

## **“Teaching Them”**

### **Matthew 28:16-20**

At the end of the gospel of Matthew, just before his ascension, Jesus gives us the “great commission.” <sup>18</sup>*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>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, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

This is my son. This is my daughter. In Christian love, we present our sons and daughters for baptism. We promise we will faithfully bring them to the services of God’s house, and teach them the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, the Ten Commandments. As our sons and daughters grow in years, we vow we will place in their hands the Holy Scriptures, and we fulfill that vow this morning, and provide for their instruction in the Christian faith, that, living in the covenant of their Baptism and in communion with the church, they may lead godly lives until the day of Jesus Christ. We promise as parents, sponsors, and as a whole congregation to raise and nurture our sons and daughters in the Christian faith.

This is my son. This is my daughter. Have we kept the promises we made to raise and nurture them in the Christian faith? As parents, sponsors, and as a whole congregation, are we fulfilling the baptismal covenant we enter into every time a child is baptized into our family of faith? We have wonderful Sunday School teachers and now we even have a youth director.

Isn't it enough to drop our children off at Sunday School when they get old enough and let the Sunday School teachers and Laura do their jobs? I don't know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments, so let's leave it up to the experts.

Teaching them. Two paragraphs from a sermon preached by Martin Luther in Germany in the year 1519.

“Nothing can more easily earn hell for a man than the improper training of his own children; and parents can perform no more damaging bit of work than to neglect their offspring, to let them curse, swear, learn indecent words and songs, and permit them to live as they please. Some parents themselves incite their children to such sins by giving them superfluous finery and temporal advancement so that they may but please the world, rise high and become wealthy. They are constantly concerned to provide sufficiently for the body rather than for the soul. Nor does Christendom suffer a greater harm from anything, than it does from the neglect of children, as was done in times of yore.

Therefore it is highly necessary that every married person regard the soul of his child with greater care and concern than the flesh which has come from him, that he consider the child nothing less than the precious, eternal treasure, entrusted to his protection by God so that the devil, the world, and the flesh may not steal and destroy it. For the child will be required from the parent at death and on Judgment Day in a very strict reckoning. For whence, think you, will come the weeping and mourning of those who will cry: “Blessed are the barren and the womb that never bore and the paps which never gave suck”? (Luke 23:29). Undoubtedly from those who have failed to bring their children back to God, who had entrusted them to their care.” Martin Luther preaching in 1519.

Teaching them. Jesus Christ is among us. God is here in the faces of our children. Do we take the time to see him, to feel him, to listen to him? Many of us say we lack the time. We have no time for prayer, for silence and reflection with our children. It just doesn't fit into our schedules. We are always in a hurry and that's exactly what our children observe. How will they know that prayer and the reading of Bible stories requires time when we provide no model for them? Should not these things we promised to do at their baptism be an important part of family life?

We must somehow learn to slow down and let our children know there is time for prayer, for singing "Jesus Loves Me", time for our spiritual life. What do we do to feed ourselves spiritually and when do we include our children?

We cannot expect our children's spiritual life to develop without any input from us, without "food for thought", without some spiritual experiences. Children must have models and experiences so they can build up over time their own story of relationship with God. Without our modeling, children may not be inspired to give expression to their own spiritual lives.

Some ideas. Our children's spiritual life can be greatly enhanced by preparing a special place in their bedroom where they can establish a relationship with the mystery of God. It can be the top of a dresser, a bookshelf, or a small table in the corner. We might have a Bible, the child's baptismal box, a statue of Jesus, a children's devotional book, the baptismal cloth and candle placed where they are visible. We might have concrete representations of the parables that would inspire the child's sense of wonder. The mustard seed or the precious pearl could be

used to tell your child the parable after we learn it ourselves. Then by leaving it on the dresser, shelf, or table, the child would be continually reminded of these teaching parables of Jesus.

As a child's language develops, they become hungry for words. They repeat what they hear their parents saying which isn't always good. Why not give them words of prayer and song?

When our children were young, the night time ritual at our house after the baths were taken, was to gather in the boy's bedroom where Rachel or Danette sat on the floor with the boys gathered around as they read a story from a children's Bible, sing "Away in a Manger", "Jesus Loves Me", and other easily learned songs, and closed with everyone praying together a memorized prayer.

Another idea is to bring our children to worship on Sundays like this one when we have you come forward to relight your baptismal candle or to receive a Bible and to remember and celebrate that we are God's children.

Children must have models and experiences so they can build up over time, their own story of relationship with God. Don't leave it totally up to the Sunday School teachers and Laura.

Teaching them. Jesus Christ is among us. God is here. We have seen it in the faces of children who shined with expectation during the Christmas season. I'll never forget their faces as they gathered around baby Jesus on Christmas Eve. That brightness is the praise God receives. It defines how our hearts – the hearts of creaky adults – feel when we consider the gift

of an only begotten Son for our sakes, for our salvation. We too grow bright with an eternal gladness.

But how will the children themselves know of the greater gift?

They will know when we, who love them, tell them the story. The story comes when someone who loves them sits them down and tells them of the faith of Jesus, person to person, from faith to hope, from grandma to her dear grandchild.

It is the faithful mouth and the loving heart, who can best shape the story and invite the child to enter into it and live there.

Grandpa, have they heard it in the dear tones of your own voice?

Father, what you tell your children carries weight and power for them. If you make a special time in a special place for the story, they will never forget it.

Mother, yours is the face of reliable love; you are so often present during those special times when Father is busy elsewhere. Yours is the breath of genuine grace for them since you give love for no payment in return. Therefore, your telling of the Christmas story, the Easter story, speaks not only to their minds but also to their souls, and you, Mother, become the image of God before them.

I know the power of story. I received it as a child from grandpa and grandma, from mother more than father. I have used it all of my adulthood. I have used it in all of my preaching, teaching, and parenting in trying to bring the Gospel to life again and again.

Make the story the gift to your children in 2011. Touch them. Give them something to sip as they sit on the bed at 8:30 p.m. Turn the lights down. And then say, “I’m going to tell you a true story, a beautiful story” – and then tell them.

Teaching them.

#595 – Jesus Loves Me