

The First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
“Growing Out Of and Into”
Rev. Joanne Blair
December 27, 2015

I Samuel 2:18-20, 26
Luke 2:41-52

Just two days ago we celebrated the birth of Jesus, and in today’s reading he’s already twelve.

It seems “time really does fly!”

This story from Luke is the only mention of Jesus’ youth that made it into Scripture.

Most of us have seen the movie “Home Alone”, where a boy is mistakenly left home while his family heads to Paris, and many people think of it when we read this Scripture at this season of Christmastide. How in the world can you leave for a long trip and not know if your kids are with you?

But it’s very easy to see how Mary and Joseph didn’t realize that Jesus was not with them. People traveled in caravans to and from Jerusalem, and while we “helicopter parents” may chastise Mary and Joseph for not checking that their son was with them, it really wouldn’t have been unusual in that time and place to assume he was mixed in with the others.

Scholars argue whether or not the “three days” counted travel time or not, but more to the point is the conversation between Mary and Jesus. Imagine how distraught Mary and Joseph would have been! You think your child is safely with your friends and relatives, only to discover, miles down the road, that he is not with any of you.

You find yourself in that place where “you worry until you know they’re safe ... so you can scold them.”

Upon finding that Jesus was, in fact, safe, Mary says to him, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.” Jesus’ answer is pivotal. “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house? But they did not understand what he said to them.”

The one thing we don’t have in the story is “tone of voice.” We all know the saying, “It’s not what you say, but how you say it.” Was there one of those eye rolls that kids (and myself) are famous for? “Why were you searching for me?”

It seems that Jesus acted impetuously, seemingly oblivious to the impact his actions had on others. And maybe that’s true. After all, Jesus was only 12. His response is also full of the self-absorption so typical of adolescents. Adolescence - when we stop being defined as our parents’ children and we start the struggle to find and be our own selves.

This story is a peak into Jesus’ childhood and our only up-close and personal view of Jesus as a boy not a baby, as a child not a messiah.

These first words the young Jesus utters immediately establish the unique intimacy of his relationship with God. There, in the midst of the holy temple, Jesus felt God's presence fully and as a result felt completely at home.

Today's scripture lesson shows us a developing Jesus with increasing awareness and growing self-knowledge. We so often think of Jesus as either human, or divine. It is hard to wrap our minds around the fact that he was both human and divine at the same time. I think that would have been hard for Jesus at times, too.

Today's story serves as a transition between Luke's infancy narratives, and his account of the ministry of the mature Jesus. We hear no more about the infant or adolescent Jesus. But we do have some insight. I doubt Jesus rolled his eyes when he answered Mary.

Scripture tells us that Jesus went back to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph and was obedient to them. Despite his knowledge of his relationship with his heavenly Father, he was a dutiful son to his earthly parents. Or perhaps because of his relationship with his heavenly Father...

Jesus already sensed his connection to God at 12 years of age. For Luke, the Temple is Jesus' home- his Father's house. That says something about Jesus. But it also says something about Mary and Joseph.

Mary and Joseph were devout Jews. They built their life around the practice of their faith, and this laid a strong foundation for Jesus as he grew. Thanks to them, Jesus' daily life was firmly rooted in the life and faith of Israel.

Jesus grew from his religious roots, not in spite of them.

It was not just because he was God's Son that he was so comfortable in the Temple. He was a child rooted in the faith. He knew the stories and traditions and laws, and was therefore in a position to discuss them.

It also says something about young people. Sometimes young people are more tuned in to God than those of us who are older. Sometimes years and circumstances make it more difficult than it once did for us to accept the wondrous presence of God in this world. You know, we can get crusty, and we can get rusty. We must always leave ourselves open for God.

Your being here today matters. Your being here the week after that, and the week after that...it matters. Learning the Bible stories and what they mean...it matters. Praying with our brothers and sisters...it matters. Building relationships with people in this church community...it matters. We cannot "be the church" if we aren't part of the church. We cannot "reform" if we aren't being reformed. We cannot feel at home here, if we don't make this our home.

I'm not talking about membership. I'm talking about committing one's life to God. Involving God in all we say, and think, and do. Living a life pleasing to God inside and outside of these walls. Knowing God intimately.

Jesus was comfortable in the temple as a 12 year old boy not just because he was the Son of God, but because his faith was a part of his daily life. He knew what questions he had, and what truths he believed. And this didn't happen on just one night in a stable.

He grew in his understanding.

Verse 40 tells us that “Jesus was filled with wisdom.” Verse 52 tells us that “he increased in wisdom as he grew.”

Jesus knew of his special relationship with God the Father, but had to grow into it.

The daily practices of following his faith rooted him, and helped him in the days to come.

So yes, even Jesus had a faith that grew.

And so can we.

But we have to invest ourselves in it, just like Jesus had to.

So where does that leave us today, as we prepare to turn the page and start 2016? Does it leave us with lists of New Year’s resolutions? I sincerely hope not.

Maybe instead of making lists of unattainable, and often very selfish goals, perhaps we could do a spiritual inventory and see what fits, and what doesn’t... or shouldn’t.

Resentment, old wounds, selfishness and narrow mindedness can be really tight and uncomfortable...constricting even. Grown out of it?

Compassion, generosity, justice and love always fit a little loose...with enough wiggle room for more. Growing into it?

Jesus had to grow out of a young boy, and into the Messiah.

Mary had to grow out of being a “typical” mother protecting him, and into sharing him with the world.

So the challenge this week is for you to ask yourself: “What do I need to grow out of that hinders my faith journey? And what shall I grow into to bring me closer to God?”