

“At Home in the Temple with God”
Luke 2:41-51/I Samuel 1:21-28; 2:11; 2:18-21
FPC/January 3, 2010/2nd Sunday of Christmas
By Rev. Dr. Glenn Hink

I. Text

Our text today is the only story we have in the Bible about Jesus between the time he was infant, and the time he began his public ministry as an adult. Luke may include it in his story about Jesus to give us a glimpse of Jesus’ growing faith and developing awareness of his place in God’s plan. As this brief account is read listen for echoes of the Old Testament story of Samuel, who also “grew up in the presence of the Lord.” (I Sam. 2:21)

Read Luke 2:41-51.

II. Exegesis (Read as dialogue, with one person reading the “expected” parts, and the other person reading the “surprise” parts.)

As I was working on this text this week I began to hear a story told as “well that’s expected, but that’s a surprise”.....“expectation and surprise, expectation and surprise.” As so I thought it might be helpful to hear a discussion of this text in that way.

(Expt. 1) It was expected that Joseph would go to Jerusalem for Passover. Faithful Jews were commanded to participate in the three major religious festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. But if they lived too far away from Jerusalem and the Temple to share in all three, they were expected to make every effort to share in Passover. Passover was a seven day festival, celebrating the saving power of God that freed their ancestors from Egyptian slavery. It was a foundational event in the history of Joseph’s people, and a central religious story in Jewish faith. It was expected that Joseph would go to Jerusalem for Passover.

(Surp. 1) That may have been expected, but there was also a surprise. Women were not expected to make the trip and share in Passover, but there Mary was, right in the middle of the celebration. And boys were not expected to be there until their 13th birthday. It was then, following their bar mitzvah, that they were expected to take on the full responsibility of adult males in the faith community. But there Jesus is, 12 years old, and sharing in Passover....sharing in the responsibility and faith of his people.....
...doing more than was expected. It is a surprise that Mary and Jesus are with Joseph. This is a surprisingly faithful and pious Jewish family.

(Expt. 2) Perhaps it was expected that Joseph and Mary might lose track of Jesus. The best communication does not always happen between 12 year olds and parents. Miscommunication can especially happen with all the excitement and chaos of

being in the big city of Jerusalem for Passover. Joseph and Mary assume this. Jesus assumes that. If you've had teenagers you know how that goes. And it's expected that Jesus might get lost in the way of travel. Pilgrims traveled together in caravans for safety, often in large extended family groups. You can almost hear Joseph and Mary; "I thought Jesus was with Uncle Barnabas." "I thought he was with his cousins Thomas and James." "Where has he gone to?" Being lost for a brief time is not a surprise.

(Surp. 2) But the surprise is where Jesus is found. He's not in the market. He's not playing a "pick-up basketball game" with other boys. He's not hanging around fortress Antonio watching the Roman soldiers. That would have been expected. Rather the surprise is that he's in the Temple. No wonder it took Mary and Joseph a while to find him. Like the Old Testament prophet Samuel, Jesus is at home in the Temple.....at home in the beauty and wonder of God.....at home learning about faithfulness to God. And like Samuel became aware of his special vocation with and for God during his service in the Temple, so Jesus has the stirrings of a vague awareness of a greater duty and call to God. He's 12 years old, and in the Temple by his own choice.....that's a surprise.

(Expt. 3) When Joseph and Mary find Jesus in the Temple the response is expected. It's the response of mothers' the world round: "Where have you been? We've been worried sick about you. We had no idea where you were? We were one day out of Jerusalem when we discovered you weren't with the caravan. The last couple days have been a nightmare searching for you. How could you do this to your parents?" It's an expected word of a mother to her son, isn't it?

(Surp. 3) It is expected, but Jesus' response is surprising. He's surprised they didn't know where he would be. He's surprised they did not know him well enough to know that he would be in the Temple. He's surprised they were worried at all. And it's here we begin to see a distance between family and son.....between parents and Jesus. As Jesus begins to wonder about his relationship with God, there begins to be a break with this family. His physical home will still be with his mother and father.....but his spiritual home, his growing questions about faith and God.....will put him increasingly in another home. He has a growing sense of home in the Temple with God. Mary and Joseph are surprised by what Jesus says....."in his Father's house.....the Temple?" They did not understand. And only in years to come when they looked back would they come to begin to understand.

(Expt. 4) And in the end the expected happens; Jesus returns with his parents to Nazareth. The search and worry are over. Mary and Joseph don't understand all that has happened, but they do know that their son is obedient to his parents. The event in the Temple is over. They will catch-up with the caravan so to journey home. The story ends as expected.

(Surp. 4) But we have seen something surprising. Jesus may go home as expected, but what are we to make of this story about the Temple? What will happen? The story has been told in an “expectation and surprise, expectation and surprise” style. Jesus goes home with Joseph and Mary as expected. Is there another surprise? Perhaps.....the rest of the story of Jesus.

Expectations and surprise.....expectation and surprise.....it is an interesting way to hear this story.

III. Reflections

As I pondered this familiar story this week two questions came to mind; what does this story tell us about how Jesus came to understand himself, and what does this story tell us about faith formation in our lives? The first question is more academic and theological, and the second question is about spiritual formation. I think both are interesting.

I don't believe or understand that from the very beginning of Jesus' self-awareness that he understood himself as the Christ. Nor did he one day realize, “Well, I'll be. I think I'm the son of God.” I think this story of Jesus in the Temple suggests to us that Jesus' self-understanding was a gradual process. He was raised in a faithful, pious Jewish home. Parents, synagogue and Temple shaped his self-understanding. His life reflected obedience to the traditions: Circumcised and named on the 8th day; dedicated to God in the Temple at 6 weeks; celebrating his Bar Mitzvah at 12 years old and participating in the annual Passover festival in Jerusalem; starting his own public life at 30. He learned prayer and piety with his family. In the synagogue in Nazareth he learned the Torah; the law of God and the stories of his ancestors.....Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah. In the Temple he experienced the beauty and wonder of God, and the importance of religious festivals. In the talk of synagogue and on the street he heard of the longing for the Messiah.....and the stories of failed “would be” Messiahs.....put to death by the Romans for their political and militant actions. And in it all Jesus had his own personal experiences with God.....the still small voice.....an assurance.....the strange warming of his heart. This story in Luke of Jesus at age 12 in the Temple suggests a gradual, growing awareness of a call and way of life. And at 12 it is already creating a surprising divergence away from his family.....he is at home in “his Father's house.”

Last Sunday as I watched the Steelers-Ravens football game I noticed the Ravens left tackle, #74, Michael Oher. The recent movie “The Blind Side” is about his life. I don't think that as Michael was living on the street amidst the culture of drugs, gangs and despair he said, “I'm the future tackle of the Baltimore Ravens.” The way

from the streets of Memphis to professional football is a long way. It took the care and love of a family that adopted him. It took catching up on his education, and the dedication teachers. It took discovering football. It took a scholarship to the University of Mississippi, coaches, and hard work in the weight room. Michael Oher didn't begin with any assurance that he would play professional football. Rather it took learning, taking chances, growth, reflecting, wondering.....a growing awareness....and at some point he came to believe it was possible.

I think that this story in Luke shows us that Jesus is on a similar journey; learning, taking chances, growth, reflecting, wondering.....a growing awareness that will continue throughout his life. In the end Jesus will believe that God's plans of salvation for this creation are uniquely connected to him, and he will trust God through the horrors of the cross and death. At age 12 we see a growing awareness.....the stirrings of a unique relationship with God.

The story also suggests something about the development of faith in our lives. We are familiar with the saying, "It takes a village to raise a child." A similar thing can be said of developing faith, which is why children are baptized in this "village" called the church. As parents, synagogue, Temple and personal experience were important to Jesus in his spiritual development, so they are important to us. Parents are not the only factor, but are usually one of the most important factors of Christian faith developing in a life. Seeing parents in prayer, Bible reading and study, and living the Christian faith makes a big difference. Jesus learned in the synagogue. So our children learn stories of the faith in Sunday School, Children's Church, the Children's Message in worship, and in Vacation Bible School. Jesus saw a bigger community of faith in the Temple, shared in religious festivals there, and experience some of the wonder and beauty of God. He was at home in the Temple. So our children also learn of a bigger faith community that they are part of here, share in our religious festivals, and have opportunity to experience some of the wonder and beauty of God. I hope they feel at home in church. And as Jesus received a sign of the covenant with God in circumcision, and proclaimed his own faith at 12 in the Temple, so our children receive the sign of the covenant in baptism, and proclaim their own faith in confirmation.

There was a day not so long ago when some of this religious formation just happened without much intentional effort. Not so long ago our culture supported particular expressions of Christian faith; nothing was planned on Sundays and Wednesday evenings because of church, Christian stories were told in school, school choirs sang Christian hymns, Christian values were the cultural values, and when you moved to the Shenango Valley you were expected to go to church, Protestant or Catholic. Culture and church supported each other. It wasn't easy if you weren't part of the dominant Christian majority. But if you were, it seemed as though the culture was

Christian. There were problems with that, but the point is that the way of life supported a type of religious formation. Those days are gone.

Today people and families are very busy, with more to do than ever before. Often Sundays are needed for rest, chores, and being together. Participation in church is one of many options for people, and often sporadic. Regular attendance for many people today is once or twice a month. Our Youth Director, Aaron Christy, and I have talked about the increasing difficulty of getting teenagers together regularly for a youth program. With school, sports, clubs and work youth ministry is increasingly optional....."I'll come if I have time." And even when there is participation the culture of consumerism shapes participation, as many people look for a religious community that has something that meets a particular need they have....."What does the church have for me?" The hard truth is that "a spoonful of religious experience" will not lead to any significant type of spiritual formation.....it will not lead to any meaningful relationship with God.....it will not lead to the meaningful practice of faith, hope and love.

"Philip Haile wrote of the little village of Le Chambon, France, a town whose people, unlike others in France, hid the Jews there from the Nazis when they came. Haile went there wondering what sort of courageous, ethical heroes might live there, risking all to do such extraordinary good. He interviewed people in the village, and was overwhelmed by their ordinariness. They didn't seem to be extra-ordinary at all.

Haile decided that the one factor that united them, and set them apart from other villages, was their church attendance. Sunday after Sunday they attended their little church, where they heard the sermons of pastor Trochme. Over time, they became people shaped by worship and scripture, who just knew what to do, and did it. When it came time for them to be courageous, the day the Nazis came to town, they quietly did what was right.

One old woman, who faked a heart attack when the Nazis came to search her house, later said, 'Pastor always taught us that there comes a time in every life when a person is asked to do something for Jesus. When our time came, we just knew what to do.'" (William Willimon, Pulpit Digest)

Today we have to make many decisions about our lives, our families and our community. Some of the decisions are big.....and many are small. They are decisions about courage, hope, help, forgiveness, honesty, and love. How might we, our children, and our grandchildren make the decisions before us.....and how will spiritual life make any difference.....when the different times in life come for us to decide what to do?

IV. Appendix: Background and Context of I Samuel 1:21-8; 2:11, 18-21

In ancient Israel the gift of children were believed to be a gift from God. Hannah, a faithful woman, had no children. Year after year she pleaded with God that she might bear a child, but she remained barren.

On one trip to the temple in Shiloh Hannah again pleaded with God for a son. She prayed that if God would give her a son she would dedicate him to God, and that this son would serve God in the temple and throughout his life. The priest at the temple in Shiloh hears Hannah's prayer, and tells her that God will grant her request.

Hannah then returns home, and in due time conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel. And as Hannah promised, Samuel grew up in the temple at Shiloh, and served God in great ways throughout his life.

This scripture reading from I Samuel 1 and 2 is the account of the boy Samuel coming to the temple in Shiloh, and being raised in the temple. It is the background text to Jesus' trip to the temple in Jerusalem at age 12. Samuel and Jesus are at home in the temple, have a special relationship with God from childhood, and have a special call to serve God.

Read I Samuel 1:21-8; 2:11, 18-21