

Mount Olive Lutheran Church  
5327 W. Washington Blvd.  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

Second Sunday in Lent  
March 12, 2006  
Mark 8:31-38

*"He Began to Teach"*  
(Lutheran Education Sunday)  
by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

### Introduction

It is interesting how it works out sometimes. Throughout the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, this past week has been observed as Lutheran School Week to highlight the important work of our Lutheran schools. This has been the case in our Christian Day School as well. Special events and emphases took place each day. But one thing about our celebration has been slightly different. Many congregations start out the observance of the week with a worship service. For most of the years of our participation, we have ended the week with a worship service. Because of this, our celebration today has ended up on the second Sunday of Lent and that presents us with a wonderful learning opportunity.

The synod board charged with overseeing education provided us with materials to be used on this day. The order of worship we are using has come in part from their suggestions. They also provided sermon notes and materials to be used on this day. But when I looked up the Gospel reading for this Sunday and saw the first words of the first sentence, I knew that the material provided would not be necessary. For the words of the Gospel provide us with good words for Lutheran Schools Week and for any time: "He then began to teach ..." May the Lord bless us in our study, our teaching, and our learning.

### I. Jesus Teaches

The Gospel of St. Mark uses on several occasions a unique phrase in describing the work of Jesus. Our text is one of those times. It says of Jesus, "he ... began to teach." This is also said of him by the shore of the Sea of Galilee and at the synagogue, and now in the account of the Gospel for today which follows upon the confession of Peter that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah). How fitting that on this Lutheran Education Sunday we see Jesus in one of the important works of his ministry—teaching.

Now what he teaches is very straightforward and to the point. He explains to his disciples that the "Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again." It is the lesson of the suffering servant. The Messiah will not reign victorious without first undergoing suffering and death. It was a lesson which did not meet the expectations of those listening to him and so Peter rebukes Jesus. Jesus must in turn rebuke Peter in the strongest possible words: "Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." It would be hard indeed to accept that the Son of Man must suffer. But that is Jesus'

own word, his teaching. That is indeed what we know is the central part of our faith, that he suffered for us. For in the words of the creed, he was “crucified, died, and buried.” What an important lesson our Lord teaches in these words of our text.

## II. We Teach

And as Jesus taught, so we also teach. What a marvelous connection with Lutheran Schools in general and with our own school in particular. How very fitting that on this day as well we install three teachers to continue their service in our Christian Day School. All of them have long careers in teaching, but the opportunity has presented itself to our congregation to issue calls to each of them. Today as they are installed we also will implore God’s blessings upon them. In this connection, what a blessing it is for us that we have a faculty entirely composed of trained church workers, teachers who have dedicated their lives to the work of the Lord in teaching his lambs and helping to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

And for this blessing, we must also thank you who by your prayerful support for our school make it possible. In some ways, our congregation is becoming more and more unique in our support for Christian education. Some might even suggest that we are foolish in what we are doing. You see, our school is exceptionally dependant upon the support of the congregation for its continued existence. We do not rely much at all on tuition, nor on outside sources of funds. It is true that our school families make a rather healthy payment for school fees, but much of that goes to pay for books and supplies, for other school resources. The bulk of the support for our teachers, their salaries and insurance, the heat and light and other needs of our school comes from your offerings and is upheld by your prayers. It is because of this that we have recently made the decision to offer to families who are financially unable to meet the financial obligations of our school the opportunity to send their children. In so doing, we have made our school even more accessible as a mission outreach. We have heard the word of Jesus, “Let the children come to me and do not hinder them for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”

## III. We Witness

The closing words of the Gospel offer more teaching from our Lord. They are an important lesson as well. In following Jesus, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross. These words seem so contradictory to the general feeling of our contemporary society. Deny yourself? Take up a cross? This is not considered very uplifting today when the usual message is to do everything for yourself, enjoy yourself, love life to the full. No that is not Jesus message for as He says, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?” The Christian life is a life changed by Christ. It is a life where we are called out of this world to serve him. In the closing verse of the Gospel for this day, Jesus says, “If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.” Do not be ashamed of Jesus. Rather use every opportunity to witness. Most especially let us witness to the

generation that is growing up around us that they too may know of Him.

Last week, I was passing through the child care center. The children are always very happy to see me and greet me when I am there. I asked one child who is probably about three years old, "How are you?" And when she answered, "blessed by the Lord", I thought that was a good example of how our teaching bears fruit. So I said, "Yes, we are blessed by the Lord, aren't we?" And she replied, "Jesus loves me!" From out of the mouths of young children comes such blessings. That is what Lutheran education is all about. That is what our Christian Day School and child care is all about. Thank God for the opportunity we have. For the little children may very well be the best witness we have. Jesus loves me, indeed.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.