

Trinity United Methodist Church
Sunday, Dec. 30, 2018
Scriptures and Sermon
Pastor Geri Hamlen

The Bible tells us that Jesus was not the first young boy to be blessed by God in a special way. There was the shepherd boy David and of course, the little boy Samuel, son of Hannah who dedicated her boy to God after the miracle of her pregnancy. Let's hear what that was like...

Old Testament Reading

1 Samuel 2: 18 – 20, 26

Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy wearing a linen ephod.
His mother, Hannah, used to make for him a little robe
and take it to him each year,
when she went up with her husband,
to offer the yearly sacrifice.

Then the high priest Eli would bless Hannah and her husband, and say,
"May the LORD repay you with children by this woman
for the gift that she made to the LORD";

...and then they would return to their home.

Now the boy Samuel continued to grow

both in stature and in favor with the LORD and with the people.

The words of God for the People of God.

Thanks be to God

On Christmas Eve, we lived out the Birth Day of Jesus with costumes and a procession. The Bible moves quickly through the days of Jesus' childhood. Let's remember this s childhood story in Luke 2: 41 – 52.

Gospel Reading

Luke 2: 41 – 52

The Voice (VOICE)

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⁴¹ Every year *during Jesus' childhood*, His parents traveled to Jerusalem

for the Passover celebration.

When Jesus was 12, He made the journey with them.

They spent several days there, participating in the whole celebration.

When His parents left for home, Jesus stayed in Jerusalem,
but Joseph and Mary were not aware.

⁴⁴ They assumed Jesus was elsewhere in the caravan
that was all traveling together.

After they had already traveled a full day's journey *toward home*,

they began searching for Him among their friends and relatives.

When no one had seen the boy,

Mary and Joseph rushed back to Jerusalem and searched for Him.

⁴⁶ After three days of separation, they finally found Him—
sitting among a group of religious teachers in the temple—
asking them questions, listening to their answers.
Everyone was surprised and impressed that a 12-year-old boy
could have such deep understanding
and could answer questions *with such wisdom*.

⁴⁸ His parents, of course, had a different reaction.

**Mary: Son, why have You treated us this way?
Listen, Your father and I have been sick with worry for the last
three days, wondering where You were, looking everywhere
for You.**

Jesus: ⁴⁹ Why did you need to look for Me? Didn't you know that I
must be working for My Father?

Neither Mary nor Joseph really understood what He meant by this.
Jesus went back to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them.
His mother continued to store these memories like treasures in her
heart.

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The Message

'Search Always'

Pastor Geri

Such a familiar story and really, the Bible doesn't tell us very much about Jesus as a
child. Of course we know that as a baby he and his family were political
refugees...running from a cruel and corrupt government. Crashing across borders and
finding safe harbor in Egypt. And when the time was right...out of Egypt the little family
returned to their community.

But, other than this story, we don't know too much about Jesus being a kid or an
adolescent or a teen ager...unless you go searching in the writings outside the
Bible...Have you ever heard of the 'The Infancy Gospel of Thomas?' That book
survives to this day and has lots of Jesus childhood stories. Including one about Judas
Iscariot...the man who sold out Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Legend has it: The child
Judas Iscariot (possessed by the devil and has a reputation for biting) tries to bite
Jesus. He can't succeed, but instead hits Jesus. Jesus heals Judas of the devil.

Even the Quran of the Muslim religion mentions Jesus as a boy...making birds out of
clay and breathing life into them.

Interesting stories but they didn't make the cut for getting into the Bible that we use as
our source of inspiration so I feel even a little bit guilty for mentioning those other
sources. But then again...maybe Jesus wouldn't mind because Jesus was after all, a
student. And as interesting as it is to learn about other sources of information about

Jesus, in truth, the Biblical story we read today, about the 12 year old Jesus, has enough going on to keep us busy and interested and growing, right here and right now. There are a few things that jump out at me.

We can tell from our reading this a.m. that Jesus was a curious youngster. A searcher...He fit right in with the Jewish practice of reading and studying and questioning and discussing...That's what Jesus was doing in the synagogue that day. Searching for what...truth? Wisdom? God? We don't know for sure what he was looking for but it's clear that Jesus was absolutely comfortable with asking questions, even of his elders...and listening to the answers. He really wanted to know what other people were thinking and feeling and teaching. Jesus cares about people and their ideas. He likes us and wants to know what's going on in our minds and our hearts.

Makes me think of how he called his earliest disciples...Come and be fishers of people. Come and search and find out what it is that the people around you are talking about and thinking about and needing. Ask questions and listen to the answers. Be patient. Be calm. Be persistent. Jesus might say to us: **Search Always**, as I have searched for you. Search always. (Yes, I'm still on my 2 word kick.)

So let me tell you what my searching in this story has brought forth. At first, I got carried away in my thinking about the irony that it was Mary and Joseph, his parents, who were the first Seekers of Jesus. In this day and age, people who are curious about Jesus, asking a lot of questions, checking out church to see if there's anything useful for them...they are the ones called Seekers. Looking for someone and something special.

Mary and Joseph already knew that Jesus was special. He was their lost boy, or at least they thought he was lost and they were his faithful parents. There is no doubt that they would **Search Always** for their child. So I went a day or two giving them the credit for being the first Jesus seekers. We don't really know what Joseph thought about all this but Mary was pondering in her heart and storing up memories like treasures. Seekers. Definitely. The first Seekers. I loved that idea.

But, I was wrong about that, wasn't I? As much as I liked that idea. As ironic and entertaining and satisfying as that idea was. It wasn't true. You know that, don't you? Who was seeking Jesus before Mary and Joseph?

Wise Ones

Shepherds

King Herod

All of Israel...the prophets.

So...I was wrong. You heard it here first! As I write these sermons, I ask God to enlighten me. I pray for an open mind to absorb new information and I pray for an accessible memory system so I can draw on old information and, sure enough. God answers prayers and I had to let go of the idea that Mary and Joseph were the first Seekers of Jesus. It just isn't true...as much as I would like it to be.

Sometimes it's hard to give up those great ideas we get, isn't it? But with a little humility and a chuckle at my own thick-headedness...I did it. I let that idea go. Hope you do too...any of you who wandered off in your thoughts...Come back and hear me. As good a parents as Mary and Joseph were...they were not the first seekers of Jesus.

Although I bet they would **search always** and forever for Jesus or any of the other children that they had later on.

So, I let go of one idea and not too long later...another one popped up in my busy brain. It's something I've thought about every year...Have you ever noticed how this trip to Jerusalem when Jesus was 12 was sooooo different for Mary and Joseph compared to their trip to Bethlehem that night when Jesus was born?

Bethlehem trip was kind of bleak...just the 2 of them...and maybe some robbers? A donkey. Loneliness. No room at the inn. It's like...where were all their friends and their family? There had to be others who had to travel to Bethlehem for that census but they weren't car-pooling or tag-teaming it with Mary and Joseph.

Can you guess why that might be? The Bible doesn't say this in so many words but let's face it: Mary was pregnant out of wed-lock. Joseph was flouting convention by staying faithful to her even when she obviously hadn't been faithful to him. Do you suppose that created some kind of family tension? Community isolation? Disconnection? Ostracism even maybe? I'm guessing yes...

Because 12 years later...what we read this a.m...what a difference travelling from Nazareth to Jerusalem. Jesus and his family were part of a caravan. A caravan that was so huge, and so relaxed, and the people were so comfortable with each other. A caravan that was a little miniature village, a community where people trusted each other to watch out for the kids and probably the elderly and the less functional. Trusted so much that Jesus could be missing for a day before his parents even noticed! Not because they were careless but because they trusted.

That sounds kind of scary to us in this day and age and yes, Mary and Joseph were scared and worried and **searching always** to find Jesus...for 3 days they searched.

But still...how cool that they weren't isolated and alone...like that trip to Bethlehem 12 years earlier. Some kind of miracle of acceptance and reconciliation must have been going on in the lives of Joseph and Mary's friends and families. Time and the Spirit of God and the faithfulness of people and the beauty of this child Jesus, must have melted hearts and created a sense of fellowship and care among a whole big bunch of people. Have you ever thought about it like that? I love that picture of a happy childhood for Jesus and his parents after the trauma of his birth and the necessary asylum seeking they experienced.

Now, I have to tell you...I have never read anything anywhere, that compared those two trips like I just did. I don't know anybody who has written an article or a sermon or a book about the early social isolation of that little family being transformed over time into acceptance and integration...and you don't have to buy it. It's my little happy place, so to speak. It's an idea that came to me as I read the Word of God. As I imagined myself as an unwed pregnant woman, as a wife, as a mother, as a scared and worried parent. As I was searching for Jesus...the Jesus who could save me and heal me and keep me company in my loneliness and isolation...It's a concept that came to me out of the imaginative, contemplative, prayerful place in my soul where I **search always**...to draw closer and closer to Jesus.

Yes, I am a seeker of Jesus. How about you? Do you want Jesus to be your best friend, forever? Do you want a mind that is open to new information? And an imagination that allows you to enter into the Bible in a special, unique, one of a kind way so that you can get closer and closer to Jesus? Are you ready to search always for God to show up in your life?

I know that's asking a whole bunch of questions really fast. So let me just slow down and say this. The 12 year old Jesus was showing us what it looks like to search always for more God in our lives. He was curious...He was brave. He didn't feel intimidated that he didn't have all the answers. The Bible says...he asked questions and he listened to the answers. It's OK to do both. We don't have to know everything in order to know God. But...asking and listening just might be the easiest way to find God. To get closer to God through Jesus. To search always and receive the gifts and the goodness and the solutions that Jesus wants us to have.

I really hope and pray that in 2019 you will consider a variety of formats and opportunities:

Workshops on the First Saturdays of the month.

Book Study on Wednesdays at 5:30.

Bible Study on Tuesdays at 6:00.

Special Worship on the third Saturday afternoon and the third Sunday at Evergreen Manor.

Us Methodists are big on learning stuff. (That's what convicted me about becoming a Methodist you know. I was amazed to be in an adult SS class where it was OK to be dumb. It was OK to be smart. It was OK to do the research and figure out what God was saying to me. And at it's best, Methodist churches are a place where people learn and practice asking questions, listening to answers and respecting other people's ideas...even when we don't agree with them.

We can agree to disagree without being disagreeable knowing that Jesus set the stage, even as a 12 year old for us to use the brains, the heart, the imagination, the soul that God gave us to figure stuff out. Asking. Listening. Search always and Jesus will be with you...

Let us pray.

Wisdom of God, playful and profound,

You are patiently persuasive, gentle and strong,
child-like and full of the wisdom of the ages.

Reveal yourself to us in the faith of the children whom you call to yourself.

Show us how to respectfully receive the wisdom of a child, the child that you were.

Help us to see the child in our teachers and our leaders...digging past worldly concerns to the eternal playfulness and joy that is your greatest gift to us.

We pray and we praise you. Amen.ⁱ

ⁱ Attribution: amended from Brian Wren book of Advent liturgist and prayers. p. 164