

It Takes Family and Friends to Raise a Child to Love God

Luke 2:41-52 by Patty Friesen (Jan.6/19)

We are using the same gospel reading as last Sunday about Mary and Joseph losing Jesus and finding him in the temple because this is a rich text that provides us three sermons worth of reflection! Last Sunday we saw Mary's pondering on this event and how we can create space in our prayer life for pondering on God's work in our lives with prayer tools such as praying with scripture called Lectio Divine and using silent morning prayer and evening thanksgiving prayer. We talked about how labyrinths help us find Jesus in the center.

This morning, I'd like to lead us in a Bible study of this passage which reveals even more wonderful things about it. Using this dry erase board, because I don't know how to work computer technology to make a power point presentation or don't want to take the time to learn, I will walk us through the text. Bible stories are often brilliantly written as chiasms - meaning they are written with parentheses verses at the beginning and the end and we work our way towards the middle of the text to find out what the writers really want us to emphasize.

Luke 2:41 "Now every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover." So we begin with Jesus with his parents in their hometown of Nazareth practicing faithful Jewish observance of the Passover and we end in Luke 2:51 with Jesus in Nazareth with his parents and his mother Mary pondering her faith and Jesus' role in it. Verse 42 " And when Jesus was twelve they went up as usual for the festival." Jesus is twelve - this is a signpost. What other children are 12 years old in scripture - Jairus' daughter who dies and Jesus raises. We have 12 tribes of Israel and 12

disciples so Jesus' age is a signpost that something happens with the number 12 as it will in this text. Every year Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem...and when Jesus was twelve, they went up as usual. There is nothing particularly exciting about these verses about the festival - in fact it sounds kind of routine, habitual religious practice like going to church. But at least Mary and Joseph know what they are doing in verse 42, in verse 50, "they did not understand Jesus."

Verse 43, we have Jesus as an active agent in the text. He stays behind in Jerusalem. It's his choice. His parents didn't know it paralleling their lack of understanding Jesus in verse 50. Verse 44 - assuming Jesus was in the group of family and friends traveling back to Nazareth, Mary and Joseph journeyed a whole day before looking for Jesus and searched for him among family and friends. The bracketing verse is verse 49 where Jesus is again the active agent with choice and voice and says, "Why were you searching for me among my earthly family - didn't you know I would be found in my Heavenly Parents' House?"

Verse 45. When they did not find Jesus among family and friends on the road trip, they returned to Jerusalem to search which parallels verse 47 where Mary says: Child, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been searching with great anxiety."

Now we neatly get to the core of the text in verse 46: After 3 days - this is another signpost foreshadowing the future when Jesus will also be absent for 3 days in the tomb and will be found resurrected. Here he is not found among the souks and marketplaces or found among the other play places of other 12 year old boys. He is found in the heart of the city, in the heart of the Jewish faith, the temple, in the heart of

the Jewish law, sitting among the rabbis, listening and asking questions, discussing and questioning and reinterpreting Jewish law as he does throughout his ministry: You have heard it said but I say unto you. Here Jesus is at the centre of faith but also becomes *the centre of faith* with new interpretations of the law and scripture. It's a powerful centre that invites us to sit with Jesus and listen as well to what new things God may desire to do with us this new year. It reminds us as well as Mary of Bethany also sat at Jesus' feet to listen and Jesus blessed this place of contemplation and learning for her as well. Delicious chiasm, it doesn't always work this perfectly.

Let's retrace our steps in to the middle to see what this text says to us about how Jesus came to faith. Jesus' faith formation began at home in Jerusalem with his parents. He didn't necessary come pre-programmed with knowing everything about God and the Jewish faith. He came as a baby. He too had to be taught to speak, read and write but it all happened within the context of a family. I think we forget about Jesus' early upbringing because not much is written about it. This is the only text but it speaks volumes if we let it.

Mary and Joseph went as usual as they did every year up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover scripture says...the same old trip to Jerusalem with the same old parents. Most spiritual formation at home is routine, religiously habitual and maybe even a little boring. Every meal we give thanks to God. Every night we maybe say a prayer of release for the day. But routine, even boring spiritual routine is good for children. We always get up in the morning, get dressed, eat breakfast, brush teeth. You always know what to expect and children tell us when we forget. Routine sets a stable groundwork for good habits - just like doing dishes and learning to always say thank-

you. The more we practice good habits and routines at home, the easier they become and when it comes to routine spiritual practices like prayer and bible stories in the home, the more possibility there is for meaningful encounters with God anytime during the day. Parents know this and I'd like us to share in our Sunday School classes and at coffee this morning about something we learned from our parents and grandparents and children and grandchildren with regards to religious routine or habitual prayer as a way to learn about God or possibly get in the way about learning about God. And then share how we can share ideas about how to make meaningful Christian rituals in our homes.

Now the role of grandparents, friends and the extended family in the faith formation of children. Luke 2:44 "Assuming that Jesus was in the group of travelers, Mary and Joseph left Jerusalem. Then they started to look for him among their *relatives and friends*." Back in Jesus time, everyone lived and traveled as extended family and friends so I'm sure parents frequently assumed their children were with someone else they knew. There is still a huge role for friends, grandparents and aunts and uncles, especially single ones or ones with no children, to play in the spiritual formation of our children. It is why as a childless couple, Patrick and I enjoy being part of a church with cool kids.

Elsie Rempel writing *Please Pass the Faith, the Spirituality of Grand parenting*; calls on grandparents in particular to be authentic and intentional in creating opportunities for children to ask about God and faith. This is a challenge if one's children don't want grandpa and grandma "proselytizing" or teaching their children about God but grandparents can get around this by saying, "I'm not telling the kids what to believe, I'm just telling them what I believe and I'm inviting their spiritual thoughts and

questions about God.” Grandparents, there are ways of sneaking around your secular kids to teach your grandchildren. Elders in the Mennonite Nursing Home who came out of Russia in the 1940’s said when the parents couldn’t teach their children about God because the secret police would arrest them, the grandparents would teach the children because the state believed no one would listen to grandparents anyhow. When the Soviet system collapsed and citizens flocked to the churches for observance and comfort, it was obvious that the grandparents had done their job well!

I’ll never forget how when my siblings and I would go to our grandparents farm, Grandpa and Grandma would have devotions every morning and we felt special when we were asked to read the scripture or the Rejoice reading. My parents also tried to institute morning devotions but somehow it didn’t work as well as we tried to get ready for work or school so morning devotions at home were a flop, but what was much more effective encounters with God in our immediate family were our summer camping trips to BC and if it was a Sunday, we’d go find a place in the woods and have nature church. We felt close to God sitting under those tall Douglas firs beside a flowing creek. I encourage families to practice nature church - skip regular church if you need to but get those kids outside and engaged with their Creator.

My family of origin had family church this last fall when we moved Mom into her new assisted living. It was Sunday morning and we were too tired to go to her church but we found a room at her new complex and read a bible passage and my sister preached to us, which she has been waiting all her life to do, and we sat in a circle and prayed for Mom in her new place. It was a powerful moment of family church that helped us all in this dramatic life transition.

Family rituals help us make transitions to begin school or end a job or welcome a new baby or bury a pet. I've put a book in the church library called Faithful Families, creating sacred moments at home with all kinds of ideas about creating a family altar, a comfortable corner of a room where kids can flop and look at family photos and pray for family members or hold rocks from family vacations and give thanks for nature. There could be a battery operated candle they can turn on or there can be cards with questions about God like: How did I see God in some good things today? Or where did I *not* feel the presence of God today and how can I invite God into that difficult experience as well? Advent wreaths at home are a meaningful way to prepare for Christmas beyond the sweets and present grab.

Any minimal kind of spiritual formation we do at home has huge counter-cultural effect, providing a different framework for seeing and behaving in the world and this will occasionally be difficult for children and parents. Why do we have to go to church when no one else does? Why do we have to come home for supper when no one else does and say what we are thankful for in front of our friends who have joined us for supper? Why do we have a stupid Advent wreath when everyone else has a 20 foot tree full of presents?

Spiritual disciplines around simplicity will be particularly challenging for children, parents and grandparents around this time of year. How many presents did you get? Did your mom make that outfit or your dad that toy? The competitive, show-off-ness among children and adults is brutal and nothing makes us feel the shame of not measuring up than someone else's judgement on something we wear or own. We live in a world where possessions, jobs, body shape, status and house size have become

our gods and the kingdoms we serve. We need in-depth conversations about money, materialism and gratitude for children and adults alike. We're different, we stand out among most of our children's friends so we will need other family friends who share our same values.

Our winter worship series on spiritual practices will include the spiritual lives of our children. We'll examine this more in next week's service on the role of the faith community in the faith formation of children. Let us pray...