

“Treasure Them”
Luke 2:41-52
First Presbyterian Church
November 14, 2021

Introduction

We don't know much about Jesus' childhood.
We know a little about his birth from Matthew and Luke.
We know that he was dedicated at the temple at eight days old.
But after that we don't know much
 until he is baptized by John and begins his public ministry.
There is, however, one story related by Luke,
 and it is through this story that I now invite you to listen to
 for God's word this morning.

Bible Reading

¹Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴²And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. ⁴³When the festival was ended, and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. ⁴⁴Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. ⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.”⁴⁹He said to them, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” ⁵⁰But they did not understand what he said to them. ⁵¹Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵²And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

ANTHEM

Sermon¹

Jesus was 12 years old. Perhaps you know a seventh grader at Grandview or Northview Middle School... that's how old Jesus was... and in his Jewish tradition, that meant he was about to become a man. This story takes place during Passover... one of the highest of Jewish holy days. Faithful Jews would move heaven and earth just to be near the to Jerusalem temple at Passover and every year Mary, Joseph, and their children would make the pilgrimage. That's about a two-day trip from Nazareth to Jerusalem... so Mary and Joseph would surely camp overnight.

¹ This sermon is inspired by and follows closely a sermon by Rodger Nishioka, professor at Columbia Theological Seminary. It is published in *Proclaiming the Great Ends of the Church*, Joseph D. Small, ed. (Louisville: Geneva, 2010), 54-57.

Then, the next morning they would walk up the mountain to the plateau on which the great temple was built. Joseph would make the required sacrifice... they would all participate in the Passover celebration... and then, along with all the other pilgrims they would head back to their home in Nazareth (again, a two-day journey). Well, according to Luke it was only when they had finished the first day of the return trip that they realized nobody had seen Jesus. Why they didn't notice this before, we don't know... maybe they were distracted by Jesus' younger siblings. But once they discovered Jesus wasn't with them, they raced back to Jerusalem... another full day's journey... and began the search. Now Jerusalem was a big city... especially compared to tiny Nazareth, so even three days of looking for Jesus might just be the beginning. I imagine that just as they were getting desperate, they happened to overhear a conversation about this "whiz-kid" who had been in the temple for several days talking with the teachers and amazing them with his questions. And then, Mary and Joseph gave each other THAT look... and knew it had to be him. So, they ran to the temple... found him with the scholars... and the text tells us they were "astonished." This is the English word to translate the Greek... and it's not a bad translation... I'm thinking that Mary and Joseph had frantically looked five days for this kid, and when they found him all they are "astonished?" Me thinks there might be more to it than that. And sure enough, there are other aspects of this word's meaning – like amazed... astounded... and even "overwhelmed." The translators chose "astonished" – but a Greek hearer of this story would understand that Mary and Joseph were amazed, astounded, and *overwhelmed*; sometimes with joy, sometimes with wonder, sometimes with fear, all at the same time!

So, overwhelmed with ALL of these emotions, Mary asked her son a classic mother-question: "What do you think you're doing?" No, actually it was: "Why have you treated us like this? Can't you see your father and I have been worried sick?" Jesus answered her in a way that makes you think, "Well, he may be the Messiah, but he sure doesn't know how to work his mother." He answered her with a question: "Why have you been looking for me? Didn't you know I must be in my Father's house?" To which Luke adds: Mary and Joseph did not understand what he said to them." Which may be Luke's way of saying: "They were still pretty upset!" But finally, Luke says that EVEN in her amazement, EVEN feeling completely overwhelmed, when all was said and done, and they were back home... Mary *treasured* all that had happened in her heart. Mary treasured all that had happened in her heart.

You may remember this was the second time Luke tells us that Mary "treasured" something in her heart... the first was twelve years before when the shepherds came to the stable in which he was born. I have always loved reading these words of Christmas Eve: "Mary treasured all these things in her heart." And I found myself thinking about them last Sunday as we commissioned this year's confirmation class... as we received last year's confirmands as full members of the body. Because it seems to me that "treasuring" is the very essence of how we are called to be with our children and youth in our families, in this church, and in our community.

In the church, we treasure our children when we see them NOT as the future of the church, but as the church NOW. We treasure our youth when we learn their names, engage them in conversation (even if we only get one-word answers to questions).

We treasure our children every time we teach Sunday school, make snacks for Vacation Bible School, chaperone a mission trip, serve as a confirmation mentor, OR pretty much say “yes” to whatever Sarah White or Kendall McGeorge asks us to do. And here’s a way you may not immediately think of – we treasure our children when we, as adults, take seriously our own spiritual growth... when we take seriously our own study of Scripture... our own life of prayer and service... when we let our lives model *for them* what it looks like to follow Jesus.

There is an emerging body of research about children that is both encouraging and frightening. This research focuses on the “resilience” of children. We hear a lot about how resilient children are... how kids can roll with the punches... and the implication is that this resilience is just sort of a built-in quality all kids possess. But the research shows that resilience depends on whether or not children have adults in their lives who “treasure them” just as Mary treasured Jesus. And the research indicates that young people need at least four adults in their lives who treasure them. If when asked, they can’t name at least four, then an alarming number of these young people will not thrive. Well, friends... the church is built for this... I mean, this is in our wheelhouse... Christ has designed the church to be a place where everyone is treasured; and especially children. Though families are vital, and parents are the primary “resilience builders,” it takes more than that... and the church (this church) can be that more.

So, we need to treasure OUR children... but not only OUR children. We need to treasure ALL children... to do whatever we can to make sure the needs of children are at the top of our legislator’s priority list... to make sure our communities are safe, and our schools are strong... and perhaps, perhaps TO BE one of those four trusted, loving adults for at least one other child... to be someone they can count on to love them no matter what. Briefly, out of the many ways you can do this, I want to suggest two. One is close up and the other is from a distance... so that if you can’t do one, you might be able to do the other. I’ve mentioned several times in the past couple of months the opportunities for reading to children and tutoring kids in our public schools. There is information on the back of your bulletin insert this morning... William Pleasant and Katherine Mull and dear Mary Ann Crane were trained last month to go into schools and read to kindergarteners. So, please take a look at that. And then, this Christmas we can all take part in an effort we are calling “Poinsettias with a Purpose.” Rather than buying a poinsettia to honor a loved one this Christmas, use that \$15 to purchase an emergency bag that DSS social workers will provide to children who need to be removed from unsafe situations in their homes. Sometimes these kiddos have to leave with only the clothes they are wearing, so these bags have PJs and underwear, a toothbrush and a blanket... and a stuffed animal for the littlest ones. We will still publish the names of our loved ones we are remembering, yet instead of taking a plant home you will be treasuring a child in our community. You see, this “treasuring” is not a passive thing. Coaches and teachers know that... so do counselors and mentors. Foster parents know this as do folks who tutor and have a lunch buddy. And God knows that those of us who are parents and grandparents... we know that “treasuring” young ones is not a passive thing... and that there are times... there will continue to be times when we are amazed... astounded... and even overwhelmed by the kids in our care. What the mother of our Lord teaches us that the best response is to so treasure each of them in our hearts so that all children of God know that the One who created them in his image... who redeemed them through God’s only Son... and sustains them through God’s Holy Spirit ... treasures them in God’s own heart forever.

Prayer

Let us pray:

What a gift our children are to us, Lord, what an amazing, astonishing, and sometimes overwhelming gift they are. We thank you for them, Lord, for our children and grandchildren... and for all of the children of the covenant that adopt by baptism into your family in this place. We treasure them... teach us to treasure them even more... that they might always know you will always be with them... and that you treasure them in your heart. Amen.