

The Gospel of Luke 2:41-52

Now the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem every year for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. 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. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 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." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

The Gospel reading we heard today is one of my favorites. It has also been a mainstay for my youth ministry. This story is singular in the whole of the New Testament. Nowhere else do we hear a story about Jesus in his childhood. You may have heard or read of other extra-Biblical stories about Jesus as a child. I don't know about you, but those have always struck me as fabrications that do little to increase my understanding of the Good News. Jesus bringing a bird back to life, impressing his friends and family with his superman-like powers.

But this story is different. It is odd that no other Gospel tells this story, but Luke tells lots of stories about women and children and those who are poor and fallen. Luke felt the need to have this story placed between the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple, and his baptism by John the Baptist. Why ?

Jesus is 12 years old. This would have been around the time of his bar mitzvah. We are told that the family has come to Jerusalem for the Passover, and if the customs were the same then as now, this would have been the first Passover in which Jesus had been able to participate. Luke takes pains to tell us that Jesus' formation from a Jewish baby, and as young person, has been strictly by the book. Jesus has not gone off on some wild, heretical tangent. He is a faithful Jewish boy raised by faithful Jewish parents. And, true to Luke's style, he presents this story in a particular historical timeframe, without embellishment and without miracles. It is part of Luke's "orderly account" of what occurred in the life of Jesus.

The story is very engaging because we can identify with it. When Jesus is left behind after the feast of the Passover, we can understand how Mary and Joseph felt after discovering that their son was missing. Each thought he was with another family member. Have you felt that pang of fear when someone you are responsible for has gotten lost?

Philip and I had that exact feeling when we took all our boys to the world's fair in Knoxville TN back in 1982. The boys were 6,5,3 and 1. We were pretty gutsy or stupid to be taking all those youngsters to a fair attended by 11 million people. But all was well until suddenly we didn't see our 3 year old, Hans. He had just completely disappeared as we were standing in line for the China exhibit. After alerting fair officials, and looking everywhere we possibly could think of, Philip finally found him. He had walked up to the front of the line for the exhibit and was waiting there to be let in. He was just a little impatient and didn't want to wait with the rest of us. What a huge sense of relief we felt when we had him back safe and sound. We couldn't help say to him though, "What were you thinking, Hans? Don't you ever do that again."

So, I imagine Mary and Joseph, after a day's trek back to Nazareth, and three days of looking everywhere in that city of about 50,000 people were probably pretty irritated with Jesus too. Mary and Joseph reacted just the way Philip and I did when we found Hans. Mary said, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."

But while Mary and Joseph were fretting and worried sick about their boy, their son was not worried about them in the slightest. You can almost hear this 12 year old say to his parents, "Come on, guys, what are you so upset about? Didn't you know where I'd be. Big deal that I stayed behind. You found me, didn't you?"

How Exasperating teenagers can be! And Jesus seems to have been a typical teenager; wanting his independence, yet not really yet responsible enough, or experienced enough to handle such independence.

And yet...there is also something else we get from this simply told story...Jesus was very different from most teenagers. He wasn't in the video arcade. He wasn't watching a show. He wasn't hanging out with other boys. He was in the Temple. If you were looking for your son or daughter would you look here at Trinity church? Most probably not. Even the most polite and obedient of teens would probably not be caught dead hanging around the church studying scripture. Although, I will admit, there may be a few.

So, in this little picture that Luke gives us of family life with young Jesus, he seems to be both very different from regular teens, but also very much the same. One of the hallmarks of the life of a teenager is rebellion. It's not that they are bad people, of course, it's that they are growing up and spreading their wings and want to be given a bit more responsibility and a bit more respect for what they are becoming.

That brings me to the topic of the importance of ministry in the church – to, and for, and with teenagers. They ARE rebellious. They DO push the limits. I have been working with teens for many years. First with my own, and then with youth groups in Hartford, Southport and Tegucigalpa. Each of these groups of young people was very different. Some rich, some poor, some black, white and brown. What they shared in common was that need to be heard and respected and given a little bit of responsibility, bit by bit. They need to feel that the church is their family.

They need adults who listen to them, attempt to understand and identify with them, and respect their ideas, even if they haven't necessarily thought them all the way through. We have a small but dedicated number of young people here at Trinity, and we have to be the ones who listen to our young people, and give them respect. You may think, "Well, that's fine for some young parent, I haven't been a teenager for quite a few years." And the same is true with me. Jesus was twelve in the story we heard today. When I was twelve it was a very different world than it is today. It was 1968. Astronauts from the Apollo 8 made the first human orbit of the moon. The record album of the year was St. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club band. Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were assassinated, and we were deep in the Vietnam war. A postage

stamp cost 5 cents in 1968 and the TV show *60 Minutes* was launched. (facts compiled from www.infoplease.org and *Controlled Chaos* by Kurt Johnson, Standard Publishing, 2001). How different things are for 12 year olds today.

Teens in our church today have never known what life was like before the Internet. They can't imagine not being able to talk on a phone that you can't carry around with you. They will probably never play a vinyl record album unless it's just out of a historical curiosity. And although we are at war today, as we were when I was 12, the impact that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have on us and the impact that the Vietnam, Korean or World Wars had on us a people is much different.

So, why am I taking this stroll back in time? Because it helps me to remember what things were like when I was 12 and so be able to identify with the things that our young'uns are going through today. As I think back I can remember the things I argued with my mother about to try to show my growing understanding of the world around me, and to assert my independence.

This is how we can help our teens; to remember what it was like to be 12, and to identify with their world. and their issues and listen to them as we wish people had listened to us when we were that age. Here at Trinity I think it is of utmost importance to give our children and our teenagers the chance to express themselves, be given a larger role in the life of our family, and larger focus of our love and care. I know one person who has made a concerted effort to draw young people into our church through acolyting and through the summer sports program that he has put together. I know three mothers who have given of their time every week to be sure that there is a Sunday School program for children. And our music director has made a special effort to include children in our musical offerings and has spent time rehearsing with them.

But I hope that in 2010 we can do more for our kids. There was no money budgeted in 2009 for Christian Education. And I understand that we are on a very tight budget. Here's where we stand now. Our pledge totals so far are over \$100,000 representing 31 pledges, and I thank you very much for the generous pledges many of you have made to Trinity church for the coming

year. But, even the most bare bones budget that we can draw up for 2010 will require about \$160,000 in pledges. We are \$60,000 short. We can only keep the lights and the heat on, pay the minimum in salaries to our organist, bookkeeper and sexton, and hit the absolute essentials with the income we have. We need everyone to fill out a pledge card.

Wouldn't it be nice to offer our children a faith experience that will last them a lifetime and draw them closer to their church family? Let's sponsor them working in a soup kitchen, and have an overnight in the cathedral of St. John the Divine. Wouldn't it be nice to support our diocese more fully, as is expected of us, to give opportunities for ministries for children and youth in Waterbury, Bridgeport and Hartford. Maybe one 12 year old out there would like to have the ability to study theology in the Temple like Jesus did.

I may have strayed a little from my topic of teenagers here, but my point is that we put our money where our hearts are. In these next few weeks before the annual meeting I want us to be cognizant of where we want to go as a Parish Family in 2010, and where we want to put our efforts and our attention. There are lots of things we would like to do. You have hired me to help grow this parish and bring new life and activity to Trinity. We cannot do it without the money to fund the programs. We need everyone's support.

This story today gives a little glimpse into the life of Jesus as a child from our Gospel. Jesus grew up and came into his own. Our children are growing up too; faster than we can imagine. Let's do our part to be sure that they know that they are loved by their parish family members as well as their nuclear families. Let us be their mentors, grandparents, teachers, and their sponsors. Our children need us to teach them what they cannot learn in school.

Let us rejoice that we have children in our midst and love them.