

Growing Up

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26

Luke 2:41-52

It was just a couple days ago we were celebrating the birth of Jesus and now today in our Gospel lesson he is 12 years old. How did he grow up so fast? That is a question most every parent asks at some point? One day you are taking cute baby pictures in front of the Christmas tree and the next day you have a 12 year old peering into the roller coaster ride of teenage life. One day you are lifting them up high so they can put the angel on top of the tree and the next day you have a child as tall as you, perhaps taller. One day you are reading Christmas stories while making animal sounds. What does the donkey say? “hee-ha, hee-ha” The next day they are off to see Star Wars. They grow up fast. No doubt that is how it felt to Mary and Joseph.

Jesus is 12 years old. They have gone together as a family to make their annual journey to Jerusalem for the Passover. Joseph and Mary appear no more ready for the growth of their soon to be adolescent than most parents. They apparently assume that this child who up to now has always been eager to be in their company is with them on their trip back home. When Jesus misses lunch, Mary asks Joseph, “have you seen Jesus?” Joseph replies, “no, but he is probably with his buddies. I am guessing Matthias’s folks gave them something to eat.” It is when Jesus also misses dinner that they start to worry. First they check with aunts,

uncles and cousins. “Have you seen Jesus?” Then they check with friends. “Have you seen Jesus?” No one has seen Jesus.

We, of course, know where Jesus is, because Luke has told us. Jesus is back in Jerusalem. On his own, without asking his parents, at the ripe old age of twelve, Jesus decides he is old enough to make this decision by himself. In the meantime, Mary and Joseph continue searching. “Have you seen Jesus?”

Let’s be honest, growing up is not always easy, no matter who is doing it. Luke is the only one that gives us a story about Jesus during his growing up years. Parents with children at or near the age of 12 may be saying to themselves, “Thank goodness for that. We certainly don’t need more stories about Jesus as a youth going off on his own without telling his parents”. But, is this only a story about Jesus and youth? Or is this also a story about what it means for all of us to grow and mature in our faith?

Any adult who has taken their children to a movie in recent years knows that movie producers frequently include lines that can innocently fly over the heads of children, but which are fully understood by adults. Luke was taking this approach long before modern day movie producers. The story of Jesus remaining in Jerusalem while his parents and family head home, stands on its own. But, early adult Christians would have immediately recognized the not so subtle illusions Luke includes in the telling of this story. Luke tells us Jesus goes with his parents to

Jerusalem for the Festival of Passover making it hard to escape the awareness that the final journey Jesus takes to Jerusalem is for the Passover. Joseph and Mary search for Jesus for three days and we are immediately reminded of the time between Jesus death and resurrection. Luke tells us Jesus is twelve years of age and early Christians would have no trouble recognizing the parallel with the young Samuel providing the reminder Christian faith emerges out of Jewish faith. Modern day movie producers have nothing on Luke when it comes to weaving into the story illusions with deeper meaning.

Have you seen Jesus? The story of Jesus as a twelve year old is never less than a story about what it means to go from child hood to adolescence, but it is also much more. Luke leaves little doubt that growing up in faith, maturing in faith is a lifelong process and that some of the same dynamics at work for Jesus and his parents are at work for us at every age. This is precisely why the Apostle Paul says to the church in Corinth, “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways”. Paul understands that faith means continuing to grow and mature in what it means to be a follower of this One who in birth reveals God’s love, who in life reveals the content of that love and who in death and resurrection reveals the assurance of that love. The baby Jesus grows from infancy into adult hood and so must we.

Have you seen Jesus? It is a lifelong question, both for us as individuals and as a community of faith. It would be nice for Jesus parents and it would be nice for us if we knew exactly where Jesus is at all times. It would be nice if we could avoid the anxiety of not knowing exactly what Jesus would do, as the bracelets suggest. It would be nice if we knew where Jesus stands on every issue of importance. It would be nice if we never had to question what it is we believe about God, about Jesus, about this one born in a manger, who begins life as a refugee, grows into an adult challenging political and religious authorities, speaking out on behalf of the poor and oppressed, offering healing and transformation so that we might be born again into a new way of living and ends up on a cross. Have you seen Jesus?

When Mary and Joseph finally find Jesus in the temple, Mary says to Jesus, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." Have you seen Jesus? There is anxiety that comes with asking that question, because it is an acknowledgement that we also have some maturing and growing to do. It is an acknowledgment none of us knows what the future holds, but if we are faithful in seeking after this one born a baby in Bethlehem we will be chasing after someone who leads us all the way to Jerusalem and the cross.

Have you seen Jesus? When Mary and Joseph do at last find Jesus, they discover that Jesus has resources for growing up that Luke makes

clear are our resources for us as well. Luke tells us they find Jesus in the temple, “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.” Asking questions is a key resource for all who would grow in the Christian Faith. There is no point in our lives as individuals or in our common life together when questions are invalid. Asking questions is central to growing up in faith.

It is also clear from this story given to us by Luke that the questions Jesus asks happen within the context of a particular tradition to which he belongs. For Jesus this is the Jewish tradition, for us this is the Christian tradition whose roots include the Jewish tradition. Our questions of faith are born out of the soil of faithful people who themselves struggled with what it means to live in relationship with God and one another. Their stories, their struggles, their questions remain a resource for us as they were for Jesus.

Finally, Luke makes clear that the questions Jesus asks happen within the context of community. Jesus is spending time with elders, teachers, people who are part of the community. Mary and Joseph have the support of community when it comes to helping Jesus and them as they grow in faith and what it means to be a child of God. On more than one occasion I have had parents come up to me and say, well my child asked me a question that I had no idea how to answer, “I told her to go ask Pastor Tim” Now you could say the parents are punting and maybe they are. I can assure you that I am as often likely to be stumped by the

challenging questions of youth as are their parents. But, Luke reminds us that none of us are solely responsible for supporting our children, youth or adults with our questions and our growth. Growing in faith happens in the context of a supportive community of faith that is unafraid of asking questions.

Have you seen Jesus? It is a question that was being asked by Mary and Joseph and it is a question that anyone wishing to grow in faith is still asking.

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26

Samuel was a transitional figure for the people of Israel. He was the last of a long line of Priests who provided leadership for the Israelites before Saul was appointed King, followed by David. The stories Matthew and Luke tell about the birth of Jesus draw heavily on the stories surrounding Samuel, including the song of justice sung by Mary, which we know as the Magnificat. In today's lesson we hear about Samuel as a young boy, growing and maturing in faith, much like the 12 year old Jesus we hear about from Luke.

2:18 Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy wearing a linen ephod. 2:19 His mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. 2:20 Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the LORD repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the LORD"; and then they would return to their home. 2:26 Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and with the people.

Luke 2:41-52

Our Gospel lesson today gives us the only story any of the Gospels provide about the life of Jesus between the time of his birth and his emergence for baptism with John. In today's lesson, Jesus is twelve year's old and creates great anxiety for his parents when he decides to stay back in Jerusalem rather than accompany them on their journey home.

2:41 Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. 2:42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. 2:43 When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. 2:44 Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. 2:45 When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. 2:46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 2:47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 2:48 When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." 2:49 He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" 2:50 But they did not understand what he said to them. 2:51 Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. 2:52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.