



We learn differently. Some of us learn by reading, others by hearing, others by seeing. A challenge in teaching is how do you reach everyone when not everyone learns the same way?

God seems to say "I've tried to teach you by taking you by hand to bring you out of Egypt." Even before the people reached the promised land they were grumbling. So leading and teaching by physical action that didn't work. "I've tried to teach you by destroying the world in flood except for 8 people." Soon after the flood receded the people were back to doing evil things. So

that approach didn't work either. In our reading from Jeremiah, God now says: I'll try putting my law within you – I will write my law on your hearts and that will work. It will work because once God's law is found deep within your heart you don't need an outside or visible way of teaching. It is intrinsic to who you are and it is the basis on which you make your decisions. Then everything will be fine. People will live in harmony and the kingdom of God will flourish on this earth. At least that's God's hope!

“Pedagogy is the academic discipline that deals with the theory and practice of teaching. Pedagogy informs teaching strategies, teacher actions, and teacher judgments and decisions by taking into consideration theories of learning, understandings of students and their needs, and the backgrounds and interests of individual students.”¹ Examples of different kinds of pedagogy are the Suzuki method of teaching music or the Montessori method of preschool or Godly Play, to bring different teaching methods closer to home.

In the passage from Jeremiah, God is searching for a teaching method- a pedagogy – that will work since earlier attempts have failed. The covenant between God and God's chosen people has been broken time and time again. God is looking for ways to reach God's chosen people. God is looking for ways to help us, as beloved children, to live in harmony with one another. When we do so, the kingdom of God is now. No longer far off and amorphous, but here and now.

The Suzuki method of teaching music builds on several core principles that we might consider for our purposes this morning:

- The parent must be involved with the child who is learning. God keeps after and after the people of Israel, wooing them back to the covenant. The covenant that will bring life to all when followed. The covenant that confirms God is the one god and God is the source of all that is.
- The earlier a child begins to learn music, the better. That's one reason our own Sunday School and Vacation Bible School can be so important. We learn the basic stories of our faith at a level appropriate to our age and understanding. Having these stories known to

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedagogy> (March 16, 2018)

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51: 1-13; Hebrews 5: 5-10; John 12:20-33

us from early years sets a foundation upon which we can build a greater knowledge of our relationship with God and the values that flow from loving God and loving neighbor. It's never too late to start even as earlier is better.

- Listening is also important to learning. We learn differently but for all of us, hearing sacred texts read out loud is helpful. When we are not concentrating on the words in front of us on the page, but rather using our ears to listen, we hear the words more deeply. We often have an "ah ha" moment when someone else reads the text.
- Repetition helps deepen our faith. It is, perhaps, one of the reasons why we have a three year lectionary cycle. Yes, we have heard the Scripture before. But we are in a different place in our lives than was true the last time a particular Scripture was part of the cycle so we hear and can understand it a bit differently. One reason we celebrate the Eucharist each week is that the Eucharist is both solace and strength. What we need from week to week may change. We hear the words of institution- this is my body, this is my blood- and they sink into our very being as we experience the Eucharist over and over and over again. It never gets old because it is foundational to our faith and our relationship with one another.
- Being present each week creates a community of faith. A community that encourages one another, especially in times of sorrow or stress. We come together so that we can go out into the world, proclaiming the Gospel of good news: that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and took our sins upon himself so that we might have eternal life. We are encouraged to be what God has called us to be knowing that we are loved.
- Our physical presence here each week is important to building and keeping our faith community strong. It is by being together that we can grow into more than we are individually. It is by being together that we can learn from each other, we can laugh and we can cry together, we can find a place where we are part of a whole – no longer alone and having to do it all ourselves.

One other aspect of God's desire to have God's teaching written deep in our hearts is to facilitate the change in society from families being responsible for an individual's actions to each of us being responsible before God for our own actions. We need to move from understanding ourselves as sheltered within a family group and see ourselves, as adults, responsible for our own actions. We need to stop seeing ourselves as victims and start seeing ourselves as human beings who are responsible to God and to our community for what we do and what we say.

In the Gospel reading we come to the end of Jesus's public ministry. He has been teaching in a variety of ways – through healing, through using parables, through preaching and quoting Scripture, through simply being with people in their daily lives. Jesus's whole ministry is about showing people ways to put God's law into their hearts until it is so intrinsic to their understanding of themselves and their place in society that it will guide us to ways to live together in peace. Having done all he can to help people learn about God's law, it is now time for Jesus to set that aside and focus on the next phase of what he has been sent to do.

The metaphor of the grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying in order to provide a new crop escapes the understanding of those around Jesus. When we hold onto something that we love too tightly, it sometimes withers and dies. When we love something enough to let it go, it often returns to us tenfold or even one hundredfold. Learn, Jesus seems to be saying, that it is ok for something to die in order for something new to begin. Jesus has tried various pedagogies and

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51: 1-13; Hebrews 5: 5-10; John 12:20-33

now it is coming time for Jesus to live the example he has preached and taught. Submit yourself to God, love God with all your heart and mind and soul – and trust that God loves you and that God is creating a new way for you. **We love Jesus but do we *trust* him?**

What would it take for you to trust Jesus? A different type of learning style? Perhaps what is needed is repetition- coming together each week to celebrate the Eucharist with our friends and neighbors. Perhaps it is feeling the presence of Jesus in the midst of chaos- that still small place, that sheer silence- that says God is here, with you in this life. Whatever it takes, find a way to trust that Jesus is with you and will be with you to the end of the age. Trusting Jesus makes all the difference in the world as you face the world each day. Trusting Jesus to the depths of your soul creates a light in you that the darkness cannot overcome. And when you do trust that God loves you, then the world is a better place for you and for me, now and forever. Amen.