "Go and sin no more" -- essentially, "Your sin is forgiven."

He was a master at changing things, not just changing water to wine, but changing things. Or think of how He was with lepers, whom He would touch to cleanse. Unheard of because you make yourself ceremonially unclean by touching a leper. He was saying that it was about grace, it's a different way to be.

Or you think about a guy like Peter -- Peter the impetuous disciple. Always speaking for Jesus or acting for Jesus in some way. Always needing to experience His grace. And even Peter had to learn some things. For instance, when others were following Jesus and it got a little tough because of what He was teaching them, and how He was with them, we have in John chapter 6 these words. "From this time many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed

Him.” They didn’t want to go, it was too tough. And what was too tough, I suspect, was His grace. And His call of discipleship was too tough.

And so Jesus turned to the twelve and He asked, “Do you want to leave too?” And Simon Peter blurts out; answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; we have come to believe and to know that You are the Holy One of God.” To whom shall we go? He’s saying, “Lord, there’s no where else -- we’re going to hang with You; I’m going to be with You to the end.” Indeed he would say that later. And shortly after he said that again, you remembered what happened? Out in the courtyard Jesus is being taken off for trial, and Peter says “I don’t know the man.” Not once, not just twice, but three times. And yet after the resurrection it was Jesus who comes to Peter and says, “Peter, do you love Me.?” Not just once, not just twice, but three times, and each time telling him, “Feed my sheep, tend my flock.” What is that in evidence of? That’s grace at its best.

No wonder Peter would write later in his life a couple of letters; we call them 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter. And in one of them he would say, “Cast all your anxieties upon Him because He cares for you.” This Peter got grace, and he communicated that grace. And John, the beloved disciple would also write in such a grace filled way, what we call 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> John, in the theme of love – and love is a verb. Which is grace driven, ‘we love because He first loved us.’

Do you kind of get the picture here that a student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be what? Like the teacher. Not because we’re trying to live up to his standards, not because we should do it because it’s commanded of us, not because we have to, but because we have been changed. And isn’t it true that if you’re with someone long enough? You become very much like that someone. I can remember as a student in college or at seminary, being there with certain professors that I admired, and I can hear my voice, my vocabulary changing so that I sounded a lot more like the professor that I admired. Have any of you had that experience? It’s almost like if you live in the south long enough you sound southern. Even though your birth certificate is any place but the south, you begin to say “y’all” really well, and you develop a hankering for grits. You don’t just like them; you develop a hankering, and for fried chicken. You pick up a vocabulary because of the environment you’re in. And I’d like to suggest to you that that’s exactly what Jesus is saying here to His disciples, “A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher,” because he’s been in that environment. And a rabbi had his students fully around him and it was an environment. It was a very close and intimate relationship, and so those people would become like the rabbi.

And I’d like to suggest to you people, that if you’re going to master life, it’s important to be like the Rabbi. To have His heart of compassion, to have His understanding of grace. To understand that you don’t deserve anything, it’s all because of God’s grace you have anything. And that you are enormously

blessed and gifted because of His grace to you. And that you learn from Him to manage anxiety, because Peter, the most anxious person in the scriptures that I can find, learned about casting anxiety upon the Lord because He cares for us. He knew how much the Lord cared because he was so forgiven by that Lord. And John knew how to love because he saw love enfleshed in Jesus, and he sat next to Him and spent special time with Him like Peter did apart, like on the Mount of Transfiguration or like the Garden of Gethsemane.

And I'd like to suggest to you that (I need to pay attention as well) if we're going to master life following the Rabbi, we spend time with Him -- just like the students of a rabbi would. Lots of time with Him. And that's why I'd encourage you not to read all that Old Testament stuff this Lenten Season, but you pick up that guide through the New Testament and read through it during Lent and Easter just so you can get those words into you. I'm not asking you guys to memorize it -- just read through it and ask the good Lutheran question as you read through it: "What does this mean?" do that so that you personalize it and take out of it, which by the way if you do that, you probably will not be able to read through the New Testament in the prescribed period of time, because you're going to stop and ask what does this mean, and you're going to ponder it and it's going to come into you, and you're going to absorb it. Do that and it's going to become a part of the fabric of your living so that you live more and more like the Master, the Rabbi rather than like the old sinful nature that you acquired by birth.

And if you don't get all the way through during the Lenten and Easter Season, I want you to have grace for yourself. "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but the world through Him might be saved." If He's not condemning you, why should you? You're going to live like the Rabbi without condemnation, without a lot of guilt. You're going to go at it, say alright, here's the deal. If it takes you until Christmas to read through the New Testament because you stopped and said "what does this mean," that's cool, because what you're doing is you are getting close to the Rabbi and to the Rabbi's heart, and to the Rabbi's spirit, the Holy Spirit who comes through the word of the Gospel.

This Rabbi comes to you today in bread and wine to forgive you for how you've lived this past week -- ways that have been not happy for Him or for you. Where you have broken His will for your life, He wants to forgive that and He does forgive that, and He brings that forgiveness to you in bread and wine, so that you can not just hear the Master, the Rabbi, you can taste His forgiveness through the bread and wine and body and blood that we receive this morning. Then you can go out of here turned around, or turned back if you will. As you've been hearing me say lately to repent is to turn back, like the prodigal son turned back home. So we turn back to God by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that we're not going away from Him but we're going toward Him because we want to be near the Rabbi. We want to sit at His feet because a student is not above the teacher. We don't ever outgrow Him, but we want to be fully trained so that we are like Him so when people encounter us they encounter Jesus. And why shouldn't

they, He comes to us in the waters of baptism. He comes to us in the word of the Gospel, He comes to us in bread and wine. So if he comes to us this way, and as Emanuel God with us, then truly people ought to see Him in us, and when they do, they get excited and they want to know more, and then we're prepared to say, "let me introduce you to the Rabbi." You don't have to apply. He comes to you in His grace, His unconditional love. And what I have you can have because I'm just a fisherman too.

May God bless you and me this week so that we might master life because we've sat at the feet of the Master, the Master Rabbi of all time. Amen.