

The Gospel in the Classroom

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The Gospel in the Classroom

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The Gospel in the Classroom

Before beginning this morning, please excuse me while I have my lunch. I was taught never to go to school on an empty stomach! Get out McDonalds bag - napkins, ketchup, mustard, salt, straw, special sauce, box - O no! They forget my sandwich! All these things are nice to have but without the sandwich, they are no longer important.

We pastors and teachers can fall into a similar situation in the pulpits of our churches and schools. We can talk about love, respect, discipline, Christianity. We can speak of faith, Scripture, even grace, but if the box is empty, all those subjects become quite meaningless. We can even emphasize God, the Lord, Christ - but if Jesus is not in the box - not evident in our lives, we've left the Gospel outside the classroom.

We can discuss (or argue) about hymns, the Sampler, memorization, which Bible translation, and the 101 topics that pastors, teachers, and well-meaning laypeople get hung up on, but what good is the ketchup without the burger?

My purpose today is not to put anyone down. Nor is what I have to say of a profound nature. With only 15 years in the ministry, I don't pretend to be an expert or authority. I do, however, speak to you from the heart.

Coincidentally or not, I was just completing a six-week stint of teaching sophomore religion in one of our area Lutheran high schools when I received the invitation to deliver a paper to this conference on "The Gospel in the Classroom." Six weeks does not an expert make!

But that six-week experience in the classroom coupled with many other "discoveries" moved me to accept the challenge. May God bless this presentation and may He use it to His glory.

When I graduated from the seminary, I entered the world as, I expect, each of my classmates entered it: determined to single-handedly convert it in a year's time. I had all the answers, youthful vigor and energy, and what I couldn't do with the Gospel I did with the Law.

And I was loyal. No one dare put down the Wisconsin Synod to my face! It was WELS uber alles! And my sermons had a dignified theme with the right number of equally divided parts. I opened all meetings with hearty, doctrinal, well-written prayers, made sure all materials I used had the WELS imprimatur, and talked a lot about evangelism.

Now, only 15 years past, with the "Look Who's 40" banner hanging behind me on the wall, I view things somewhat differently. I smile on the inside when observing the "fresh-out-of-the-sem" recruits, not in disrespect, not in pride, but with a few gray hairs of experience and (hopefully) wisdom that can't be taught in the classroom. I see myself in those fresh recruits, thank God for them, and know that He will bless their ministries as He has so bountifully blessed mine.

And let me emphatically state, I am deeply grateful to my Lord for the Wisconsin Synod, her grade schools, academies, colleges, and seminary. I mean no disrespect to our schools, teachers, and professors. There is a dedication to God's holy and inspired Word in our synodical system that owes all praise and thanks to God.

Having said that, I can't help feeling, however, that there have been times in my Christian education when the burger was missing. Likewise in my ministry. I know that our lay people have felt it - have questioned it - have tried to correct it. I know that more than a few Christians committed to Jesus have left our circles because of it, and others have felt the tug to do the same. Only family ties or their historical WELS loyalty have kept them from making the move.

You may be wondering what this personal (and subjective) opinion has to do with the assigned topic. I hope that as the paper unfolds, you'll make the connection. If you disagree, that's surely your privilege. If you agree, then may we, under Jesus, strive to improve our individual ministries.

Let me lead into this paper by addressing the terms in our theme, "The Gospel in the Classroom." The Gospel - "The Good News that Jesus died for my sins." Yes. But so much more. One can talk all day about the historical facts of Calvary with no burger in the box. Have we perhaps limited the Gospel to napkin, ketchup, and mustard? Have we forgotten the power of the Gospel to change lives? Have we wrapped up the Gospel in a neat little package and called it "church service, Bible class, or religion class" and thus segregated it from the rest of our lives?

The Classroom - "A room for recitations, etc. of a class in a school or college," (Webster.) Yes. But so much more. I submit that more life-changing principles are taught and caught outside the classroom than in it, and that the opportunities for sharing the "Gospel" are greater in the gymnasium and on the playground. With that, we begin!

We've all had a favorite teacher in our lives, either in our elementary days or in our years of secondary education. What was it that made them special? Their intelligence? Perhaps. Their wit, charm, personality? Possibly. More than likely, however, it was their ability to be frank, firm, and honest, and at the same time full of love. Those qualities can't be faked. Children of all ages can see right through phony love. All the kind words we use are proven true or false by our actions, and children have little difficulty in determining the genuine from the counterfeit.

One teacher that I was privileged to have many years ago is still teaching at the same school. She came to our town unattached, and is now a grandmother with one of her grandchildren as a student. When asked whether her grandchild called her "Grandma" or Mrs. _____, she answered, "Grandma." She quickly and lovingly added, "But it doesn't really matter what she calls me because they're all my children." That kind of love

is real. That's the Gospel-love of Jesus that will do more and go farther than all the napkins, ketchup and mustard in the world!

When we as pastors and teachers "preach the Gospel," we must do more than talk about historical facts. Make no mistake, our salvation is the direct result of the historical fact that Jesus suffered, died, and rose again from the grave. The cross and the empty tomb are the symbols of a victory that Jesus has won for me and all people of the world. Nor am I implying that salvation must be "felt" before it's real. But we can't stop there! The Gospel is also a living force within us, compelling us to live and work in love.

What I'm saying can best be illustrated by a personal example. When I waved goodbye to my mom and dad that September afternoon in 1961, standing outside the men's dorm at Dr. Martin Luther High School, I was totally devastated. I've never felt such alone-ness before nor since. I was certain that the Lord wanted me in the full-time ministry (though still not clear whether as a teacher or pastor,) but the thought of not seeing my parents, my home, my church, my friends until Thanksgiving was terribly painful. Many of you have felt that pain too.

At that time I was also so very naive. I was expecting DMLHS to be one step closer to heaven. I was looking forward to enjoying the Christian fellowship of new classmates and professors. The pain of loneliness was great, but I was comforted by looking forward to the great Christian experience I would be sharing with fellow believers.

It didn't take long for the vision of that DMLHS dreamworld to fade. A handful of sophomores took care of that. I spent that evening getting "90's" from those loving, caring, understanding upperclassmen, learning what being a "Fuchs" was all about. (For those who may not know, a 90 is a beating with a wire coathanger.) I learned words that I hadn't heard before. Was forced to listen to stories that would have offended many non-Christians. I couldn't believe what was happening. I just couldn't believe it. What was this place? How could God be here? Where was the love of Jesus that I had learned through my parents, teachers, and pastor?

It was only by the grace of God that I stayed in that dormitory. Likewise, it was only by His grace that I kept the faith.

Many didn't stay, however. A good many fine Christian girls and boys went home. Homesickness was often given as the reason, but we know better. If they had found the tender compassion of Jesus, which they so desperately needed in the absence of their parents, they would very likely be pastors and teachers today, and very good ones. Others went home so spiritually drained that they prefer not even think about, much less talk about those days.

Yes, I know that kids do grow up. Many of those who inflicted the most physical and spiritual pain in their younger years are now dedicated teachers and pastors. God's grace is truly amazing! Maybe living in the dorm at DMLHS did separate the men from the boys. Maybe it is a case of the "survival of the fittest," but does it have to be that way? The end result is that the survivors often come out of the mold four or eight years later with a certain callousness, coldness, and lovelessness about them. It's only after getting back among our laypeople that we begin to shed this callous and loveless attitude.

About 14 years after that Fuchs year experience, now serving as a parish pastor, I had a young man in the congregation who wanted to become a Christian Day School teacher. Off he went to MLA. He was able to get home for weekends more than I had since Saturday classes were no longer being held and since he lived much closer to home. I soon sensed that things were not going well for him. We talked often, but it was obvious that he didn't really want to talk about the real issues. Sensing the problem, I told him of my experiences. Then out it gushed - he shared his pain. "Pastor," he said, "I'm losing my faith. I can't go back. I can't go back. If I go back to that place, I'll lose my faith."

I encouraged him to keep trying. We prayed. I wrote letters to the school. Finally, he dropped out. "I've got to get back among the Christians at the public school," he said. "Christians live their faith at the public school more than at that school! When I share my faith at the public school they listen. When I share it at MLA they laugh!" How sad!

I use these personal experiences to illustrate what I mean when I say that teaching the Gospel goes far beyond drilling the historical facts of Jesus' life. The professors at DMLHS did a fine job of giving the facts

through classroom lectures. What I recall of the chapel talks, they, too, presented the facts clearly. But when I met with my advisors, I don't recall them ever asking me "What has Jesus been doing in your life?", or "Let's pray together and praise the name of Jesus," or "I'll be praying for you." I do recall them saying something like, "You've got to get this grade up or else!" "What's wrong with you, kid, you don't seem to be fitting into our neat little system. Surely the problem must be you because it can't be us!"

I'm convinced that we (myself included) have been guilty of confining the Gospel message to the head. At the same time, we've actually discouraged the application of the Gospel to the heart. We've stressed the objective power of the Gospel to the extent of actually hindering its subjective results. For example, personal testimonies of what Jesus has done in the lives of individuals have, to a large extent, been frowned upon. We aren't accustomed to sharing the things of our heart. We're afraid of being viewed as a "Pietist," or even worse, an emotional Baptist"! Verbally expressing our faith outside the classroom or church building is seldom done, yet we wonder why our "Evangelism" efforts are so fruitless. We shouldn't be surprised. After all, if we can't even share the meaning of Jesus in our lives with our Christian colleagues, is it any wonder that we keep our mouths buttoned out in the world? We simply are not experiencing the freedom of the Gospel that Jesus has called us to. We don't feel free to openly and verbally praise Jesus, pray to Him, raise our arms in worship to Him, clap our hands in spontaneous joy for His grace and goodness. Consequently, sharing our faith with others has become a frightening burden rather than an overwhelming joy!

What would happen if: If those sophomores had taken me into my room and openly shared their faith with me. If they had expressed their fears and confessed their trust in Jesus. If they had prayed with me and for me. If they had told me, "Whenever you have a problem or need a friend, just look one of us up." If they had read Scripture with me and joined in singing songs that praise the name of Jesus. What if? That's what Jesus would have done.

That's what I should have done when I became a sophomore. But I didn't. No, I didn't subject Fuches to physical or spiritual torment, I didn't use God's name in vain or use gutter language, but at the same time, I didn't do anything to attempt to change the system. As a survivor, I developed that same callousness that I had learned from those who had learned it from their upperclassmen who had, in turn, learned it from theirs.

I believe that when one comes through such a system, one can easily become what I'll call a "Professional Christian." Who or what are Professional Christians? I'm not speaking of Christians who have a professional position in the business world. Rather, I use the term to describe that which can so easily happen to us as pastors and teachers. We do a fantastic job, humanly speaking, of preaching and teaching the Good News of God's love from the pulpit or in the classroom. We have more Biblical head-knowledge than many or most leaders in other Christian denominations. We're very professional in our methods and presentations. Doctrinally, we're sound, and proud of it. No "decision theology," no evolutionary concepts, no secular humanism, ever escape our notice. We're sharp! We're trained to sniff out false doctrine.

For example, last year a student at one of our synodical schools was writing a paper on the "Navigators." Since I serve as a campus pastor, he wrote to me for information. I contacted a member of the Navigators who sent him a wealth of information. Upon completion of the paper, the student sent me a copy. The format did not surprise me: one page of background history, one page of "good" things done by the Navigators, and eight pages outlining the doctrinal errors. I don't fault the student nor his teacher. His paper simply reflects our system.

What the paper didn't mention was that the Navigators are reaching thousands and thousands of unsaved university students each year with the love of Jesus Christ, while we struggle to maintain a part-time campus ministry that does little reaching out beyond our own students.

We can easily become "Professional Christians" in another sense, namely, by limiting the Gospel to historical facts taught in the classroom or preached from the pulpit. But outside the classroom or church walls, we set aside our professional duty. "It's not in my Call," is an example of this. Rushing past the hurting pupil on our way to the classroom or brushing aside the hurting member because "Don't you know I've got a sermon to write?" are further examples. Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan addresses "Professional Christianity." I

maintain again, that the Gospel can more effectively be taught through our lives than through our mouths. A picture - yes, an example, is still worth a thousand words.

When I was in grade school, one of my teachers once came to my home after school to look at my electronic experiments. I know now, of course, that my so-called experiments were of little importance. But I still remember how proud I was to have my teacher in my house. How happy I was that he took the time to come to look at my experiments and that he showed a genuine interest in me and my projects. His visit made my day - my week - my year! No, it wasn't in his Call! The truth of the matter is, he wasn't even my regular teacher! He was an emergency teacher filling in while my regular teacher was having surgery. But his example is, in my estimation, that which separates a Christian education from just another education. A Christian education dare not be defined as an education where Christ is taught. It's so much more. It's an education where Jesus' love is lived! It's an education that speaks to the heart as opposed to just another education that speaks to the head. Jesus' presence must be felt, not just talked about. His love must be expressed by our actions, not just whispered about in the abstract.

Permit me to pause at this point to show you two brief segments from a Christian movie entitled, "A Father, A Son, and a Three Mile Run." It's a tremendously powerful movie.

In the first segment, a teacher is sharing her concern to a child's parents. She's concerned that the child probably won't go very far in life because he doesn't seem to have a great capacity for learning. Notice her professionalism. Notice, too, her lovelessness.

In the second segment, this same father is sharing with that same son an experience from his childhood days. Notice the act of love in this teacher whom he describes. Notice, also, the impact that that simple act of love has had on his life.

SHOW FILM CLIPS...

The Lord has shown me many things since I have been in the ministry. He has tugged at my heart, brought about some life-transforming changes, and to a certain extent has liberated me. One tremendously important growing experience has come through an adult confirmand. This man had not used the Bible before and had all kinds of misconceptions about it. But when the Holy Spirit got ahold of his heart and brought him to saving faith, he had an insatiable desire to study the Scriptures. And he still does - reading and studying several chapters daily.

He began reading the Bible without bias - no preconceived notions. He read, and reread, he questioned, he studied, and he grew. But what he did for me is what I'd like to pass on to you. By his questions, he forced me to look closely at Scripture. He showed me how Jesus, in His life and ministry, emphasized not passive faith, not fit and proper "religious" actions, not a critical, abrasive, self-righteous attitude, but rather - and this is nothing profound or new - love! This man forced me to look at myself, my ministry, my attitudes, in the light of the love of Jesus Christ.

What was it that placed a continual burden on Jesus' heart? Was it not the self-righteous, hypocritical actions of the Pharisees? The whole New Testament deals with attitudes. The more I studied with him, the more Pharisee I saw in myself (and still do.) Frequently this man would ask, "If this is what Jesus said for us to do, why doesn't your church do it?" Simple enough question, but the answers don't come quite so easily! Simply saying, "Well, you see, it's part of the system!" begs the question.

The truth is, I believe, that all of us need to restudy the Bible without our preconceived notions. The fact that our synod went on record in convention this summer urging a top priority on spiritual renewal leads me to believe that many others have come to the same conclusion. Many of our people must be sensing that we have plenty of napkins, ketchup, mustard, and special sauce, but have somehow misplaced the sandwich.

To this point, much of what I have said has been negative. I don't apologize for that. What I have said has perhaps been said hundreds of times before in private. Now we can prayerfully discuss it in the open.

I know, of course, that you didn't come just to hear the negatives. Nor do I want to leave you with an empty box. I have some suggestions.

First of all, I believe that the timing is perfect for positive change under God's gracious hand of blessing. All of synod is ready and open for change, for "spiritual renewal." With more day schools closing than opening, enrollment in synodical training schools critically low, synodical dollars in short supply, a moratorium on mission openings, and trained teachers and pastors standing idle in the marketplace, the time is ripe for change. God wants to turn these problems into opportunities. Undoubtedly He wants us to recognize that these problems are merely symptoms of a greater problem. We are ripe for "spiritual renewal."

We must begin by getting into the Word. I've spoken those words hundreds of times before from the head, but I speak them today from the heart. As pastors and teachers, we've been in the Word since grade school, high school, or at very least, since college. We've always used the Word to prepare our lessons and sermons. In the Word we've read about God's love over and over again. We've read what Jesus did in love, what Paul spoke in love, and what John wrote about love. We know all about love. So did those upperclassmen who took pleasure in hazing Fuchses. So did I when I did nothing to attempt to change the system. So do I yet when I fail to feel for and respond to the needs of my members or the people whose paths the Lord directs across mine. So do you as teachers when you view your classroom as nothing more than "going to work." But knowing about love and responding in love are as far removed as the head is from the heart.

Secondly, we need to see Jesus. We need to see Him as the giving, caring, understanding Savior that He is. We need to view the love that motivated His every action. We need to look closely at the way He dealt with people - how He came down hard on the self-righteous do-gooders, at the same time dealing with compassion and mercy on the "publicans and sinners." We need to see how He challenged those hung up on ritual and how He praised the humble. And last but not least, we need to be sensitive to the feelings and concerns of others. "How would Jesus respond to this situation?" must be the question that we repeatedly ask.

Thirdly there's prayer. Study the Scriptures and see how Jesus used prayer. Consider this story:

Bill James was one of some 500 employees in a manufacturing plant. There was an excellent canteen and lounging room and after lunch each day, over a period of time an informal open forum developed where they discussed topics of general interest for the balance of their lunch period.

One day their discussion centered on Christianity and hypocrisy. Some very harsh and cruel things were said about Christians. When Bill James, a Christian man, could stand it no longer, he rose to his feet and said, "Men, you have been saying some very hard things about Christians. Now I admit that there are hypocrites in the church, but I also want you to know that there are quite a lot of sincere Christians, and I myself very humbly claim to sincerely believe in Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Saviour!"

He was about to sit down when a man said, "Just a minute, Bill. I would like you to answer some questions. I take it from what you have just said that you believe the Bible to be the Word of God?" "I certainly do," said Bill. "I believe it from cover to cover!"

"Then do you believe that all men out of Christ are lost and on their way to outer darkness?" "Yes, I do," he said. And so the dialogue proceeded.

"Do you think most of us men are out of Christ and therefore lost?" "Yes, boys, I am very sorry indeed to say I do believe that."

"Do you believe in the power and the effectiveness of prayer?" "Yes, I have had many answers to my prayers!"

"How long have you worked here with us?" "Four years."

"How often in that period have you spent a night in prayer for our lost souls?" Bill's head did not seem quite so high as he said, "I am sorry boys, but I cannot say I ever spent a night in prayer for you."

"Well, Bill, how often have you spent part of a night in prayer for us, say from eight to midnight?" Bill's head was going lower and he said, "I'm sorry, but I cannot say I ever spent half a night in prayer for you."

"Well, Bill, we will take your word for it—quickly add together all the time you have spent in prayer for us during the past week; how much would it be all told?" "I'm sorry, fellows," said Bill, "but I cannot say that I have spent any time in prayer for you this past week."

"Well, Bill, that is just the kind of hypocrisy we have been talking about!"

If we found ourselves in a similar position today, would this happen to us also?

Jesus frequently spent entire nights in prayer. How much time have I spent in prayer for my parishioners? How about you for your individual students?

Fourthly, loosen up! We can't make the Gospel more powerful than it already is, but we can hinder its effectiveness. Let the fruits of the Holy Spirit flow from your life. Consider yourself as a cup. The Holy Spirit pours His gifts into you as water into a cup. When the water runs over the cup, it's not the cup producing the water. It's still the Holy Spirit who is doing the producing. Likewise we can do nothing by ourselves or of our own strength. But sometimes we tend to put a lid on the cup which not only prevents the Holy Spirit from pouring His gifts into us but at the same time, keeps the results (fruits) of His gifts from flowing from us. Maybe we use (or misuse) our German ancestry as an excuse for our up-tightness. Why? Don't be afraid to use every opportunity in or outside the classroom to speak of Jesus. Don't hesitate to pray freely and regularly with your students during the day. Open up to your students. Let them know you spiritually. Share your love for Jesus. Share your weaknesses too. Let your students know that you struggle against the devil, world, and your flesh too.

One thing we like to do is segregate the spiritual from the secular. We talk about "worship time," or "devotions," as though that were the spiritual, and everything else as the secular. Consequently, our students and members soon get the idea not only that we can separate the two, but that there is no relationship between them. That's why previously mentioned students can sing praises to God in "chapel" and curse His name in the dormitory. How else could they learn of Jesus' love in the classroom and haze underclassmen outside the classroom? The truth is, we can't separate spiritual from secular. If Jesus' love is real in the classroom, then it must be real outside the classroom. We can change this spiritual vs. secular attitude by bringing Jesus into every possible situation, and by dealing in the love of Jesus at all times. If our only mention of Jesus and our only prayers to Him are in a "worship" setting, then it's not hard to see why our members and pupils fail to tie Him into their daily lives. In the Christian Day School classroom we have an ideal opportunity to proclaim the love of Jesus in dozens of ways each day. Even more opportunities are available on the playground.

A new Christian movie called "Caught" will be making the rounds in the theatres soon. See it! See it again! We as Christian pastors and teachers can really grow through this film. While unbelievers can relate to the main character, a young American in search of his father in Amsterdam, we need to relate to a young Evangelist from India named Rach. The love of Jesus shines as clearly through this young man from India as I have ever witnessed. After seeing the movie, you'll know exactly what Jesus has called us to do. You'll know what the love of Jesus is all about in the lives of His people. You'll feel guilt and shame over your own failures in living the Gospel, but you'll also feel the power of that Gospel to motivate you to renewed zeal and commitment. We need a role model, if you will, outside the system. Since most of us have come through the same system, we need to take a close look at others if we are to improve our Gospel living. Jesus is, of course, our number one model, but when you see Rach in action, you'll see Jesus' love shining clearly through.

Then too, we need to be careful not to be a trumpet sounding an unclear signal. Follow through with the Gospel outside the classroom. Today there are hundreds of good Christian films and videos available for rental. A store in Minneapolis, Praise Unlimited, will give you 30 free video rentals for a \$75 membership fee. They'll send them right to your school. A horrified layperson recently reported that her child saw "Rambo" at a church gathering. She was understandably angry since she was trying to instill Christian values in her child. There is enough of the world in our churches and schools already without deliberately bringing it in.

Likewise, there is some really fine Christian music on the market and Christian radio today that praises the name of Jesus. Why not let our students know that we listen to it and encourage them to do the same? How can we praise Jesus in the classroom and sing of adultery, fornication, and lust on the playground? With the trumpet giving an unclear signal, our children can easily justify a segregation of spiritual vs. secular in their minds and lives.

We live in a changing world. According to the Fullerton Police Department and the California Department of Education, the top seven discipline problems in the public schools in the 1940's were:

- 1) Talking
- 2) Chewing gum
- 3) Making noise
- 4) Running in the halls
- 5) Getting out of turn in line
- 6) Wearing improper clothing
- 7) Not putting paper in wastebaskets

Some 40 years later the list looks like this:

- 1) Drug abuse
- 2) Alcohol abuse
- 3) Pregnancy
- 4) Suicide
- 5) Rape
- 6) Robbery
- 7) Assault
- 8) Burglary
- 9) Arson
- 10) Bombings
- 11) Murder
- 12) Absenteeism
- 13) Vandalism
- 14) Extortion
- 15) Gang warfare
- 16) Abortion
- 17) Venereal disease

Yes, things have changed! But our weapon remains the same - the Gospel of Jesus, taught and lived, learned and shared.

After winning the American League West pennant with the Minnesota Twins, Greg Gagne told the world that the thrill of having Jesus Christ in his life was greater than winning the championship. Praise God! The interviewers will probably be staying away from him from now on. They don't want to hear from such "radicals." But I'd guess that, if given the chance, he would say the same after winning the American League championship and again after winning the World Series.

Is that thrill of Jesus in your life as real for you? Or are you sometimes actually envious of new Christians, their joy and love for the Gospel? Do you somehow picture Jesus as "present" and yet not "real" in your life? If so, you'll join me in the Scriptures in search of "spiritual renewal."

You'll discover with me the mystery of "Christ in you," a mystery that, although mentioned well over 100 times in the New Testament, may have escaped our notice. A mystery that cannot be humanly manufactured, is not contingent upon our "feeling" or "seeing," but which is ours by faith. St Paul encourages us, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus IS IN YOU - unless, of course, you fail the test," (II Corinthians 13:5.) When we recognize the awesome power of this mystery, Jesus will also be very real in our classrooms, wherever they may be.

And concerning the radical nature of the Gospel, you may wish to view a video series by Dr. Anthony Campolo entitled "I Have Decided To Live Like A Believer." He tells it like it is. He won't always make you comfortable, but then, maybe we've been comfortable too long! The Gospel does call for and bring about radical changes in our lives. Observing Jesus' love in action as He walked the earth, and really listening to what He says will reawaken us to the radical nature of the Christian life.

I'd like to wrap up this presentation with an example that I believe brings together all the thoughts expressed in this paper.

Picture this scene: You are a day school principal coaching a girls' basketball team in an important game on the way to the play-offs. Only seconds remain on the clock and the score is tied. The ball skirts out of bounds on your side of the floor near your bench. The referees are not close enough to the action to see which team last touched the ball. They are about to call a jump ball which would give the ball to your team. Parents and fans are screaming. You, however, saw the action on the floor. You knew that your team last touched the ball and that it should be given to the opposing team. In the heat and excitement of the last moments of the game, what would you do?

I know what one of you did. I was there. You walked over to the referee and told him what you saw. You told him the ball belonged to the opponent. You preached a sermon, you taught a lesson, that could never have been taught in a classroom. And by the way, the opponent went on to score and thus win the game. But I suddenly knew which team was the real winner! That little example brought home to me the real meaning of the oft-used phrase, "It's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game." Those students, those screaming parents, and yes, we few pastors in the seats were taught a most valuable lesson. We learned on the basketball floor that the Gospel in the classroom is also the Gospel in the gymnasium.

May that blessed Gospel of Jesus, that power of God unto salvation, motivate us to boldly live what we teach. May we never again be content to live on ketchup, mustard, and special sauce. And may that Gospel move us to recommit and rededicate our lives and our ministries to serving our Lord Jesus through our students with more than an empty box. We and they need so much more. His name is Jesus!