

The Gospel reading we heard today is one of my all-time favorites. This story is singular in the New Testament. Nowhere else do we hear a story about Jesus in his childhood. But we all know about teenagers. We've all been one ourselves! Perhaps Luke was the only writer to tackle the idea that Jesus was at one point a young man, a risk taker and a zealot for studying the Scripture from Temple elders.

Why did Luke alone feel that we should know about Jesus at the age of 12? I think there are several reasons: First, this would have been around the time for Jesus to become a man in the Jewish faith, 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 occasion for Jesus to participate in his first Passover as a man, an important milestone in a young man's life. Second, Luke may have wanted us to know that Jesus' formation; from a Jewish baby, through life as a 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 third, Luke says in the first paragraph of his gospel that he has wanted to set down an orderly account of the life of Jesus, through his ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension; through all his times. It is part of Luke's "orderly account" of 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?

Well, I have. Back when my sons were small, I had an experience not unlike the one that Mary and Joseph went through. Philip and I took our boys to the world's fair in Knoxville, Tennessee 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. All was well until we decided to stand in a very long line to see an exhibit. At one point I looked around and didn't see our 3-year-old, Hans. He had just completely disappeared. 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. I guess he was just tired of waiting in line. 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."

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 hear this 12-year-old boy/man say to his parents, "Hey, what are you so upset about? Didn't you know where I'd be. I stayed behind to learn what I needed to learn. You found me, didn't you?"

There is something else we get from this simply told story...Jesus was very different from most teenagers. He wasn't in the first century version of a video arcade. 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.

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. But for some studious and talented children, being a teenager is a time when the world opens up to them. Their minds are ready to discover their new talents, absorb new learning and begin to embark on what will be their life's passions and work.

That's what being a teen was must have been like for Desmond Tutu. He was brought up, a son in a poor family in northwestern South Africa. He was known as a studious young man who loved to read and did well in school. His family *had* been Methodist but then joined the Anglican Church, a diverse congregation.

Desmond married and became a teacher, but the apartheid policies of segregation of students in school, providing some with fewer resources and opportunities than others was maddening to Tutu and he quit. He studied theology in Africa and in London and was ordained a priest. His preaching was popular with Black and white people alike and he was quickly chosen to be bishop and then Archbishop of first Johannesburg and then Cape Town.

He is known to us here in the US because of his preaching and his outspoken nature. He met with presidents, spoke widely against apartheid, and taught at several universities over the years. He was always frank and honest about injustice and discrimination he saw against Blacks, against women, and against those with HIV/Aids.

He ordained women and LGBTQ persons well ahead of us in the American Episcopal Church. And he was never shy about incorporating politics in his preaching, and in his discussions with heads of state.

When speaking about the history of his country under the white Dutch colonists, he told this parable: "We had the land, and they had the Bible." "Then they said, 'Let us pray,' and we closed our eyes. When we opened them again, they had the land, and we had the Bible. Maybe we got the better end of the deal."ⁱ

Arch, as Desmond liked to be called, was passionate about ending apartheid. And after Nelson Mandela was released from prison, and fair elections were finally held, he began speaking about a rainbow nation. He was not in favor of retribution for those whites who had brutally tried to maintain their powerful minority rule. He believed in restoration as well as truth. He was on the side of God's truth, justice and the reconciliation of all people in Christ. "An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind."ⁱⁱ It sounds like something Jesus would say, doesn't it?

He said, "You are either on the side of the oppressed or on the side of the oppressor. You can't be neutral," he wrote in a statement to the United States Congress in 1984. He expanded his thinking in later speeches and sermons, noting that "If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."ⁱⁱⁱ

But he was not *just* about political issues and his quest to rid his country of apartheid. He was just as passionate about spreading the love, generosity, gratitude and compassion, the elements of the divine nature of Jesus.

Just as Mary treasured the events of the life of her son in her heart, as we heard at the end of our Gospel reading, we are called to treasure the events of our lives, and the lives of those around us. And we rejoice that the Archbishop Desmond Tutu was in the world to open our eyes to the Gospel and reflect the light of Christ for us to see and absorb into our own being.

ⁱ Obituary for Desmond Tutu, Dec. 26, 2021, New York Times.

ⁱⁱ Desmond Tutu, Dalai Lama and Douglas Abrams, *The book of Joy*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Obituary for Desmond Tutu, 12/26/2021, Time Magazine. (Quoting *The Book of Joy* by Douglas Abrams.)