

St. Timothy's Lutheran Church
Pastor Jonna Bohigian

December 30, 2018
Luke 2:41 - 52

Jesus, Son of God

“The children were lined up for lunch in the cafeteria of a Catholic elementary school. At the head of the table was a large pile of apples. After watching them for a while, the supervising nun wrote a sign and posted it on the apple tray: ‘Take only ONE. God is watching!’

“The children kept moving further along through the line, where at the other end of the table was a large pile of chocolate chip cookies. One of the children looked at the cookies and then wrote a sign that read: ‘Take all you want. God is watching the apples.’”¹

Children are the best, aren't they? Their logic is fantastic, and they can be *bold*. They are *notorious* for saying whatever comes into their minds and subsequently embarrassing their parents.

Children are wonderful, but they are young and have limited life experience. They aren't expected to provide for themselves or for others, and they can be relatively carefree. They aren't expected to contribute in the same way as an adult, and they *definitely* aren't expected to be *wise*. In our American culture, we now are experiencing an age of extended adolescence, and oftentimes *expect* young adults to act like adolescents.

When my husband, Alek, was in his mid *twenties*, he interviewed for work at a Christian camp. As he met with the camp director, he said that he would be happy

¹ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/08/marlo-thomas-laugh-of-the-day-apples-cookies-and-a-nun_n_1757718.html

to take any position at the camp, and would especially like to help with the marketing and promotion of the camp. He had just come out of running multi-million dollar political campaigns, and *surely* could be of help to a local camp. He was given the head nod and the esteemed position of Kitchen Assistant, earning \$35 a day.

A couple months after working in the kitchen, Alek approached the camp director again with the plea to help with more. He could help with the marketing, promotion, and even budgets for the camp. He received a quizzical expression and the response, "We've already got people to work on these areas of the camp. I don't see how *you* could help." Alek was unable to convince the director that he had unique gifts to offer the team, and so he faithfully returned to his work in the kitchen, where he scrubbed dishes for 8 – 10 hours a day.

Likely, I am preaching to the choir. You can relate your own experiences of being too young or too old to be taken seriously or to take on a certain position.

And this is the scenario we find ourselves exploring in our Gospel text. We observe the Holy Family in Jerusalem at the Feast of the Passover. They have come with other family and friends from out of town, and bring their twelve-year-old son, Jesus.

Perhaps this is Jesus' first time in Jerusalem for the Passover, or perhaps he has been coming every year. He *sees* the animal his parents bring to sacrifice at the temple for their offering. He *tastes* the bitter herbs and the unleavened bread served at the Passover. He *hears* the story of God's rescue of their people from slavery in Egypt thousands of years ago. He *observes* the Sabbath rest of the feast. Perhaps he

goes to the temple with his parents and sees the animals brought for sacrifice and the religious teachers expounding in the courts.

Jesus is captured by his experience, and knows that this is *exactly* where he needs to be. But this is not the place for twelve-year-old boys. This is the place for men thirteen years of age and older. This is the place for a Son of the Commandments, what we call a “Bar Mitzvah,” a person who is “accountable for [his] actions.”² Jesus is captured by this place that is not for children.

Mary and Joseph have sacrificed, celebrated, and rested. They leave for home with a great company of relatives and friends, and suddenly realize that their preteen is not with them. They are a day’s journey away from Jerusalem, and have *no idea* where their son is. They travel back to Jerusalem, desperate and anxious. After three days, they *finally* find him at the temple, sitting amongst the *teachers*. They see their son, in a *place* he’s not supposed to be and in a *position* he’s not supposed to be. Jesus is sitting amongst the religious teachers. Now, to sit at someone’s feet means *discipleship*; to sit amongst teachers means that one is a *teacher*. Their twelve-year-old son, who is not yet an adult, is *teaching* amongst the teachers at the *temple*!

This is simply unacceptable. Mary must rebuke her son and communicate that he is being disobedient. Jesus has scared them half to *death* and he should have obeyed the Fourth Commandment by honoring his parents. He should have been with them; he should not be *here*!

² <https://www.ritmeyer.com/2017/04/08/twelve-year-old-jesus-in-the-temple-at-passover/>

But Jesus doesn't apologize. He instead seems *confused* as to why Mary and Joseph were searching for him. Jesus is the Son of God. Don't they know that? Jesus is honoring his Father. He is doing the things of his Father by teaching and being in his Father's house. *Of course* he would be here!

His parents don't understand, but Jesus follows them to Nazareth and is obedient to them. Mary treasures all these things in her heart, and Jesus grows in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and people (Lk 2:51b – 52). This young twelve-year-old boy is the teacher to the teachers, the wise one to his earthly parents, and the Son of God.

What a mystery, that the Creator of all things would send His only Son to the world in human flesh, to human parents, to grow up as all humans do, and to be the Savior of the world through his humility. What a mystery, that the baby Mary swaddled in cloths and laid in a manger would one day be wrapped in grave clothes and laid in a tomb for *her* salvation and for *our* salvation.

This humble baby, this twelve-year-old boy, this humble servant, this obedient Son, came for *you*. He did not come to convince you of a doctrine to believe or to threaten you with power; he came to live and to die for *you*. And he loves you more than you will ever know.

For many of us, knowing the love of Jesus through his *humility* will be our constant struggle, for we desire strength and control and to be *right*. We work hard to cover our deficiencies and not to appear weak. To appear weak is childish, not *commendable*. To be weak is to admit that you need help and that you cannot be self-reliant.

He had been a powerful, successful businessman. His hard work and success allowed him to retire early and to travel the world with his wife. He loved his family and told them constantly: There is nothing more important than family. And with his love came incredible expectation. His family loved him, and often struggled with the heavy load of expectation laid on them.

Years later, his beloved wife died and his memory steadily declined. He needed to be cared for and to have *others* remember what he could not. His family moved him to a care facility in Fresno, where they could help him and see him often.

A few years ago, my mother-in-law took us to A Christmas Story play. Throughout the night, she tended to him. She reminded her dad that he did not need his coat because the show was not yet over. She watched him carefully as he stood up and sat down, so that he wouldn't fall. She watched his feet, lest he trip an actor who might come through the audience. She commented, "In some ways, life is more difficult with Dad, but in other ways, it is much simpler. Dad is like a child in many ways. He doesn't *want* to need people but needs them quite a lot. There is a sweetness to Dad now that wasn't there before."

We drove him to his home, and he was *exhausted*. Even his *fingers* were exhausted, he said. We made our way up to his room and my mother-in-law helped her dad get ready for bed. She proceeded to put pajamas on him, helped him use the restroom, and put him to bed.

As I came to say goodnight, I overheard him tell his daughter, "You are the *best* caretaker. What you did for me today was *unbelievable*." I stood in the doorway with tears forming in my eyes. I hugged him and gave him a kiss.

My grandfather-in-law would *never* have chosen his state of weakness and need, nor would his family. And yet, because of his weakness and need, he became a different man. He became childlike, with no strings attached, overflowing with love for his family.

Though we often deny it, it is *through* weakness that love is shown and the truth is spoken. When we are strong and confident in ourselves, we are less likely to listen and to learn from others. We treat others as pawns to achieve our goals. We exhibit charisma to gain status. We boast in our abilities because we are unsure of God's hand in our lives.

Weakness is painful, undesirable, and is *not* affirmed in our culture. It is the quality of babies, the elderly, and those with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities. And it is *exactly* what God in Jesus chose to save you and me. He did not choose to save you because of your wisdom, hubris, or strength; He chose you because He loves you. He chose you through *his* weakness.

And it is the weakness of Jesus which unites us. We are *not* united because we think the same, we're intelligent, or we have life figured out, but because Jesus was born to live and to died for *us*. We are united in Jesus, his Church, "a place where we can bring our pain, for it was founded by One whose body was broken for us, in order to give us life."³ We are a people united in weakness, and are called to invite others in their weakness to be the Church. Amen.

³ Philip Yancey, *Church: Why Bother?*, 59.