

Mark 10: 35-45
Creekside COB
October 8, 2006

“One Tough Teacher”

“Everyone take out a sheet of graph paper, and remember, if you don’t turn this quiz in on green graph paper, you get a zero for the day... is that clear? When I get the problem on the board you’ve got exactly fifteen minutes to solve it.” Every day this teacher gave tortuously difficult quizzes plus one exam a week. As he wrote the problem on the board a timid student raised a shaky hand, waiting for Dr. Lawrence to turn around and see him.

“I don’t remember Castigliano’s Theorem. What can I do?” said the student. The teacher stood before him like a looming monster, ready to pounce with his dreaded, crushing zero with a dot in its center. “Whose fault is that?” the teacher asked. Walking back to his desk he opened the drawer and pulled out his grade book containing the most personal and unflattering information a student could imagine. “I don’t mind doing this, Jeffery. You’ve been forgetful much too often—more so than the rest of the class. Good engineers simply don’t forget their lessons as easily as you do. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, Dr. Lawrence, but...” “Good. You get a zero with a point in it for the day. I trust there will be no more memory lapse in you, and let me make another thing perfectly clear... I will not tolerate forgetfulness in any of you. And I can assure you that none of the wealthier or influential fathers you may have will be buying a grade out of this class. That is an insufferable monument to laziness and I won’t tolerate it. Now then, I want to see every eye on the board. You’ve got fifteen minutes. Begin.”

Just as he announced the beginning of the quiz there was a knock at the classroom door. In came a man dressed in a black suit who, in a low voice, asked for a word with Dr. Lawrence. The

doctor of structural engineering turned to the class and informed them he would be leaving the room momentarily. "If I find that even one of you glanced at another's paper, the whole class will get a failing grade. I hope I've made myself clear."

He followed the man into his office. "Pull up a chair, Dr. Lawrence. I don't expect this to take long." "I hope not," the doctor replied. "You realize my class is taking a quiz and I should be watching them." "Well... that's just why I've brought you down here to my office." "Okay, what's the problem?" "Oh, come on now, doctor, we've had this discussion before, but you still remain evasive on the issue. When I hired you, I knew all about your background in engineering, but I never dreamed..."

"Never dreamed *what*? Please come to the point Dr. Killingsworth. I have a class in session taking a very important quiz." "But that's my very point, Dr. Lawrence. This is an elementary school! You can't expect five year old children to absorb the kind of material you're trying to teach."

"Hmm, are you sure?" "Of course I'm sure!" "Alright then, if you really think I'm wrong in this. But my gut feeling tells me the students will be lost in boredom, so we'll just have to back up to plain calculus."

Do you suppose the disciples felt like five year olds trying to grasp the advanced calculus taught by Dr. Jesus? One of Mark's favorite designations for Jesus was rabbi, which means teacher. He was a different kind of teacher. No one had heard anyone like him. "*He teaches as one who has authority,*" they said. "*He's nothing like the Scribes and Pharisees.*"

Jesus was different *and* tough. He taught with stories and riddles that left the disciples scratching their heads. He answered questions with questions. He often wouldn't give them straight answers. When he spoke straight forward, they didn't get it, or pretended not to get it.

Jesus was a tough teacher who didn't just come to pass along new information. God would have sent a text book if information

was all they needed. God sent a Savior, instead—a teaching Savior who fundamentally changed their view of themselves and the world. And Jesus wasn't after listeners. He was after doers and followers.

If Mark's favorite designation of Jesus was rabbi or rabboni, his typical depiction of the disciples was "bone heads." Jesus' message was either sailing over their heads, not sinking in, misunderstood, misapplied, or forgotten.

In the verses preceding our lesson Jesus has given the disciples the third prediction of the suffering and death that awaited him in Jerusalem. The third time is a charm, right? It will sink in, take hold, and they will understand everything. But he no sooner said it than the brothers James and John told Jesus, "Teacher, do whatever we ask of you." "What do you have in mind?" Jesus asked. "When we get to glory-land we want to sit at your right and left. James will be Secretary of State. I'll be Chief of Staff."

What a stupid thing to say! We say stupid things when we're amazed and afraid, as Mark says the disciples were. Jesus sat them down again and said, "The strong rule over the weak in the world, but not with you. If you want to be great you must be a servant. If you want first place, be a slave of everyone.

They didn't get the Jesus they expected. He didn't rid the world of evil and injustice. He didn't answer their questions about why people who are good must have it so hard. He did the very things they wanted to avoid—sacrificing, serving, suffering for the sake of God's desires for the world-- choosing a cross over a crown.

Americans don't like the tough stuff that Jesus taught. Lots of Christians don't like it, either. It's not what we want to hear. It puts us out of step with the belief and practice of nine out of ten Americans.

The message plastered on the back windows of cars says, "God Bless America." The hard lesson is, "God's blessing doesn't recognize boundaries."

Time magazine recently had a feature story on the prosperity gospel made popular by televangelists. The message says that God wants us to be materially and financially prosperous. The hard lesson is, “You can’t worship God and money and ignore the needs of the poor.” We are told we must do everything possible to make ourselves safe from terrorists, even if we have to resort to torture to do it. The hard lesson is that without Jesus’ moral compass we become like those bent on harming us. It is easy to despise the crazed man who turned an Amish school into a mass murder scene. It is tough to confront evil like the Amish, not with hatred but forgiveness. They were taught that revenge is not an option for followers of Jesus.

There is no teacher shortage, not if you’re looking for teachers to tell you what you want to hear. Christians come to church to hear interesting information or have their beliefs affirmed. *“That’s a fascinating thought. That idea would make for an interesting discussion. I can certainly agree with that.”* But our purpose of being here is not to be informed or entertained. It is not to talk Jesus into helping us get a seat on his right or left.

We’re here to become followers who are worthy of the identity, Christian. We are here to be in the service of what Jesus wants. We are here to be changed from consumers to servants. We are here to quit climbing the ladder of success and knell beside the tub and towel of humble service.

We still don’t get it. When it comes to being faithful followers we get zeros with dots in the center. In Jesus, we have a demanding teacher, but he is also a patient teacher who wants us to succeed.

We can be grateful for teachers who did more than present the facts to us. By introducing you to new ideas, they were out to change you. They wanted you to think for yourself. They worked hard to help you see the world in a different light. They were out to convert you.

Looking back, which teachers made the greatest impact upon you—the teachers who let you breeze through their classes, or the tough ones who pressed and pushed and prodded you to do your best? Think back to high school reunions when old teachers dropped in to visit. Which teachers had more people clustered around them, thanking them for the lessons they taught-- the ones whose classes were calk-walks, or the ones who made you sweat for everything you got?

I had a professor who turned my world upside down. I fell under his spell in the classroom, and he continued teaching me after I graduated and he retired. He came to hear me preach and then sat me down to talk about what I said or should have said. When visiting family in South Bend he took me to a breakfast cafe called Rosie's. He sat me down at a table with the "regulars" and got everyone involved in discussing the "significant issues of the day."

I drove to North Manchester to spend the day with him. He took me into the woods where we sat on two stumps, listening to the birds and wondering what God was up to in our lives. I spent a day with him when he was in an intensive care unit. We didn't talk about his condition. He wanted to know my thoughts on the condition of the Church of the Brethren, the state of the world, and how I incorporated into my life the lessons learned in his classes.

After every encounter with Tim my brain was exhausted. Sometimes he chided me, and always he challenged me, and I always walked away with something precious. He was hard on me. I always expected it because I knew he loved me.

Don't come to church every Sunday expecting your discipleship to be affirmed, or be filled and uplifted. The disciples didn't because they continued to "not get it." We've heard Jesus' message and still don't get it and if we're honest, we don't like it.

But the Lord knows we need it, which is why he is so tough on us. He wouldn't be so tough on us if he didn't love us.