

[Scripture Luke 2:41-52 NRSV]

The Boy Jesus in the Temple

⁴¹ Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. 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. 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. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 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." ⁴⁹ He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he said to them. 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.

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

[Prayer, Psalm 19:14 NRSV]

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. **Amen.**

[message starts here]

This week is the first week after Christmas, so we get to read a story about Jesus' childhood. I don't know if you knew that's the pattern, but it is. There are three years in the lectionary cycle, and there is a story about Jesus as a baby or a boy that is read for each one of them. Next year we'll read about the holy family fleeing to Egypt from the second chapter of Matthew. The year after that we'll read the story we read last year on this day, of Jesus parents taking him to be presented at the temple, and their encounters with the righteous man Simeon and the prophet Anna. This year we get this story of the annual Pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Three stories for three years of readings.

If you look at this story in a Bible with subheadings, it probably is split up just like that as well. Matthew chapter 2 probably has a subheading that says "The Escape to Egypt" within this

wider narrative. Here in Luke your Bible might have more subheadings, but probably at least has The Birth of Jesus, Jesus Presented at the Temple, and the Boy Jesus at the Temple. I guess even when Biblical scholars were coming up with where to split chapters and verses and put subheadings and as the lectionary was created somebody decided that people even then were too ADD to read these as larger stories. So we split up this larger childhood narrative of Jesus into little pieces.

I like to look at them together, but even looking at the "two stories" from Luke you see this theme of following the law and of going to the temple, the holy place in Jerusalem throughout Jesus childhood.

Mary and Joseph are doing what is required of them. They take Jesus, their firstborn son, to the temple to be presented as holy to the Lord because the law requires it. Jesus is circumcised and he's given his name on his eighth day of life because the law requires it. They go to the temple for purification because the law requires it. They offer a sacrifice because the law requires it. And although the story about celebrating Passover isn't quite as explicit about why they are going, Luke's Jewish audience would know that Mary, Joseph, and Jesus weren't just travelling several day's journey to the temple all just for "funsies." Passover is one of the three Pilgrimage Festivals where all Jewish men were to be together in the presence of the Lord in the temple in Jerusalem, because in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy -you guessed it- the law required it. God's law required it.

When you look at the lectionary calendar these scriptures take us from Christmas Eve to Christmas to Epiphany. When you look at these stories themselves they take us from Jesus' birth to his presentation to the wise men to Egypt, back from Egypt, to teaching at the temple to heading home. We're spanning over a decade of Jesus' life in the one or two Sundays from Christmas to Epiphany each year. And in all of those years of his life, we see his family doing what's expected of them all this time.

They are doing what the law requires. They're doing what their friends and family expect of them. What their culture expects of them. What God expects of them. They are teaching Jesus from birth how to be Jewish. Which is a little humorous. Like, "Hey there, baby God. Jesus, the Word. Who was in the beginning, and was the Word, and was with God and was God. And I'm going to teach you how to live what the Word says." It's funny that that's what they get to do. But they do. As we'd say here in the South, "They're good churchgoin' people." So God the Son

learns how to be Jewish from people who seem like they ought to have no business even trying to teach **him**. But they teach him. And he learns.

We're going to see that again in a second.

Because here we are in Luke chapter 2 with Jesus doing what's expected of him. He goes with his family to the temple. To the holy place. As the law requires. He celebrates Passover, the holy festival in the holy city. He's there to be in the presence of God. And he's not just along for the ride because his dad is required to be there. He's twelve. He's an adult in Jewish culture now, and being male, he's required to be there. He's learned through his childhood these holy habits, when to go to the holy place, and what holy things to do there, how to worship God, how to be in awe of God in his presence. And Jesus is obedient to God in this way.

So obedient that his parents think he's being disobedient to them.

We learn how to go to the holy place too. Raise your hand if you were an acolyte in elementary and middle school. A lot of us. We *need* acolytes in a traditional service. We *need* somebody to bring in the light, to light the candles on the altar which symbolize the light of Christ. I've heard more than one pastor say "If I start coughing in the middle of my sermon, I need the acolyte to bring me a glass of water. That's who I'm looking at." We need the acolytes. But we also *get* to teach younger believers through being acolytes what to do when they go to worship. We *get* to learn when we're young what to do in this holy place.

When I was in elementary and middle school, my holy places were Berkmar UMC in Lilburn, Georgia and St. Paul's UMC in Clarksdale, Mississippi. And I learned how to be an acolyte in those places. In both of those churches we had the layers of acolyte robes, the black and white, the cassock and surplice and the wooden pectoral cross we had to wear. Half of acolyte training was how to put on all that stuff, and half of it was how not to trip on it all as you went down the aisle. But I still remember that stuff. I remember learning the parts of the service and when to pick up the plates and where to take them after the offering. I remember what we were supposed to do if we walked too fast and our candle blew out before we made it to the chancel.

I remember, twenty-one years later, that first Sunday when my name came up in the acolyte rotation. I remember standing in the narthex and I remember staring really hard at that candle and walking really slowly down the aisle. And I remember before the service started and my mom went to sit down front how she looked me in the eye and said "Don't set the church on

fire." Which is something else funny, since now that I work in a church building 40 hours a week I stand in the narthex each Sunday and say to the acolytes "It's okay if you set the church fire."

I love that we get to teach newer believers what to do in the holy place.

And I love that in our scripture Jesus' twelve-year-old self is amazing the teachers with his questions. I love that he's doing that now. He might officially be an adult, but still, even those rabbis know, dude's *twelve*. They're in awe of him.

[Jesus teaches in the temple image]

[accurate things: Roman couch. Seated teacher.]

[fun things: all looking at Jesus. Empty couch. Everyone as close as they can be. Invites us to sit and be close too.]

[inaccurate things: that Jesus is teaching at all. Listening and asking questions]

[final accurate thing: expressions of amazement]

So they're thinking "what is he gonna do next?" Well *we* know the answer to that. Because we've out of all the childhood Jesus stories we have now. After another week we'll skip to adult Jesus beginning his official ministry. We know he leaves the holy places and the holy people and takes his own holiness out to the wilderness, to the communities, to the fishermen and tax collectors and lepers and prostitutes. He takes his questions, and his wonder and awe of God, and what he's learned. He takes the holy place with him.

I keep talking about holy places in the sense of our temples, like Jesus family would have thought of *the* Temple as their holy place. But let me ask you about your holy places.

[take 30 seconds to talk about where you see God outside of this building]

[what are some answers? Beach? mountains?]

[my places: rivers. ramada inn (BR) coliseum (Pilgrimage)]

[standing in awe of God]

[Allen and "well-prayed spaces"]

[when do I stand in awe of God/what are my well-prayed spaces/what are my holy places?]

close it up here

May you find the holy places. May you take the holy places with you.

message ends here

[Benediction from Colossians 3:12-17 NRSV]

¹² As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.