

**Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles**  
**Fourth Sunday after Epiphany – January 29, 2017**  
**Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister**

**Matthew 5:1-12**

**For Reflection**

"Let us remember: One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world."  
- Malala Yousafzai, Pakistani Activist b.1997

**Called to Teach**

The word Rabbi means My Teacher. It comes from Aramaic – *rabh*: master/teacher + *ī*: my. Rabboni, a title bestowed upon Jesus twice in scripture, is the emphatic form. (It's pronounced rabbon-ee, but that sounds too much like baloney - so I say rabbon-eye.) It is a title of respect and "refers to the top religious leader in Judaism, like the president of the Great Sanhedrin who functioned as the religious leader of the nation."

<http://biblehub.com/greek/4462.htm>

So, what was the Sanhedrin?

The ancient Jewish court system [of the time]. The Great Sanhedrin was the supreme religious body in the Land of Israel during the time of the Holy Temple. There were also smaller religious Sanhedrins in every town in the Land of Israel, as well as a civil political-democratic Sanhedrin...

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-sanhedrin>

[The word Sanhedrin comes from] "sitting together," hence "assembly" or "council". [It] was an assembly of twenty-three to seventy-one men appointed in every city in the Land of Israel.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanhedrin>

The Great Sanhedrin was a religious assembly of 71 sages who met in the Chamber of Hewn Stones in the Temple in Jerusalem... It was the final authority on Jewish law and any scholar who went against its decisions was put to death as a *zaken mamre* (rebellious elder)...

The Sanhedrin judged accused lawbreakers, but could not initiate arrests. It required a minimum of two witnesses to convict a suspect...

The Great Sanhedrin dealt with religious and ritualistic Temple matters, criminal matters appertaining to the secular court, proceedings in connection with the discovery of a corpse, trials of adulterous wives, tithes, preparation of Torah Scrolls for the king and the Temple, drawing up the calendar and the solving of difficulties relating to ritual law...

Local Sanhedrins consisted of different numbers of sages, depending on the nature of the offenses it dealt with. For example, only a Sanhedrin of 71 could judge a whole tribe, a false prophet or the high priest. There were Sanhedrins of 23 for capital cases and of three scholars to deal with civil or lesser criminal cases.

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-sanhedrin>

So, knowing what the Sanhedrin was and did, you can see why they took offense at an itinerate teacher from Galilee being called “Rabboni.” It parallels the offense taken by Herod at hearing that a new “king” had been born. Not that Jesus claimed any of these titles himself – but his followers did – and that is what mattered.

*My son, Peter, used to claim that he ruled our household. I pointed out to him that he may be the Prince – but I was the Prince’s mother which made me the Queen and daddy the King. The hierarchy got sorted out eventually. If we had abdicated, you can imagine the straits we’d be in now – figuring out which military school might be willing to take our son the tyrant and straighten him out.*

Jesus was NOT the president of the Great Sanhedrin, as much as his disciples would wish him to be. But he was their master teacher. They claimed him as their rabbi and he did teach. His style was rabbinical or talmudic – responding to a question with more questions or a story – leading the questioner to think about multiple possible answers. He also did what the best teachers do – led by example – acting out the compassion he suggested might be the preferred course of action in a world where G-d is actually in charge.

In our story, G-d did NOT send in the clowns – nor did G-d send in an emperor to make the world a better place. G-d chose to send in a baby of questionable parentage who grew up to be a working class, itinerate teacher. A TEACHER. In Jewish communities, this made perfect sense. The synagogue as a gathering place for worship and study – and the rabbi as teacher – were revered but not set apart. One’s relationship to G-d was a matter of every moment in life. The synagogue was where the people were taught the rituals and values that were to be implemented in the home and workplace. Teaching and learning were foundational to living faithfully. So, of course, G-d sent a TEACHER to re-educate humankind on the basics of concepts like love and justice, humility and hospitality.

In addition to my parents, my teachers were the ones who instilled in me the values I live out every day. Their voices are still in my head – describing photosynthesis and California Missions – encouraging my introverted self how to debate and practice citizenship – putting the biological and physiological ground under my feet – and instilling in my deepest soul a love of language and literature that set the course for my professional life. If my anxiety disorder had not steered me away from managing a classroom, I would have certainly been a High School English Teacher.

As I wrestle with the education of my son, my respect and love for teachers has deepened beyond words. Teaching is a calling and it is evident that the people educating my son have been called for a host of reasons and because they are skilled in ways that amaze me. Teachers are the ones who have identified Peter's issues and guided us in addressing them. Teachers are the ones who have trained in specific techniques to help kids with special brains learn how to read our secret codes of language and mathematics. Teachers have intervened in destructive behaviors and taught conflict management skills and made self-regulation doable in a caring community.

Peter's school has a set of eight Guiding Principles that I recognize as my own core values – even though I was never taught them in so many words.

**Aveson's Mission Statement:**

Aveson redefines teaching and learning so all children have the opportunity to experience an exemplary public education. We provide the right instruction for every student every day by supporting innovative teaching methods and a personalized, experience-based learning environment to ensure no child is left unknown.

**Our mission is supported by the following Guiding Principles:**

Vision means seeing what could be and what will be and living the difference.

There is no such thing as too much truth.

How you say it is as important as what you say.

When identifying problems, offer strategies and solutions.

Everyone's time is valuable.

Your commitment is to make others around you successful.

Our growth together requires us to grow individually.

Integrity is everything.

Do any of these speak to you?

Do you remember a teacher who inspired you –

to whom you can trace any of your guiding principles?

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In this world – the one in which we currently reside – teachers are more crucial than ever. Teachers are the ones to guard and pass on proven facts rather than alternative facts. Teachers are the stewards of our literature and champions of language. Teachers are the curators of art and imagination and their subversive effect on power and culture. Teachers are in the forefront of communication skills and conflict management strategies from the preschool play-yard to the faculty forum. Teachers are the courageous explorers – forging ahead into the frontiers of the human mind – and finding ways to open new territory, keep us curious about new people and ideas, rescue us from insularity and fear.

The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus taught his students that “change” is certain and because things always change, we can never step twice into the same stream.

Various theories of social progress have helped us to imagine ourselves on a spiral – which appears to be cyclical but is always trending upward toward an ideal.

Our teachers strengthen us in times of destruction and decay, fill us with hope for the next round of change which will return us to our better selves.

Jesus taught us many things, one of the most important being the transformational role of Teachers in our midst.

May our teachers, may all teachers, be blessed and upheld in these days and the days ahead.

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Scripture Reading for Sunday January 29, 2017 – Epiphany 4 – Year A

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### **Matthew 5:1-12**

1 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 Then **he began to speak, and taught them**, saying:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

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rhabbouni: my master, my teacher  
Original Word: ῥαββουνί  
Part of Speech: Aramaic Transliterated Word (Indeclinable)  
Transliteration: rhabbouni  
Phonetic Spelling: (hrab-bon-ee)  
Short Definition: Rabbi, my master  
Definition: Rabbi, my master, teacher; a title of respect often applied to Christ.

4462 rhabboní (rabboní) – the emphatic form of 4461 /rhabbí ("rabbi"), note the suffix (-oni). 4462 /rhabboní ("high-rhabbi") refers to the top religious leader in Judaism, like the president of the Great Sanhedrin who functioned as the religious leader of the nation.

Word Origin: of Aramaic origin, cf. rab  
Definition: my master, my teacher

<http://biblehub.com/greek/4462.htm>

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Definition of rabboni  
: master, teacher —used as a Jewish title of respect applied especially to spiritual instructors and learned persons  
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rabboni>

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### The Semitic Background

As evidenced by John's translation, rabboni is not Greek but Semitic. The word is a development of the adjective רב (rab) = great → "chief".<sup>1</sup> A first person pronominal suffix makes רבִּי (rabbi) = "my lord". The form rabboni is from the intensified form rabban (also rabbon in Palestinian Aramaic).<sup>2</sup>

Derived from רב (rab), the intensified form רבֵּן (rabban) is a title for the outstanding scribe.... רב is already used for "teacher in the saying handed down by Jehoshua bPerachiah (c. 110 B.C.): "Get a teacher (רב) and find a fellow-student." The saying shows that a student had to try to gain admittance into the circle of a respected teacher and to engage in the study of Scripture and the tradition in this fellowship.<sup>2</sup> The Jewish Encyclopedia indicates that the intensified form as a title was first used in the first century C.E.:

It was first used of Rabban Gamaliel the elder, Rabban Simeon his son, and Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai, all of whom were patriarchs or presidents of the Sanhedrin.

<http://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/20442/is-there-precedent-perhaps-in-jewish-tradition-for-the-usage-of-rabboni-who>

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rabban  
[rab-uh n, ruh-bahn; Sephardic Hebrew, Ashkenazic Hebrew rah-bahn]  
Spell Syllables  
Word Origin  
noun, plural rabbanim [ruh-bah-nim, rah-buh-neem; Sephardic Hebrew rah-bah-neem; Ashkenazic Hebrew rah-buh-nim, rah-baw-nim] (Show IPA).  
Judaism.  
1.master; teacher (used as a term of address and title of respect for a person ranking higher than a rabbi).  
<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/rabban>

noun, plural rabbis.  
1.the chief religious official of a synagogue, trained usually in a theological seminary and duly ordained, who delivers the sermon at a religious service and performs ritualistic, pastoral, educational, and other functions in and related to his or her capacity as a spiritual leader of Judaism and the Jewish community.  
Compare cantor (def 2).  
2.a title of respect for a Jewish scholar or teacher.  
3.a Jewish scholar qualified to rule on questions of Jewish law.  
4.any of the Jewish scholars of the 1st to 6th centuries a.d. who contributed to the writing, editing, or compiling of the Talmud.  
5.Slang. a personal patron or adviser, as in business.

< Greek rhabbí < Hebrew rabbī my master ( rabh master + -ī my)

<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/rabbi?s=t>