

“Temple Talk”
Luke 2:41-52
December 30, 2018

As Art Linkletter used to remind us, “Kids say the darnedest things.” And the young 12-year-old Jesus of Nazareth was no exception. In a way, the scene is entirely familiar: I can remember many times during my own growing up that my parents would be worried sick if I came home too late, if I couldn’t be found where I’d usually be, or if I had stopped along the road after school to play in the snow. Now, when it came to snow, I was particularly fond of engineering waterworks, with melting snow cascading through all manner of jetties and blockages which I had constructed with slushy ice that began to refreeze as the temperatures dropped. But boys being boys, I’d lose track of time, and even the approaching darkness was no deterrence. It might as well have been my own mother saying Mary’s words: “Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.” And the child’s reply is so naive, so unaffected, so disarming: “Why in the world were you worrying? I’m just fine, mom.”

When you think about it, Mary and Joseph shouldn’t have been all that surprised. Luke tells us that they made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem every year for the festival of the Passover - not too mean a feat for common folk, many of whom were born, grew up, lived, died, and were buried all in the same village, beyond which they never set foot. The young Jesus was privileged to be constantly steeped in the religion of his forebears - is it any wonder, then, that by age twelve he found that faith had grown within him and had struck a responsive chord in his heart?

That twelfth year is full of wonder. Some of us might have a little difficulty remembering what things were like when we were twelve - for me that was over half a century ago - but it is generally an age where horizons begin to expand, one fancies oneself as more independent of family, or at least a little less dependent on parents. We begin to notice all kinds of things that had never given us pause before. In many ways, we are on the threshold of growing up.

That twelfth year is also full of difficulties for many of us. And we must suspect that Jesus had his own challenges growing up, even though he was a Special Boy. But then, weren't we all special in one way or another to our parents, as well as being beloved of God in heaven - as all children are! And we were probably beginning to wonder about ourselves, just like Jesus was perhaps thinking about exactly who he was, what would be his place in life, how he would begin to cope with life, the universe, and everything.

We might assume that Mary and Joseph had done a pretty good job with Jesus. If your child happened to disappear, wouldn't it be a relief to find that she was at the church? Or talking to the Deacons? Or in choir practice? Or at mid-week Bible study? Maybe helping with coffee hour refreshments. Yes, the words of the Book of Proverbs do certainly seem to apply to Christ: "Raise up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will never depart from it."

I suspect that Jesus was more than passingly familiar with the 27th Psalm, which we read together in unison this morning - especially verses 4 and 5: "One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." Here he is, at age twelve, taking those words at face value! Maybe if his parents had taken those words more to heart, they would have known where to find him:

inquiring in the Lord's temple. For, we might surmise, Jesus had been struck by the beauty of the Lord.

I wonder: how many of us have been struck by the beauty of the Lord? Surely our house of worship, as well as our music, is a reflection of that beauty: the serenity, the loveliness of souls united in worship, adoration, and praise.

So if someone were looking for you, and couldn't find you at all, what would be the chances of you - having been struck by the beauty of the Lord - answering, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be about my father's business?" And while that might work for some of us to account for an hour or two on Sunday mornings, what about the rest of our time?

If we think about it for a moment, being about our father's business is not as problematic as we might think: there are many deeds that count as our father's business that don't have to happen here inside these four walls, as attractive as this place of worship might be. While Jesus did spend a lot of his time in his local synagogue - the scriptures are explicit (in an off-hand kind of way) that Jesus worshiped regularly - it is also clear that worship, for him, was not only an end in itself, but was also a haven ... and then a point of departure, with most of Christ's ministry occurring beyond the confines of his local house of prayer.

So what was Jesus up to? Already in the very first chapter of Mark's Gospel it is reported that the crowds were looking for Jesus: apparently Mary and Joseph weren't the only ones having difficulties keeping up with Christ. Luke tells us the very same thing in his fourth chapter. And even Simon Peter, it is reported in the Gospels, had to hunt for Jesus.

Where was Jesus off to? We all know about his preaching to the crowds, his healing of the sick and the demon-possessed, his calling of many disciples (not just

twelve: the Gospels record that there were at least seventy), feeding the hungry (sometimes thousands at a time), comforting the afflicted, teaching in parables, as well as challenging those who refused to allow God any place in their own lives as they sought their own selfish ends. And, of course, Jesus has been known for his prayers to God.

How have we taken all this activity to heart? All we need do is to think about ourselves as a congregation as expressed through our diaconate, our various committees, our music program, our Fellowship Society, and our officers. And then there's all that we do as individual members through our daily lives as we pray for others, assist one another, encourage each other, fostering a positive outlook among each other, loving each other. To the extent that we have taken Christ's example as our own model, we can be assured we are doing the Lord's work.

And so we now stand at the threshold of another year. While we cannot know how 2019 will turn out, allow me a moment of Temple Talk to make some observations and suggestions as to what shape our father's business might take, now that we have had a year to begin to put some of the difficulties of the previous years behind us as we consolidated and regrouped.

Just a brief look through an old worship bulletin from February 2001 (I never throw anything away!) shows we had a large enough membership to have eight Deacons who met on a monthly basis to plan dovetailing their duties with those of the pastor in terms of visitations of the hospitalized and shut-ins, as well as new member recruitment. Our Sunday School boasted five teachers - both men and women - and there were six active members of Buildings and Grounds. We had an Acolyte program centering on The Light of Christ, weekly worship

assistants in the pulpit, child care for toddlers too young for Sunday School class, as well as a mid-week Toddlers' Play Group. We were providing volunteers for VNA hospice work, and there were special studies planned for mid-week classes during Lent. In addition, the Pastor was selling tickets for the Consolidated School's Annual Community Dance.

Now I'm not saying any of this to provoke anxiety - how did we manage to do all that! Nor do I suggest that we need to somehow recreate in 2019 what we were doing less than 20 years ago. But we should be thinking pro-actively about how to move forward, and in what areas, of our church life together. And, we don't have to do it all at once. Growth takes time!

Some of you might have guessed that the late Douglas Adams is one of my favorite authors. He's not particularly religious, but even as a non-believer he had this insight into the life and ministry of Christ when he reminded his readers, in an off-hand sort of way, that Jesus was put to death simply for saying that people should be decent to each other for a change. Similarly, my own father always had a piece of advice he would share with me and my family whenever he came to visit: "Be kind to each other." Surely that counts as part of our father's business, doesn't it? It is no accident that Christianity lists kindness as one of the seven cardinal virtues. Where did Jesus ever come up with that notion? I suspect his anxiety-ridden mother, his watchful father, and his time spent talking to the teachers in the Temple as a twelve year old might have had something to do with that. May we be blessed with similarly nurturing families and helpful teachers in this house of worship, that we may continue to grow in loving-kindness to be like the Child whose birth we celebrated only a few days ago.

Let us pray.