

# The Park Road Pulpit

*Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church*

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**Presentation is Everything**

**Luke 4.14-21; 31-32**

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You know I love to cook. I especially love to cook nice meals. I like for every plate to have a variety of color – orange and green and red nicely arranged with the proper garnish; chocolate drizzled artistically on the plate under the piece of dessert – because you know – *presentation is everything* in turning an ordinary meal into a gourmet dinner. Ask any caterer and they will confirm this: *presentation is everything!* I don't know how much Jesus knew about the culinary arts, but I think he surely must have understood this concept about *presentation*. Today we take a look at Jesus as Teacher. Jesus is referred to as “Teacher” at least 49 times in the four gospels. It is one of the favorite titles for Jesus used by his disciples: Rabbi. I could have chosen from many different texts from any of the Gospels to read this morning to exemplify my point. But I chose this particular passage from Luke for a reason. I'll get back to that in just a moment.

In today's text alone, Jesus is connected to “teaching” three times. Let me set up the scene for Luke's telling here. After his baptism in the Jordan River, Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness being tempted by the devil, Luke tells us. I've seen the wilderness, and it's not a place that I'd like to spend 40 days. It's not just hilly – it is mountainous. It is dry. It is barren. It is hot. It is in the middle of nowhere. There is no sign of life in the wilderness – no trees, no water, nobody. When we arrive at our text for today, Jesus has just returned from this wilderness experience to Galilee – the lakefront property of the

region. It is lush and green with banana trees and olive trees and the most beautiful blue/green water you've ever seen. It must have truly been a sight for Jesus' sore eyes! And where does he go first? To the synagogue, to teach, of course. And news began to spread about him throughout the whole area. News? or Gossip? or Rumors? Who knows. All we know is that this was one prophet – one of many – but this one was really beginning to make a name for himself. I would even venture to say that folks may have been calling him the real deal – unlike so many others who passed through but were far from real. The way Jesus went about teaching and living his life made folks wonder – could this be the One for whom we have been looking and waiting?

So he decides to go back home – sometimes a difficult proposition – but he goes to Nazareth nonetheless. He simply can't help himself – he heads straight for the synagogue to do what? To teach, of course. And here is why I chose this particular text: what does he teach? Something new and innovative and creative? Something that will astound them beyond belief? Something they've never heard before? Something that's 4-color glossy print? Something that will have them spellbound – wondering to themselves “why haven't we heard about this before?” No. He opened up the scroll and taught them an old, old lesson – something that he, and any good Jew would have surely known by heart. Nothing new. Nothing profoundly innovative. Nothing with a new zing and zap and wow. Nothing that even a Powerpoint *presentation* could spice up. He simply quoted the prophet Isaiah to them. He taught them something they already knew. *Bring good news to the poor* [he taught]. *Release to the captives* [he taught]. *Recovery of sight to the blind. Let the oppressed go free. Proclaim the year of the Lord's favour* [he taught]. And with that, he rolled that scroll right back up and sat down. After 40 days with the devil in

the wilderness, he heads back to his hometown and teaches them . . . nothing new. But let me tell you – his *presentation must have been everything!*

He really riled them up that day. They just couldn't believe this was Joseph's boy. Jesus acknowledged that it was hard to be understood and accepted in your own hometown. After he sat down, they had some back and forths – some real heated conversation - and the people ended up driving him out of town. Really, they decided to throw him off a cliff, but the text says that he *walked right through the crowd and went on his way*. And he headed straight back for that lush and beautiful lakefront property on the Sea of Galilee – to Peter's hometown of Capernaum. And you guessed it. He couldn't help himself. He headed straight for the synagogue to do some more teaching. The way the news, the gossip, the rumors spread about him – I think we can safely assume that there was something about him – something about his teaching *presentation* – that made him magnetic, compelling, and dangerous.

Marcus Borg calls Jesus “a sage, a teacher of wisdom. [What does that kind of teacher teach?] Some have thought that he was primarily a teacher of beliefs; or more precisely, of what was to be believed in order to be saved . . . Others have stressed that he was a teacher of a new moral ethic . . . such as love and justice or ‘the golden rule’ . . . But Jesus was not primarily a teacher of either correct beliefs or right morals. Rather, he was a teacher of a *way* or *path*, specifically a *way of transformation*. His teaching involved a radical criticism of the conventional wisdom that lay at the core of the first-century Jewish social world.” (Jesus A New Vision, Marcus J. Borg, page 97) Jesus presented an alternative way. “He founded a revitalization movement which sought the

transformation of the historical path of his people.” (Jesus A New Vision, Marcus J. Borg, page 116)

I would love to have heard him while he was teaching. Some people have the gift of teaching – bringing alive something that is their passion. His passion was not legalistic rules or dogmatic doctrine. His passion was about living a life that was so centered in God that all of life became the way of God. Sure, he most certainly had some new things to say. Sometimes he would say to those who were sitting at his feet – hanging on his every word – *you have heard it said . . . but I say to you . . .* I don’t want to imply that Jesus had nothing new to teach. But more often than not, I am convinced it wasn’t so much what Jesus taught, but how he taught the same old message that God had been trying to get across from the beginning of time. But there was something about Jesus as Teacher that made the people sit up and take notice in ways they had not before. They “sat up and took notice” so much so that today – over 2000 years later – we are gathered here in this room today still teaching what Jesus taught. But I fear that more often than not, The Church has royally messed up the *presentation*.

Often The Church is an embarrassment to the teaching of Jesus. The Crusaders? The Inquisition? Slavery? Need I go on? Often The Church’s *presentation* has been less than stellar, and many folks have left The Church precisely because of the *presentation*. And that is, literally, a shame.

I wonder about our *presentation*. I wonder about your *presentation*. I wonder about my *presentation*. If I am right – that it wasn’t so much what Jesus taught as how Jesus taught – then I wonder if we are teaching in a way that brings the Good News of the Gospel to life. Do our children hear us speaking and see us acting in ways that honor the

name Christian? Have our youth learned from us what it really means to be a follower of Jesus? Have we – WE – taught them well, or are we waiting for someone else to teach them? Or have we hired Michael to take care of this for us so that we can strike one more thing off our “to do” list? And I wonder about our neighbors and our coworkers and our extended family members – are we teaching them by our example, our words, and our very lives – are we teaching by our presentation - the things that Jesus taught. What Jesus taught was what he learned: *Bring good news to the poor. Release to the captives. Recovery of sight to the blind. Let the oppressed go free. Proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.* Until we learn this for ourselves, how can we possibly teach it?

And I think therein lies the issue: I'm not sure we – a collective we – have taught the message of Jesus well enough. And I think that often our *presentation* is lacking. “The gospel of Jesus – the good news of Jesus' own message – is that there is a way of being that moves beyond both secular and religious conventional wisdom. The [Way] of transformation of which Jesus spoke leads from a life of requirements and measuring up (whether to culture or to God) to a life of relationship with God. It leads from a life of anxiety to a life of peace and trust. It leads from the bondage of self-preoccupation to the freedom of self-forgetfulness. It leads from life centered in culture to life centered in God. (Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time, Marcus Borg, page 88)

If our lives were centered in God, as was the case with Jesus, the *presentation* would come so naturally. It would ooze from our very pores. That's why Jesus' teaching was so engaging and life-changing – he *presented* from the place of being centered in God. An hour a week will not be enough. Even if you add Wednesday night supper and activities to the mix – it will not be enough for us. This place, important as it is, is but a

weigh station. We come here to learn and to be centered in God so that we can go “out there” and *present* the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was St. Francis of Assisi that said, “Preach the gospel always. If necessary, use words.”

And remember, it’s not just about the content of the teaching material – it’s the way we go about teaching it. It’s the tone of your voice. It’s the things you do and the things you leave undone. It’s how you talk to your children. It’s how you respond to your parents. It’s how you treat your employee. It’s how you react to your neighbor. It’s about the words you choose when speaking about your enemies. It’s about priorities you make. It’s about the way you spend your money. It’s about how you use your time.

All week a song has been rolling around in my head. It’s a story about a mother and her wayward son. “Years ago she read a letter from the teacher sent home with her third grade son. Tested on some reading he had been caught cheating. ‘Why?’ she said. ‘You told me to make good grades,’ he said. She tried to explain: ‘Son, the way we go about it matters. It’s the testimony of the heart. Yes the way we go about it matters. It’s the proof of who we truly are. Who we truly are.’ [The song continues to tell the story of the boy who grows into a young man – expelled from school because of drugs. He leaves his mother to become a drug dealer to make the much needed money for the family. She says that kind of money is worth nothing to her – because “the way we go about it matters.” He ends up doing time in jail and upon his release the mother, just like the father of the Prodigal Son, after years of disappointment and anger, she welcomes the boy home – no “I told you so’s” - she is still the mother – the God image of this song, and in the final verse of the song, Kyle sings] Tonight she’ll welcome home the boy she raised alone who has done his time in prison like his father. Friends will come. They’ll dance

and laugh. She'll prepare the fatted calf and at her table, he will take the seat of honor, and she'll hold him in her arms because . . . the way we go about it matters. It's the testimony of the heart. Yes the way we go about it matters. It's the proof of who we truly are. Who we truly are." (Kyle Matthews, See for Yourself cd, "The Way We Go About It")

*Presentation is Everything* when it comes to teaching the Way of Jesus the Christ.  
May it be so.