

A Learning Community
1st in the monthly series "Disciples Learn"
 2008-2009 Program Year: *"The Big Idea—Making Disciples"*
 Luke 2: 41-51
 January 11, 2009
 First Federated Church
 Peoria, Illinois
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 Sermon Notes

Text: ...*they found him in the Temple, sitting among the teacher, listening to them and asking them questions...* (vs. 46)

Over the years the gospel of Luke has become my favorite gospel primarily because the writer is the most transparent of all of the gospel writers. In his opening words he tells us who he is and what he is doing.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and minister of word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theolophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.

Right up front he is saying that there were numerous stories about Jesus within the early Christian community, and though, he was not an eyewitness, he has studied the stories carefully and decided to write an orderly account for a those who want to know who Jesus is and what he taught.

Underlying these opening words is an assumption the disciples want to continually learn who Jesus is. I say continually because our relationship and understanding of Jesus changes over the course of time, as we grow older, as we have more experiences and as the Holy Spirit reveals to us new truths.

Only Luke takes the time to record any stories of Jesus' youth. And one of the things that he wants his readers to know is that Jesus was raised in a good practicing Jewish family.

He was presented in the Temple for circumcision—the Christian equivalent of baptism—when he was eight days old, as is prescribed in the Law: Torah.

He was dedicated to God when his mother Mary underwent the rite of purification six weeks after his birth.

He had a bar mitzvah, which literally means "son of the Law" when he was 12 years old.

Because of these things we can rightfully presume that, as was said of his cousin John the Baptizer, he "grew and became strong in Spirit."

Growing and becoming strong in the Spirit is what today's gospel lesson is all about.

The first key to growing in the Spirit is a sense of commitment.

In other words, his family took spiritual development seriously. As I already stated they were observant Jews. There is little doubt that Jesus learned by example.

This past week Daren, Ralph Schoen and I hosted two orientations sessions for our new Executive Board members and Deacons. During those sessions I noted that everything we do is educative. Whether we are conscious of it or not, we are constantly teaching by our actions.

In my father's papers I found something that he wrote when he was young man and I was a small child. It was a short piece on how, after he had seen me mimic something that he did, he had to be more conscious of the example that he set.

In a joint research project by Duke University, Indiana University, the University of Michigan, the Center for Disease Control, the Barna Research Group and the National Institute for Healthcare showed that children who actively engage in a faith community on a regular basis are rewarded with a significantly reduced likelihood of problems and risks in later life. While it's not a silver bullet, here are just a few of their findings:

- Recovery from clinical depression at a 70% faster rate;
- A reduced risk for committing crime;
- A reduced risk for binge drinking or drug use in college;
- And a lower risk of suicide.

A similar study indicated that a father's faith example has much more impact upon a child's faith pattern than an mother's example. As the authors of the study concluded in an editorial comment: **"No father—no family—no faith."**

A second key is a teachable spirit.

There are four hallmarks of the early Christian community described in Acts 2: 42. They are: devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer.

First and foremost is devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching.

In our lesson Jesus illustrates a teachable spirit.

Too often we picture in our mind's eye—if we've ever heard this story before—that Jesus is at the center of the room teaching the teachers. But that is NOT what the gospel of Luke is saying at all. Rather he was "listening and asking questions."

That phrase, "listening and asking questions" is a Jewish idiom for a student with a teachable spirit. Jesus may have been precocious, but at this point in his life, he was a student.

Children have a natural curiosity. They really do want to learn. I see it when I volunteer in our Reading Buddy program. I saw it in high school students who struggled in high school until their junior and senior years when could suddenly take shop classes like welding and carpentry and electronics. Suddenly they saw that all of those math courses and reading classes that they thought were worthless had great value, indeed.

I see it whenever my grandchildren want me to read them a story or when I see them “helping” their dad in the garage or their mother preparing pizza.

All of us learn in different ways. That is one reason why our Christian Education program is so good. We plan intergenerational events like the Ginger Bread House Party and Family Fun Day. Each week our children are exposed to a variety of learning methods through a rotation Sunday School program. One week they read a story, the next they see a movie on the same story, the next they prepare food related to the story, the next they make crafts—all designed to reinforce the month’s story, which, by the way, this month is “The Boy Jesus in the Temple”—today’s gospel lesson.

A third key or element is mentors and teachers.

Our lesson tells us that the teachers in the Temple readily welcomed the young Jesus. They were amazed by the depth of the questions and the quick understanding but they also wanted to feed his hungry mind.

In a few moments we will have the opportunity to renew our baptism vows. This has become an annual event on the second Sunday of a new year. In this opportunity we will be able to recommit—or to commit ourselves for the first time—to take the life of discipleship seriously.

A part of this calling involves being involved in the lives of our young people—not only our own, for some of us do not have children or have children who have moved to distant cities and lands—but to all of the children that God has graciously placed in our care, in this congregation and also in our neighborhoods.

We are invited to coach, mentor, encourage and lead by example. Everything we do is educative. For disciples, learning is a lifelong adventure.

Amen.