

Children's Sermon for 5 Epiphany, C
Church of the Good Shepherd, Wareham
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Have you ever questioned or challenged a teacher? Have you said to your teacher—I think you're wrong—or—there's a better way to solve this problem—or—your assumptions are wrong? If you didn't, why didn't you?

If you did, what happened?

It's not always a pretty sight when you challenge a teacher, is it? My older brother was always getting into trouble when we were growing up. Because he would question, test, challenge. I still remember when he was in maybe 3rd grade and he had to take a standardized test. One of the questions was, what is a contraction for "it is"? and one of the possible answers was "tis" which he decided was a perfectly good contraction. So when he was marked wrong, he made a ruckus, pointing it out in the dictionary, arguing with the teacher, the whole nine yards. She never gave in, and I don't think she liked my brother very much after that. That happened a lot for Paul.

Teachers are powerful. They can help you and make you feel great about yourself; they can flunk you and make you hate yourself and school. If you cross a teacher, you can sometimes get into **big trouble**.

Today's Gospel story—that's a story about Jesus—happens early on in Jesus' ministry. He has been walking around the area near his home, and he has been teaching and healing people. So many people want to hear him that they crowd around, and some can't hear. So he takes a boat belonging to a man named Simon and rows out a little way so he can teach the people on shore. Jesus knows Simon; his is one of the people who has been listening to Jesus, and Jesus has even healed his mother-in-law. (So we know that Simon, later called Peter, the first "Pope," was married.)

And after he teaches a while, Jesus turns to Simon and says, "Go out into the deep water there and let's catch some fish. Let your nets down." And Simon does a bold, audacious thing. He challenges the Teacher. "Aww, Jesus, we worked all night long trying to catch fish, right here, and we didn't catch a single fish. Not one! This is a complete waste of time!" Imagine, saying that to your teacher! But he did. And what did the Teacher say? "How dare you challenge me?" or "What, you don't believe me?" No, he didn't say anything. But maybe he gave Simon a look. A bit of—yes, I really mean it.

So Simon challenges Jesus, but he goes ahead and does what he asks. He rows out to the deep water, puts his nets in, and . . . gets a humungous catch of fish! Fish everywhere, ripping the nets apart, overflowing that boat and the other boat and causing them to start to sink. And then Simon realizes what he's done. He's not only challenged his rabbi, his teacher, he's challenged God. For Jesus is God.

And he knows he's in trouble. God is going to strike him dead for that! Why didn't he keep his big mouth shut?! He throws himself down in front of Jesus and "Lord, stay away! For I am a sinful person." And what he's really saying is, "Akk! Don't send the lightning to zap me! I messed up!"

And what does Jesus say? He says, “Now that you know who I am, come with me. I will make you fish for people.” Jesus/God gives Simon a new job. Even though he questioned, doubted, challenged.

Have **you** ever questioned or challenged God? We’re taught a lot to be nice and behave and not to question our elders or those in authority. And God most of all. But all through the Bible are people who have questioned God—think about it—the big name heroes and saints of the Bible are the ones who talked back. When God was going to destroy the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham said, “Wait! What if you kill off good people with the bad people—how about you not destroy the city if you find 50 good people?” And then he talks God down to 45 people, 40, all the way to ten. When Sarah, 99 years old, finds out she is going to have a baby, she laughs at God. Jacob wrestles with God before he goes to meet with the brother he wronged many years earlier. Moses leads the people out of Egypt, but every ten minutes they’re complaining that they don’t like the scenery, the water is salty and the food is bad. Finally, Moses has had it. He says to the Lord, “Why did you give me these people to take care of? All they do is complain night and day and I can’t do anything about it!” Jonah tries to run away when the Lord tells him to go to his enemies and tell them to repent—heck, I’m not doing that! But eventually he does anyway. Job stays faithful through all kinds of horrible events, but eventually he can’t stand it any longer, and he cries out, “God, I haven’t done anything wrong—how could you do this to me? Show me what I did to deserve this—I have only tried to follow you and look how you repay me!”

All these famous people in the Bible talked back to God. They refused. They laughed in God’s face. But all of them cared deeply about God. All of them had a real, intimate relationship with God, just as with a friend. And all of them eventually did what God asked them to do, whether it was having a baby or leading people or reconciling with a brother or giving a message.

In just a few minutes, we are going to welcome two babies into God’s household. Kaylee and Xavier are seven months old. They are too young to talk, much less talk back. We wish for them health and a loving family and happiness. But more than anything else, we want them to know God. We want them to be on a first-name basis with God. Yo, God, how are you doing? Hey, Lord, you know what I did today? . . . or . . . God, I am in trouble and need you to heal me and guide me. But we also want them to feel free to pour out their hearts to God, even if that means to question, doubt, or challenge God. “Why am I suffering so?” “Why did my beloved friend get cancer?” “Why did you let 200,000 people die in the earthquake in Haiti?” “How am I to live in this messed-up world and have hope?”

God does not strike us dead for asking these questions. Rather, like a most gentle and loving parent, God gathers up all these questions in his/her heart, and rejoices that we are in relationship, free enough to pour our hearts out. And God gently or not-so-gently invites us to follow Jesus, put out our nets where he directs, and be filled. And invites us to a new job—once we know who Jesus is, who God is, to bring the love, the message to others, so that they too may be filled to overflowing.

Jesus is the best teacher, who invites our questions and doubts, and invites us to follow him, to take part in an abundant life.

Let us pray. AMEN.