

Sermon – National Lutheran Schools Week: The Great Assignment

Pastor Ed Blonski | January 22, 2023

This is National Lutheran Schools Week! And this weekend we begin our week-long celebration of St. Matthew Lutheran Early Childhood Center.

Since 1864, the men and women of St. Matthew Lutheran prioritized raising up the next generation of Lutheran Christians through education.

Our school started very small, with just a handful of children taught by the pastor on the back porch of the parsonage.



Through the years we have been blessed by many teachers and students. And while faces, names, and numbers have changed, many things have not.

Sermon:

"National Lutheran Schools Week:
The Great Assignment"

Matthew 28:18-20

Making
Disciples
for Life



NATIONAL
LUTHERAN
SCHOOLS WEEK 2023

The priority of sharing Jesus Christ and His love for us.

Celebrating the gifts of God in our lives.

And teachers assigning work to students!

That's what teachers do; they give assignments. The type and complexity of the assignments vary with the age of the student and the content of the subject matter.

Mrs. Split and Mrs. Leonard may say, "Take this worksheet home with you."

Mrs. Meyer or Mrs. Lott may have assigned students to practice reading with a parent.

Mrs. Lazarus may have assigned math problems assigned as homework.

And when you get to high school the assignments get more sophisticated.

This is nothing really new to our culture and time.

Even 2000 years ago, teachers – called rabbis in Israel – would give their students – called disciples – various assignments.

The teachers in Jesus' day gave assignments, too.

But for most of them, their "assignments" led disciples to the philosophies and ways of the world and away from the truth of God's Word. These kinds of lessons taught a life of guilt and, ultimately, eternal condemnation.

Then came along Jesus. He also was known as a rabbi, but Jesus was different. He was known to be "a teacher come from God" (John 3:2).

Ironically, Jesus, the Son of God, was given an "assignment" - from His heavenly Father. The assignment was to enter the "classroom" of the fallen creation. Jesus, the holy, all-powerful Son of God, was to take on human flesh so that He might not only teach the lesson of the kingdom of God but complete the greatest assignment ever given: the saving of sinners.



When I was a student, I had the occasional incomplete assignments. I'm sure you can all relate! And that naturally resulted in a less-than-perfect score.

When it comes to the assignment that we all have been given to complete by God – to keep His Law perfectly – you know, as well as I do, that it is impossible for us to meet God's demand to be perfect students.

God's assignment of keeping the Ten Commandments gives our grade: "Failed!"

The Good News is that by His sacrificial death, Jesus completes all that is required for our salvation.

From the cross, Jesus announces, "It is finished" (John 19:30). The sacrifice is completed and accepted.



Jesus' completion was affirmed and announced to the disciples, "He has risen from the dead" (Matt. 28:7). Jesus' resurrection affirmed that His completion was for the disciples and for the world.

Jesus' completion was witnessed by the disciples. Jesus' resurrection was the message of the Pentecost appearance of the Spirit and was the proclamation of those whom the Spirit had visited.

The blessings of Jesus' completion were not received by intellectual assent or completing human assignments, but by faith alone. The salvation "assignment" is completed and is ours by grace through faith (Rom. 3:22-28).

While all schools and teachers give assignments in order to have students learn and be able to grow up to be responsible and educated adults, Lutheran schools have – for the last 500 years – taken on an additional assignment in education!

The mission and ministry of a Lutheran school is to celebrate and share that the Father assigned salvation to the Son. The Son perfectly completed the assignment; the Spirit, through the Means of Grace, brings the message and blessings of the completed assignment to the church, children, staff, parents, friends, neighbors and the world.

Matthew 28, commonly called the Great Commission, is also Jesus' Great Assignment to do just that!

Shortly before His ascension, Jesus “assigns:” *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”* (v. 19).

The apostles’ Spirit-led response to the assignment is shared in the Book of Acts.

Peter and John witness boldly on the streets of Jerusalem.

Saul, once a persecutor of Christians, becomes a missionary to Gentiles.

Deacons serve widows and the needy.

Martyrs give their lives to defend the Gospel (Stephen).

Others share their witness with travelers (Philip) who take the message to another area of the world.

In the centuries since the call of the first disciples, Jesus, through His church, has continued to call and equip His disciples to “make disciples.”

Lutheran pastors – ordained ministers – begin their service to the congregation promising to nurture disciples as they “faithfully instruct both young and old in the chief articles of Christian doctrine” (Lutheran Service Book: Agenda, p. 179).

Lutheran schoolteachers – many of them commissioned ministers – are privileged to “make disciples,” “trusting in God’s care, [seeking] to grow in love for those you serve, [striving] for excellence in your skills, and [adorning] the Gospel of Christ with a godly life” (LSB Agenda, p. 216).

Whether commissioned or not, teachers of St. Matthew Lutheran Church and Early Childhood Center continue to make disciples “of all nations.”

But the devil hates this! He will stop at nearly nothing to destroy Lutheran schools.

He has tempted many to sometime question the “business” of a Lutheran school ministry.

Additional personnel and facilities naturally put a strain on budgets.

It may be difficult to find qualified Christian teachers.

Sometimes state and other worldly standards of accreditation challenge boards and administrators.

The time and energy demands for the pastoral ministry and other staff may increase.

At times, we may question the “assignment” of Lutheran education. Why is this so hard? Couldn’t we use our resources in better ways? How do we assemble a strong ministry team?

The answer is, “We have been given the assignment to make disciples.”

We have heard Jesus say, “Let the little children come to me,” and we are humbled to make disciples of little children. We had the joy of unchurched parents asking to have their children baptized because a teacher or another parent has taken Jesus’ assignment personally and witnessed to another family. The school & church family demonstrated deeds of discipleship in caring for another child and family who has faced illness or experienced grief.

Lutheran schools make disciples for life and for eternal life.

In her book *Go and Make Disciples* (Concordia Publishing House, 1992), author Jane Fryar tells the story of 7-year-old Jon.

Jon’s single mother brought her struggling son to the principal’s office at the neighborhood Lutheran school to enroll him. Throughout the school year, Jon grew academically, socially and spiritually in his new school.

Late one Friday afternoon in early spring, the telephone rang in the principal’s office. Jon’s mom called to share that Jon would not be coming back to school. A drunk driver had hit Jon as he was riding his bicycle, and Jon had not survived the accident.

At the funeral home, Mom let the principal hold her close as the two cried together. “I’m so, so very sorry,” choked the principal. “I wish I could have ...”

“No, don’t ... don’t apologize,” the grieving woman whispered through her tears. “I asked you to tell Jon about Jesus, and you did. Jon is with Jesus now, and we will be, too, someday. Thank you. Thank you for what you gave him, and for what you gave me.”

The Lutheran school had been God’s instrument of sharing the Means of Grace with Jon and his family. God’s servants in the Lutheran school had been called to “make a disciple” of Jon, and they had done so for his life in the school and for life eternal.

St. Matthew Lutheran has been blessed with a school ministry from the beginning, during the Lincoln Administration and the U.S. Civil War.

We have gone through many changes of growth and decline.

But one thing has never changed and – by the grace of God will never change:



God will continue to direct and bless us as we “make disciples for life” in Jesus’ name. Amen.