

February 9, 2020
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
Scout Sunday

First Presbyterian Church
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Rev. Jim Widboom

Young Man in the Temple?

Luke 2:41-52

This is the only story of Jesus as a boy in the Bible. Matthew, Mark, and John's gospels say nothing. So what a delight to have a few sentences about life with mom and dad during his years growing up. There may be teenage applications in this story, and we can use as many teenage bible applications as we can find. Age 12 is almost a teenager, back then age 12 probably was.

The family life of Jesus included a yearly journey to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. The anticipation, preparation, and then the long journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem must have been the highlight of the year. Notice that families traveled together, extended families so big that a whole day passes before his parents began looking for him, or even noticed he wasn't around.

To travel and see the world opens up a child's imagination and you begin to think about your own life. My family always took a fishing trip in August after the country fair, traveling north of Minnesota about 150 miles into Canada. For my sister Rosemary and me, it was hugely exciting. Our father was an expert at car packing, and the night before we left, fishing rods from the attic, a small outboard motor, and groceries filled the trunk of the car. Very early in the morning when it was still dark and still, we drove off. Rose and I didn't feel we made any progress in the long 750 mile trip until we were finally out of corn country, which seemed endless. To cross the border into Canada, get Canadian money, buy Canadian sweets, and French vanilla ice cream, with paper mills smelling like cooked cabbage, made the experience delightful and eye opening. I remember the first time this travel made me feel like I was a little older and was ready for some of my own ideas. Whenever we stopped for lunch, I had a hamburger. One time I thought, I am going to try something different. I don't have to have a hamburger every time so I ordered chili. It was fine, with crackers, but it felt good to make a decision on my own.

This travel to Jerusalem each year by Jesus' family must have been similar. The kids, teenagers, and the lad Jesus, must have wondered at all they saw, their imaginations opening and growing, beginning to think independent thoughts.

So Jesus tests his parents. Without telling them, he stays behind in Jerusalem when the whole clan has begun their journey back home. Did he know what he was doing? Did he intentionally stay back, just to see how long it would take his parents to notice? Or was this a

great step of the young boy toward 'individuation,' the effort all of us go through to find and know ourselves, separate from our parents and family.

Individuation, or finding yourself as a young person, a teenager, or a young adult, usually includes conflict. Certainly this event in the life of Jesus was a conflict. It must have changed the way his parents thought about him. Everyone must go through this to avoid an unhealthy dependency on parents. Conflict is unavoidable, and because I don't like conflict, I was very obedient, with an extended period of 'individuation.' I had a close friend in church, however, who got it over very fast. He couldn't do enough things that irritated his parents, and made it clear to them very early on, that he was in charge of himself.

The 'individuation' of Jesus is very clear in this passage. When his parents finally locate him after three days searching in Jerusalem, his mother says to him, "your father and I have been searching for you with great anxiety," Jesus responds, "you should have known I would be in my father's house." That's a leap; already he sees that the one who calls him out in obedience and faith is no longer his parents, but the Lord.

So the only story which is told about the boy Jesus is a story where he begins to break from his parents, feeling already a call to do the will of God. Notice, however, that the big walk away from home won't be for a while—he returns home to Nazareth with his parents and is obedient to them.

Mary, however, knows that something is up with her child. A child, a young adult, a teenager is very blessed to have a parent who notices what's up in the child's life and is not altogether surprised when things are done. Jesus once was asked during a time of stress, where are your brothers and sisters, and your family. Jesus says, "my brothers and sisters are those who do the will of God." I can hear Mary's response when she heard that he had said this, "yes, that sounds like him, I am not offended because that's who he is, and I have known this for a long time."

One time, in all the years I knew my father, did he say something to me that made me realize he knew something about me. My sister, seven years older than I, went to our denomination's college in Chicago, 500 miles from home, right in the city on the north side. At an early age, I had decided I would go there also. This was the big leap away from home, an 'individuation' from family whether I was ready or not. My father said to me, as they were leaving, "you will like it here, there are a lot of people here like you." I could hardly stand it—he knew something about me that had been true for a long time, which I didn't know he knew or paid any attention to. Mary knew her son, Jesus. And this was an enormous blessing to him.

So finally the lesson ends and he increased in wisdom, in years or stature, and in divine and human favor. Do you remember what happens the first time he returns to Nazareth, after he has left home, and begun his ministry. He says some very tough things to his hometown synagogue, and they get upset, saying, "we know this kid, he has gotten very full of himself, gone off and thinks he knows more than the rest of us," and they throw him out. His individuation is complete. His hometown and family no longer constitute his identity, his identity now clearly is doing the will of God. And sadly, at this point, this has put him in conflict with his family.

It is a wonderful story, perfectly told, where we see Jesus even at age 12 stepping out on his own, yet also respectful of parents and family, but already seeing himself as different and on a course that will take him again back to Jerusalem where the intentions of God for him become the singular and most important matter in his life.