

Dan Cravy
Luke 2.41-52
January 5, 2024

Growing Up Wise

-Happy New Year! Tracey and the boys and I just got back from a family trip to Washington this week where we got time with both boys, both sets of parents, and both of our brothers' families, first in Seattle, then in Anacortes. There were dinners and puzzles and walks and naps and conversations. A good time. Not to say an altogether *uncomplicated* time (or else how could you stand me?) But a meaningful time for sure.

Today as a church we begin our new year with the story of a family trip. Our reading for this first Sunday in January is from the gospel of Luke, 2.41-52:

⁴¹ Now every year [Jesus'] 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 were unaware of this. 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? Your father and I have been anxiously looking for you." ⁴⁹ He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be [about my Father's affairs]?"^[k] 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, and his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years^[l] and in divine and human favor.

Let's pray: *Lord, in this new year, we ask that you would find us in just the right place to get hold of us, and that as we grow in years, we might also grow in your wisdom and grace.*

-OK. To Jesus' parents, this is a story about a lost child

Anyone here temporarily lose their child before?

This story will likely forever remind me of the time I lost Caz in Bonner Park...
...for 10-15 minutes. Turned my attention to baby Colter in the amphitheater. Little Caz disappeared behind a row of trees. I scouted down the row of trees, thinking him hiding, saying 'Oh, I wonder if Caz is behind this tree.' But he wasn't there. Then I was running frantically, picking up speed, scanning the playground, shouting his name, knowing I had searched everywhere, now scanning the streets, the cars, wanting to call Tracey, not wanting to call Tracey, wanting to call the police, my phone now dead, interrogating men along the streets. A woman asked me what he was wearing. And then...Caz peeked out from behind a stand of trees at the far end of Bonner Park where he had hidden.

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When I ran to meet Caz, I was overcome with gratitude and what else?...the *anger* of guilt. Not: 'How could I have lost you?' But 'How could you do this to me?'

Jesus' parents join pilgrims from their trusted Nazareth community of friends and extended family. They travel yearly to Jerusalem to reenact this central touchpoint of their faith: the Passover. They celebrate God's liberation of his people from slavery and suffering. It's a pilgrimage. A commemorative feast. A spiritual practice to recall who God is and what matters most. *God sets you free; so put God first.*

After the festival and meal, they set out with their friends and neighbors, their pilgrim community, to walk back to Nazareth – at least several days journey away.

After a day they discover that Jesus is missing. Fear.

They forgot to do the headcount.

Mary thought Joseph knew. Joseph thought Mary knew.

Anyway. They make a day's return travel.

They search frantically for Jesus.

And when they find him on the third *day* of his absence,

How do they feel? Overcome with joy...and *anger*.

There Jesus sits among the teachers of Israel in the Temple.

People are ooing and awing. But Mom and Dad are not impressed.

They could only figure he had been kidnapped or had come to some terrible accident.

But the fact that he is well is almost more insulting.

Here Jesus sits, insensitive to their fears.

'What were you thinking?! We've been searching everywhere.'

Jesus is pure adolescent. All clarity.

What's obvious to him should be obvious to all.

'Why were you searching for me? How could you not know that I must be about my Father's business?'

They want to say: 'What's obvious to *you* is obvious to *you*.'

Parents of all ages will be heartened to know that even *Jesus* exasperated his parents by failing to communicate, then blaming them for not being omniscient like his birth Father.

-To the boy Jesus, this is a story about coming of age

I recall that my first weeks of intense college pressure were also a time of spiritual vitality. God was getting hold of me. Pointing me to what was most central. *God sets you free; put God first.*

I remember exuberantly reporting my new discovery to my parents: 'It turns out my grades don't even matter; my worth is already a gift given by the grace of Jesus!' My Dad responded with something like: 'Now, I know we took you to Sunday School and all, but let's not get carried away here.' (And I thought: Clearly he just doesn't get it.)

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Jesus has been raised in this surround of faith and practice. The teaching and traditions that make the commandments of God the very air he breathes. The yearly pilgrimages and observations of feasts that give his people their identity: *God sets you free; put God first.*

And now Jesus is coming of age.

An old soul at age 12, becoming a Jewish man means greater independence and moral responsibility

It's hard to know what Jesus came to understand about who he was to become and when.

I appreciate NT Wright's sense that Jesus' self-understanding emerged as a sense of calling, a growing sense of vocation that he was to inhabit the role of Messiah and Lord

So what we see here is an adolescent awakening of passion to be 'about his Father's affairs' – to be 'about the things of his Father.' Consider all that that these words encompass.

He's 12 years old. He has big questions and dreams. *God is getting hold of him.*

He's not a baby anymore. He knows his way to Nazareth. Why *wouldn't* he just stay a few days and sit with the teachers in the Temple?

And so why this big reaction from his Abba and Ima? As if it's a big deal to stay in Jerusalem and dig into the Truth, Beauty and Wisdom of *God* for a few days!

Children of all ages will be glad to know that even *Jesus'* parents exasperated him when they couldn't get the tension between Jesus' pleasing his elders and pursuit of his calling.

-So. Not an *uncomplicated* family trip. To Jesus' parents, a story about a lost child. To the boy Jesus, a story about coming of age. And we can be grateful for the earthy frustrations of both parents and youth. Grateful that something spiritually vital may happen even in the muddled midst of children and adults all being grown up together.

(While writing this, my sons checked in to tell me about both sliding the Subaru across the ice into a curb and making an A in English.)

Because notice: This is indeed a story about a lost child – but a lost child *found right where we'd hope him to be.* Surrounded by a community of caring adults willing to dialog about their own questions of faith with kids. And notice: This is indeed a story about coming of age – but a coming of age *to take steps of maturity, to be about the affairs of the Father, a vocation that includes honoring mother and father.*

Despite the frustrations of parents and son, then, this is a success story for Jesus' intergenerational faith community. This family, this pilgrim people from his village, with their weekly Sabbath and Synagogue worship and yearly practice of pilgrimage for Passover – they've all shaped Jesus. And so right at the critical moment when biology, conscience and Spirit open him to the big, bright questions about Who God Is and Who He's Meant to Be, the One who might have been lost is *found - right where God can get hold of him.*

-Do you hear analogies for a church family of kids and adults? How through faith-centered relationships and the spiritual practices of years – worship, Scripture reading, Christian

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community, rest, work, prayer – adults and kids shape one another for a vocation that is about the affairs of God the Father? About the kingdom?

I remember someone telling me and Tracey that what's key to cultivate as parents is a community of Christians around our children, so that, when they run from us, as they will (and have), they can be found in the arms and counsel of a circle of teaching we could only hope them to experience. So that at just the right time(s), they'd be found in just the right places for God to get hold of them.

-Friends, where will you we be found in 2025? Who will be your pilgrim community? With whom will you practice your faith? So that you might be growing up in just the place where God can get hold of you?

Mike McKay just lost his father this last week. And he reminded me of the truth that when a moment of crisis comes, when we feel lost, and we will, we want to have already invested years in real relationships, so that in the moment of crisis, we can be *found* practicing our faith in an authentic community of disciples that holds us up in the Father's love, that keeps growing us and encouraging us for a vocation of belonging to Christ.

-In the sacrament of Baptism, we Christians make promises to God, to children, to adults, to our whole faith community.

And what we *promise* is to guide and encourage one another in everything we say and do, with love and prayer, so that we all of us have every chance to know and follow Christ, to grow in relationship with body of Christ, and to participate in God's mission of saving love for all.

We promise to be a pilgrim community for one another, friends and relatives on a journey. Practicing our faith. We promise to be friends and teachers for when some of us get lost. We promise to patiently wait and watch for the days when God will get hold of each of us and surprise us with a sacred calling.

And as we do, we believe God will get hold of us *all*, again and again, to grow our passionate commitment to be about our Father's work.

If Baptism is our initiation into the pilgrim community, the Lords' Table is our regular Passover pilgrimage. Where we, children, youth and adults of all ages, are fed upon grace to grow in wisdom as we grow in years. To put the Lord first because his grace sets us free from our slaveries to what is less than God.