



Opening service. Can you believe it? Where has the summer gone? Or are you on the other end of the spectrum... you've been bored and you can't wait to get back. Parents, maybe you're craving the routine of school. Students, you're sick of answering the typical summer questions: so have you done anything exciting? Did you go on vacation? What grade are you going to be in? Who is your teacher? There's a good one. Who is your teacher going to be this year? Is it Mr. Huebner? Mr. Retzlaff? Mr. Kramer? Mrs. Hussman? Mrs. Kramer? Mrs. Gorske? Mrs. Hartwig? Mrs. Huebner? Mrs. Gosse? Mrs. Lecker? Miss Stratil? Mrs. Engel? Mrs. Heckendorf? Mrs. Hagen? Mrs. Wilson? That's it, right? Who's your teacher? Is it any of the people I mentioned? Or will you have the mystery teacher this year? Did you know we are going to have a mystery teacher this year? Let's see if you can guess who she is.

First of all, let me tell you a little about her. This mystery teacher arrived onto the scene without much fanfare? She wasn't installed in front of a large crowd like teachers often are, like my wife is going to be tonight. Only a handful of people noticed when she originally appeared. Our mystery teacher is pretty amazing. She teaches more than one class as she is able to reach people of all ages. She teaches little ones, working in daycares and preschools. She teaches teenagers. She even teaches adults. She's able to reach and teach people of all languages. She loves her students like no other teacher I've ever seen (no offense to the teachers previously named). She loves students even when they're not so lovable. When her students talk back, she's patient. When her students fail an assignment, she sticks with them until not only do they get a passing grade, she sticks with them until they get a perfect grade. You might say she's all about personal sacrifice. She loves her students so much that there's no doubt in my mind that she would lay down her life for her students. She loves her students not because there is anything special about them, she loves them because that's just the type of person she is. She cherishes her students like they're her own kids, her own treasured possession. She never tires. She never grows weary. She doesn't need or want a summer vacation to recharge her batteries. She's always there. Any guesses as to who the mystery teacher is?

Let me give you a few more clues. Let's talk about what she teaches. Maybe before we talk about what she teaches, let it just be said that she has a tremendous effect on her students. It's amazing to hear her co-workers talk about her, in a positive way. They're not jealous of her, they're just amazed by her. I've heard teachers say in the faculty room, "I can't believe how [the mystery teacher] can get so much out of the students. I can't get Justin to listen to me or be respectful to me, but she does." Then another teacher adds in, "You're right. I can't get Deanna to stop bullying her classmates, but she does. Deanna is even, dare I use the term, loving to her classmates when she's under the mystery teacher's influence." Then the music teacher chimes in, "The only way I can get Brian to come to church when we sing is if I threaten to give him an "F" in music. She gets Brian to come to church even during the summer months and he seems to enjoy it. I just stand in awe of her. What's her secret?" Another teacher adds, "I've even seen her rub off on her student's parents. I've seen how she helps moms stop bickering and slandering. Remember how they used to whisper about teachers or other families when they were waiting in the parking lot to pick up their kids. They don't do it anymore. Same thing with the dads – she has them wrapped around her little finger. Instead of cursing out the refs from the stands and making a fool out of themselves, when the mystery teacher is in the stands, the dads seem to be self-controlled." Yes, this teacher is purely amazing. She has this cleansing effect, teaching people to say "no" to ungodly thing. And it isn't a half-hearted, "no". It's not a regrettable or begrudging "no." It's a downright, completely denying and renouncing type of "no." The mystery teacher affects people in such a way that they honestly want to give up their old way of doing things. Not only do they want to give their old ways, conversely, they also are eager to say "yes" to godly things. You might say this mystery person teaches, leads, motivates you to (drumroll please) LIVE YOUR FAITH. Do you know who she is now?

Some of you might have it, but if not, let me just throw out a few more clues about her. We've talked about how she affects behavior. She also affects your mindset. You know how some people are always moping around, acting as if they have nothing to live for. The mystery teacher doesn't settle for that. She burrows her way into a person's mind and soul and gives them a hope that is like none other... a certain hope, a sure hope that there is something to live for, that there is something better yet coming their way. Not only does she change your mindset about the future, she changes your mindset about the present. If you think you're a nobody, she convinces you that you're a somebody. If you feel like you're an orphan, she assures you that you've been adopted. If you feel like you're trapped in a bad lifestyle like you're trapped in seaweed, she cuts you loose so that you can swim in the waters of baptism that empower you to live a new life. If you feel like you're lost, she convinces you that you're found. Now do you know who the mystery teacher is?

Let's find our answer in the theme verses for our school this year, which also serves as the theme verses for all schools in the FVL school system: Titus 2:11-14.

¹¹For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹²It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Did you catch it? What “teaches us to say ‘no’ to ungodliness and worldly passions?” What teaches us to “live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope?” What, in other words, leads us to LIVE OUR FAITH? None other than the grace of God. Amazing Grace, that brought salvation to all people when it appeared through Jesus, is the amazing mystery teacher. Amazing Grace is not only the mystery teacher for the 200+ kids studying under this banner at Immanuel Lutheran School. Amazing Grace is not only the mystery teacher for the nearly 600 kids studying under this banner at FVL. Amazing Grace is your teacher and mine. Grace which links you to Jesus, teaches you. Grace, which links you to Jesus, empowers you. Grace, which links you to Jesus, motivates you to live your faith. AMEN.

God's blessings as you sit and learn at the feet of Grace this year and every year until the “glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. “ AMEN.