



## **Jesus Was A Teenager! Pondering Prayerfully Towards Maturity And Wisdom**

A sermon preached by the Rev. Wilma Jakobsen

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When I saw that the gospel story for this week was about Jesus lost in Jerusalem, I went looking for stories about getting lost. I asked the CYF staff if any of them had ever been lost as a kid or teenager. At least one of them had, with a sibling, after a church picnic. They'd had a great time. They were taking a particular trail back home and had taken a wrong turning. They had been wandering on for hours, not exactly sure if they were lost or just taking a really long time to get home. As they came to a clearing on a hillside, two people in a dune buggy raced up to them and shouted at them, asking them their names. It turned out that all the church people and even the local police were racing around in dune buggies, searching all over for the lost ones, who had actually been lost for many hours. Their mother, when she got to them, was just so happy that they had been found. I'm going to leave you to guess which one of the CYF staff that was.

So maybe the gospel story today shows us that Jesus was a typical teenager. Or almost a teenager, a preteen 'tween', though in the culture of his time, he was actually almost an adult. At thirteen he would have gone for his bar mitzvah and formally become an adult. It's a great story, the only story we have in the Bible that shows us anything of Jesus' life between his being a baby and his baptism as an adult. While there are a few stories in the apocryphal gospels of Jesus doing magical kinds of actions as a child, this is the only story that is included in the gospels of the New Testament. While some scholars doubt its validity, it is a story that was chosen to be included in Luke's gospel, perhaps to give a glimpse of who Jesus was becoming, and it has much to offer us as we reflect at the beginning of another new year how we can grow and deepen in our faith and life. Let's take a look at it.

Jesus and his family go off as usual to Jerusalem for the annual week-long festival of the Passover, not quite the church picnic, in that it was a requirement for all devout Jews to participate. The time comes to go home, and the long caravan of relatives and friends that Mary and Joseph have travelled with, packs up and leaves. It's easy to see how it all happened. The women traveled at one end of the caravan and the men at the other, with the animals and possessions in the middle, often the children and younger ones having responsibility to look after the animals. Jesus could have been anywhere, with anyone, and everyone would have known he was somewhere with someone and was safe. Imagine at the end of a long day's travel, when the conversation goes something like this. Mary to Joseph, not concerned: Where's Jesus? Joseph to Mary, not yet concerned: Jesus? I thought he was with you. He must be around here somewhere. And finally after many questions and putting it all together, realizing Jesus was actually not with anyone and was not there. What to do?! Nothing but turn around the next day and go the long day's journey back to Jerusalem. I don't think they were happy campers.

Meanwhile....Jesus, having chosen to stay behind in Jerusalem, is not lost, is doing exactly what he's supposed to be doing and is having a great time with it, participating with the scholars and the rabbis in theological discussion. For a long time! He astounds them with his knowledge and his understanding of the scriptures. No one seems to ask him where his parents are or if he is going home for dinner. Scroll forward to the moment when Joseph and Mary, having looked absolutely everywhere in Jerusalem, find him happily engaged in discussion. Mary's response is typically parental with its projections of anxiety that all of us have within: "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." Just like any mother who's been really worried and anxious and is now so happy to have found her son that she can only get angry! I know we can all relate to this!

Jesus responds with the logic of a teenager: "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" He knows he is in the right place and tries to tell them. Like most parents, Joseph and Mary did not understand what he said to them. Almost-adult Jesus is acting with maturity. He has started to define himself and his identity, separating himself from his parents, setting a boundary that would make a twelve-step counselor proud. Mary, to her credit, does not then turn this into a back-and-forth parent-child interaction or a shouting match, nor does she exert dominating parental control. She stores....or treasures these things in her heart, adding them to the store of other amazing things about Jesus that have previously taken place. What do we see in Jesus? First, a teenager response – you don't understand me! You don't understand who I am, you don't understand my mission. I don't belong to you, I belong to God. Jesus probably barely understood himself. Many scholars think that Jesus would not have understood his calling or identity at such an early age, but maybe just maybe this was a fleeting glimpse he had into his own self. He had to make the point, and the gospel writer also makes the point. "I have to be about my Father's business" – that, says the scholars, is another translation of what he said. Or, "I have to be about my Father's interests, or affairs." That, says Deirdre Good in her book, *Jesus' Family Values* (pg 97), could have been deliberate ambiguity, as "this Father's affairs encompass everything. With these words Jesus distances himself from his parents; we can imagine their dismay as he attaches himself to his heavenly Father. Jesus is setting one father in his life against the other, and privileging God over Joseph. His understanding may have increased but it is at their expense. He grows not with them but apart from them, both physically and intellectually. But the text closes up the gap, at least for the present; Luke immediately shows Jesus returning into the domain of his earthly parents...Luke stresses that this rupture and reconciliation is in God's plan." Notice that the next verse says that Jesus went back with his parents and was obedient to them, difficult though it must have been. It's followed by the last wonderful verse; 'Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God.' It is very similar to verse 40 just before this story begins, and so it is wisdom and growth that frame this story as we see Jesus' growing as a healthy and mature human being, full of faith and grace.

Both Mary and Jesus in this story give us a good model of mature responses in a typical family situation that for many people would have ended quite differently and in great dysfunction. Both Mary and Jesus give us an insight into how we can take steps towards maturity and wisdom in our own lives. Their actions can inspire us at this time of year, as we have let go of an old year and have turned into a new year. Yes it's really easy to make resolutions that will too soon be forgotten – but yes, it can be a time to take some solid

decisions that will turn us towards transformation, that will move us even with baby steps towards maturity and wisdom.

How do we reach for maturity? How do we search for wisdom? I believe we start with what Mary did when she was faced with the reality that having Jesus as her son meant that life would never be business, or family, as usual. She acted in a healthy AlAnon way, in a mature, spiritual way, when she let go of her attachment to the desire for a more normal parent-child life, when she let go of her expectations of how things should be and she simply dwelt in the present moment. She pondered these things and she treasured all these things in her heart. She took time to reflect, dwell, wonder, ponder. Maybe she prayed, maybe she just reflected, trying to understand, to see the deeper meaning behind things – or maybe not. Maybe she just savored them in her heart. She acted with wisdom.

When we act with wisdom we start to deal with our own egos and to know and deeply understand and accept who we really are and how life really is. Angeles Arrien, in her book ‘The Second Half of Life,’ writes that growing towards wisdom means letting go of our fears, our attachments, our control and our need to feel special. That’s the mission of a lifetime, especially important during the second half of life. It’s the mission for those who find themselves on the journey of twelve-step recovery, it’s the mission of those seeking healing and wholeness in psychotherapy, it’s the mission of becoming fully human. I believe it’s the deep work of the Holy Spirit, at work in us to make us all that God has created us to be, knowing that we belong to God, we are unconditionally loved by God. In knowing and understanding ourselves more deeply we know and understand the Divine within us, we know God and we become more healed, more whole, more fully human. As we grow in this way, we know more fully what it means to be “about God’s business, working for God’s interests” as Jesus did in Jerusalem. We understand more fully what God wants us to do and who God wants us to be and become, and we can trust the process no matter how difficult it may seem.

Jesus had to differentiate himself from his parents and that can be a painful process. Becoming a mature adult can be a painful process as we wake up to the ways in which we would rather cling to being a needy child, a rebellious adolescent, a controlling parent, or rather hold on to our wounded hearts, our agonizing losses, our manipulative ways, our dominating actions, that have seemed successful in the past to getting love and attention or what it is we think we need. Wisdom, and the Spirit, invite us simply to let go of all this, to become free, and to grow in deep ways towards maturity and wholeness.

The lesson from Ephesians 1 can help us with this, by giving us a picture of how we can reach for these depths. It’s a prayer of Paul for the people of the church in Ephesus, and we can turn it into a prayer for ourselves, not only as individuals but also as a faith community. Here’s the translation of a section of it from the NRSV: “I pray that God may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know God, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of God’s glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of God’s power for us who believe, according to the working of God’s great power. God put this power to work in Christ when God raised him from the dead.”

In other words, the power that is at work in us is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. That’s the power at work in us to help us let go of the obstacles that prevent

us from becoming mature and full and whole human beings and embrace the task of becoming fully human. We need new eyes for our hearts, new eyes for our minds, so that we can truly see into the depths of ourselves and truly see into the breadth of the universe and the universality of God's infinite, transforming love, and truly see what we are to do to be transformed and to transform the world. With new vision we can see our lives and our world with eyes of understanding and hope and trust – which are what we need for the ongoing journey towards maturity and wisdom. I close with a prayer, a New Year's Blessing, by Joyce Rupp, as a first step towards pondering prayerfully onward into this New Year.

*A New Year Blessing, by Joyce Rupp*

*May your inner vision be transformed so that you can see more clearly your own journey with all humankind as a journey of peace, hope and bondedness.*

*May your God be someone you can lean on in your weak or painful moments. May you know God as your rock, your shelter, your strength, your wings of comfort and support.*

*May you be aware of all the places your feet carry you in the New Year.*

*May you not be afraid of the questions that press upon your mind and heart. May you welcome the questions and wait patiently for the day when they will have their answers.*

*May you be the one with welcome in your smile and hello etched upon your hand, the hand you extend to everyone who blesses you with presence.*

*May yours be the gift of reverence for all created things. May you face bravely and enthusiastically the responsibility to preserve and care for the beauty of the earth.*

*May the wellspring of compassion flow deep within you until you can taste the tears of your brothers and sisters.*

*May you awake each morning with thank you on your lips and in your heart, recognizing that all is gift, all is blessing.*

*May your friendship with God be strong and healthy. May that love be both a comfort and a challenge as your struggle to find your way in the New Year.*

*May your spirit be open and perceptive in discovering the will of God for you.*

*May your prayer be that of wisdom, guidance, and a deeper understanding of God's way for you.*

*May your life this New Year be a living legacy to your God.*

AMEN