

## Jesus Goes to School

A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Lexington

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(The first Sunday in Lent; during a series entitled "This is My Body")

We don't know much about Jesus between Bethlehem and Capernaum. As far as we know, Mary didn't make a scrapbook or keep his baby teeth. Joseph didn't save the first lopsided footstool Jesus made. The little we know comes from this, the only moment of Jesus' childhood recorded in the Gospels.

Now, before I read the passage I want to ask a question of our children.

What are some of the things that all children do?

(answers might include - grow, learn, test their parents, play, explore, go to school, maybe some slightly gross things.)

Let's listen to this passage, and see if Jesus the child did any of those things.

Luke 2: 40-52

<sup>40</sup>The child (Jesus) grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

<sup>41</sup> Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. <sup>42</sup>And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. <sup>43</sup>When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. <sup>44</sup>Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends.

<sup>45</sup>When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. <sup>46</sup>After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup>And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup>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.’<sup>49</sup>He said to them, ‘Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’<sup>50</sup>But they did not understand what he said to them.<sup>51</sup>Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

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Jesus was a human child, who grew to be a human adult. He grew in wisdom and in years. He changed and he learned. Our teacher learned and grew - and that very idea is a lesson for us.

We Christians hold precious the idea that Jesus was human as well as being God’s son, because it means that God became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us, means that every part of our human existence is known and beloved by God. Every part of our *human* existence. And we know God’s agape love through the incarnation of Jesus, who practiced God’s agape most fully. God loves us, human beings. Our bodies, minds, and spirits are known and beloved by God. Jesus walked the road of human existence and knows what our lives are like.

Yet, because there are so few moments of Jesus’ childhood recorded, we most often think of him as a tiny baby or a fully formed adult. This story tells us of his childhood.

And it’s a funny story. Right? Everyone who’s been a parent - and everyone who’s been a child - finds familiar the moment of panic when the parent realizes the child has disappeared. My parents lost me in a grocery store. And true confession, I lost Zac at least four times. Never for three days, but still.

Every teacher finds familiar the story of the precocious student. I had it happen just a few weeks ago. One of our kids was doing a reading. After they practiced, I asked if they had any questions. They didn’t ask how a certain word was pronounced. They asked a profound and astute and important question (completely unrelated to their reading) and my jaw dropped because we had about 2 minutes before the Prelude.

Everyone who’s survived being a Tween finds familiar that moment when Jesus gets in trouble. Child, where have you been? Mom, it’s not my fault! What are you doing? Do you know how worried we were? You may think you’re grown up but *you are not*. Golly it’s good to know Jesus’ parents had to raise their voice once or twice.

This story tells us some things about Jesus' human life, and our lives.

Here's what we can surmise about Jesus' parents and his community.

They were a faithful Jewish family - pious and devoted, year after year traveling to Jerusalem. And Mary and Joseph were loving. They worried about Jesus. But they also had a village, so to speak. They were part of a big community where lots of adults were watching after the children. (That's the only way Jesus could have been missing that long before they noticed.) So Jesus had a lot of folks who taught him and watched him and set boundaries for him. One of the Sunday School teachers in my previous church would always say: I love your children like they are my own. Sometimes that means cheering them on and sometimes that means guiding them back, the way I would my own. Jesus had a team. Mary and Joseph worried for him but he was not lost.

Here's what we can guess about Jesus the child.

He could grow because he was loved. And he was smart, precocious and just a little bit fresh. *Mama where did you think I would be?* At 12, he was already claiming his identity as God's child and learning scripture and tradition. But he was a child. Wisdom was something that grew over time.

Here's what the rest of the gospels tell us about Jesus as an adult. His wisdom kept growing and so did his love. He was a lifelong learner. He never stopped wrestling with scripture and talking with teachers - recall all those times he's wrestling with the scribes. We think of those talks as fights but sometimes they were more like passionate debates.

Jesus' love never stopped expanding. In fact one of the most uncomfortable moments in Jesus' ministry was when he admitted he was wrong, and grew in his understanding of who deserved God's love and mercy. In Mark 7, he met the Syrophenician woman whose daughter needed healing and he called them dogs. And until this moment in Mark, Jesus' ministry has been within his community. But this woman refused Jesus' rejection. Her provocation called Jesus out, and after their conversation, his saving ministry became one for everyone.

But first, Jesus had to be willing to learn and change.

So in the adult Jesus we have a Teacher who could change and learn, who could practice *teshuvah*, Hebrew for return, a concept of repentance and change. So often we hold on to Jesus being perfect which is to say immutable and unchanging. And we emulate a perfect teacher. But there is something important about following a teacher who is able to learn, grow and change. Jesus was human, and it takes great spiritual humility and strength to be willing to change.

So what might we learn from Jesus, the human boy who grew and the teacher who learned?

We are to be lifelong learners, too. Guess what. We don't have all the answers. Humility is the way we grow and learn. In the season of Lent we often talk about repentance - which is simply acknowledging that we are not perfect and we have lessons to learn. Without that humility we cannot receive God's grace. Without humility we cannot learn and grow in wisdom and divine favor.

The Psalmist says,  
God leads the humble in what is right  
and teaches the humble God's own way. (Psalm 25:9)

Craig Satterlee says, "the good news is that this description of Jesus is the description of every child of God, no matter what our age. We all will grow as we respond to God's love. In Christ we can expect nothing else."<sup>1</sup>

And what might we learn from the other folks in this passage? We might be drawn to Mary and Joseph in this story but how about identifying with members of Jesus' village? The ones who kept their eyes open for all the children. The ones who made sure Jesus had something to eat. The temple elders who paused to consider the questions of a precocious and fresh 12 year old.

Even as we learn new wisdom and grow in our faith, there are children in our village who need us. The precocious ones. The quiet ones. The hungry ones. The heartbroken ones. Can we look out for them?

We, like Jesus' parents, are looking for him.<sup>2</sup> We can find him only by following him. By learning from him. By loving the ones he loved. (Let the children come.)

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Satterlee, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/first-sunday-of-christmas-3/commentary-on-luke-241-52>

<sup>2</sup> Paraphrase of O. Wesley Allen, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/first-sunday-of-christmas-3/commentary-on-luke-241-52-5>

And we, like Mary and Joseph, will find him in an unexpected place - on the third day.

Amen.

“You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and fix them as an emblem on your forehead. **19** Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise up.” Deuteronomy 11:18-19