

Grace Episcopal School Sunday: The Year of the Lord's Favor  
The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 22, Year A)  
October 5, 2014  
The Rev. Robert H. Malm

## **The Teachable Moment**

There are times in our lives when we learn lessons that we will never forget. Many educators call these times "teachable moments." Moses and the Hebrew people never forgot God giving the law – the 10 Commandments – in the wilderness. It was such an important event that it is recorded twice, first in Exodus, later in Deuteronomy.

The early Church never forgot Paul's image of the Church; as the Body of Christ – with diverse individual parts all making one, complete body, community. Today at 11:15, we baptize Vivienne Egaas. Her parents, Leigh and Todd, will never forget this day and the promises they make for their daughter as she becomes part of the Body of Christ.

When Jesus came back home to Nazareth after his baptism and time in the wilderness, he preached in the synagogue where he had grown up. Most of those in attendance had known Jesus all his life. This event, this moment, Jesus' first sermon in Nazareth, would never be forgotten. It was a teachable moment.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all include the Gospel narrative of Jesus beginning his ministry in Galilee. But only Luke, the master story-teller, gives us the details – where Jesus spoke, what text he quoted, and the extreme reaction to Jesus' sermon. Luke writes, "*When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath... They rose up and put him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong...*" (4:28, 29). They not only questioned Jesus; they rejected him; opposed him and wanted to execute him.

I'm sure Jesus had seen hostility and rejection while growing up. Since Palestine was occupied and controlled by the Roman Army. He may have seen physical violence, torture, even executions. But after his first sermon his own people turned on him, wanted to kill him. It was a moment Jesus would never forget.

Since we are celebrating Grace Episcopal School Sunday today and since we are also celebrating Vivienne's baptism, I wondered when each one of us first learned about rejection, hostility, pain, suffering, death. I asked our fifth grade religion class as we studied the story of Adam and Eve in the garden – the second creation story – if any of them had attended a funeral. Most raised their hands. Then I asked them when they first remembered learning about death. One student said she first thought about death when she was six and her goldfish died.

I experienced a series of teachable moments beginning in the winter of sixth grade when we lived in New Jersey. I was called to the principal's office (not unusual for me while

in the sixth grade) and, when I entered, my mother and her best friend were sitting there wearing sunglasses on a bitter, cold January morning. The principal said, “Your mother has something to tell you...” But my mother couldn’t talk and I realized the sun glasses covered her eyes filled with tears. Her friend said, “Your grandparents in Massachusetts have been in a bad accident. Your mom and dad have to go up right away and you’ll be staying with your friend down the street after school...”

I later learned that my grandparents had died suddenly in a horrible house fire. My mother received the news after my sister and I had left for school. It was the first time I had experienced death close at hand, in my own family, with people I loved dearly.

A couple of months later my father took a new job. Our family moved from New Jersey, about 15 miles from Manhattan, to South Georgia. Most of the South in 1963 was completely segregated. I experienced hostility, rejection, the oppression of racism for the first time. Later that year President Kennedy was shot and killed. Most of us 60 and older remember exactly where we were and what we were doing when we heard the news. Much like anyone 20 and older can remember clearly the morning of September 11, 2001. I was teaching the fifth grade religion class when we heard the sirens heading for the Pentagon, and then, learned about the World Trade Centers in New York. All of our students were gone by 11:00 AM that day.

Before 1963 came to a close, I was confirmed and began to receive Holy Communion. I’m so glad our children can receive Communion as soon as their parents help them to come to the altar rail after they are baptized, many years before they are confirmed. This is a wonderful change in our tradition and practice. Knowing about Jesus, receiving Christ’s Body and Blood help us, even at a young age, to make sense of a world where evil, sin, pain, and death are realities.

Jesus’ first sermon helps us to know what we need to do:

1. Share the good news.
2. Proclaim freedom from anything that might “oppress” us.
3. Know God is our hope.

Our years of formal education come to an end, but we all can keep learning. Teachable moments come through all of life until we breathe our last. We still have so much to learn. As the philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, “Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood.”

Exodus 20: 1-4, 7-9, 12-20

Psalm 19:1-10

Ephesians 4:11-16

Luke 4:16-21