

Call to Worship

Philippians 4:8-9; Romans 14:19

From now on, brothers and sisters, if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: **all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise.**

Practice these things: **whatever you learned, received, heard, or saw in us.**

The God of peace will be with you. **So let's strive for the things that bring peace and the things that build each other up.**

Prayer of Invocation

O God, loving parent of us all, we thank you for Jesus who came, a helpless infant, to grow and live as one of us. We come before you this day, trusting that you will protect, strengthen and instruct us, your becoming people. Help us that we also may grow in wisdom, in love, and in knowledge of your truth. And may our maturing lives give honor to you. Amen.

The Word

Luke 2:41-52

Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. **When he was 12 years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to their custom.**

After the festival was over, they were returning home, but the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn't know it. **Supposing that he was among their band of travelers, they journeyed on for a full day while looking for him among their family and friends.**

When they didn't find Jesus, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple. **He was sitting among the teachers, listening to them and putting questions to them. Everyone who heard him was amazed by his understanding and his answers.**

When his parents saw him, they were shocked. His mother said, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Listen! Your father and I have been worried. We've been looking for you!" **Jesus replied, "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house?" But they didn't understand what he said to them.**

Jesus went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. His mother cherished every word in her heart. **Jesus matured in wisdom and years, and in favor with God and with people.**

Living the Word

I always find it interesting that the United Methodist liturgy for weddings says Jesus blessed the Wedding at Cana. If you remember that story, Jesus performed his first miracle by turning water into wine. I admit that that is an extraordinary event, but I think we want so badly to find scripture connecting Jesus to our events that even though his blessing was on the wine and for the benefit of the family, it wasn't really about blessing the couple.

Today, I hope to make a little closer connection between Jesus learning and teaching in the Temple at age 12 and our children and youth going off to school. This is the only story in the New Testament that refers to Jesus as a youth. Jesus' engagement with 'the teachers,' which in this contest can only mean the teachers of the religious law, is foresight of his later engagement with Scribes and Pharisees about the law. In fact, such discussions of the Jewish law, is representative of the ministry of Jesus from the beginning to the end.

The teacher's amazement at the young Jesus' words casts a shadow ahead of all of the people through his ministry who were amazed at the maturity of Jesus' wisdom/ The word 'amazed' is also used to describe the people's reaction to many of Jesus' miracles. A similar word is used to describe the reaction of Jesus' parents to this scene in the temple, indicating that even those closest to him had difficulty coming to terms with him.

This story provides a transitional marker emphasizing his growing self-knowledge of his need to be 'in his Father's house.' Why Jesus stayed behind is not stated or implied, and it is useless to speculate on the possible reasons. It is not clear from Jewish sources whether a boy of 12 was obligated to go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.

His motive for staying in the Temple after the family has headed home is unclear. Maybe he loses track of time, like any child caught up in something they love. Maybe he has had enough of childish things and wishes to mark his maturity with an exclamation point. Maybe he doesn't think that he is lost.

Time to remember - think back to your youth years. You don't have to recall the parts about pimples or being bullied, but how many of you decided one day that you were old enough to make your own decisions? Did any of you ever get lost without knowing it - as in forgetting to tell someone where you are going to be? Was there ever a time that you got so involved in something you loved and forgot what you should have been doing?

My famous story was the day that I overflowed the bathtub and it went through the ceiling to the floor below. We grew up in a big old farm house, with one bathroom. It was on the second floor. I turned on the water, and went into my bed room next door and was reading. I loved to read and always got so into the stories that the whole world around me disappeared.

By the time I discovered what I had done, the water was sloshing over the top of the tub and the brown shag carpeting was up to the top of its shag in water. I will spare you from knowing how 'amazed' my mother was, but I will say that for years everyone pointed to that plastered over spot downstairs and retold the story... I'm not sure, but quite possibly I was around 12 years old.

With his knowledge, Jesus silences the teachers in the temple who question him; the teachers later tell Mary they have never seen nor heard such 'excellence and wisdom.' It was not unusual in ancient times to tell stories of renowned people who at the age of 12 or so gave signs of their coming importance.

Such stories are told of Buddha in India, Cyrus the Great in Persia, Augustus in Rome. It is not surprising that one such story does appear in our Gospels. We do it even today: Have you seen that girl run, she would do well on the track team; did you see that fancy footwork on the soccer field? I imagine they will play college soccer; Have you heard them sing? They will go far with that voice...

In today's story Jesus comes to the temple for one of the three annual pilgrim festivals described in the Torah. The temple turns out to be the place where others see something in him that his parents do not. Later Jesus will come back again and again as an adult, drawing both followers and critics with his teachings.

In the book of Luke, the temple really is Jesus' home – "his Father's house" – where he finds his purpose and the people who can see that purpose in him. The Jesus who appears in this narrative is shown to be fully human in his maturity of wisdom and importance, anticipating his total dedication to the mission with which his Father has entrusted him.

Luke presents a less than ideal, yet realistic, depiction of family life with teenage children; we meet the young Jesus acting impetuously, seemingly oblivious of the impact his actions have on others. Although his parents have been told that Jesus will be the savior and Messiah, these revelations come as a surprise, even a shock. Here Jesus 'looks like something less than the son one dreams of.'

That God's son took this shape in the life of the holy family gives hope over 2000 years for families of all kinds and conditions. The model of living that the holy family offers is not, as is sometimes depicted in romantic paintings and portraits, that of a family perfectly ordered and without division or differences. Rather, it is a family that lives into messy moments with the confidence that God in Christ Jesus has entered and redeems them from within.

There were many back-to-school comments being shared wherever I turned this week: 1. A student who is ready to go back because they are bored. Summer can stretch on if you just sit around with the TV or Video games. Especially, if the parents are working all day and the child is old enough not to need a babysitter, but has used up all of their motivation for time off. "Someone should give that boy some work to do, that's what my mom did when we said we were bored..."

2. The parents – some ready for their child to be back in school, because they start dreaming up outrageous things to do when they are really bored and some parents who are just trying to be brave for their child who is getting on the school bus for the first time, going to a bigger, newer level school for the first time, having a locker for the first time, or maybe leaving home for the first time.

3. A teacher who was trying to remember all of the things that will change with this week. Imagine a total life change every spring, less or no alarm clock mornings, lots of time to think about meals or lawn mowing – casual thought – not the kind that staying ahead of a room full of students take. Then summer is gone and again every fall, they have to set the morning alarm, and spend their 'off time' thinking about how they can help this student or that so they will 'get it' like the rest.

If you don't fit into one of those categories, please still pray for them this week that all will begin well and anxieties will be small.

An article I found in the news this week said this: "It is the overall positive approach of parents with kids that help them overcome first day anxieties and stress in 'back to school.' By helping the kids with healthy food, shopping for school supplies, good sleep habits, physical exercises and scheduling a family calendar, and a comfortable mask... parents can avoid most of the stress laden days in the initial classes of back to school."

Robert Fulghum wrote a book in 1986 entitled "All I Really Need To Know I Learned in Kindergarten. In his first chapter he writes this: *"All I really need to know about how to live and what to do and*

how to be I learned in Kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate school mountain, but there in the sandpile. These are the things I learned: Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don't take things that aren't yours. Say you're sorry when you hurt someone.

Wash your hands before you eat. Flush. Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you. Live a balanced life – learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some. Take a nap every afternoon. When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together. Be aware of wonder.

Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam cup: The roots went down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that. And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned – the biggest word of all – LOOK. Everything you need to know is in there somewhere. Think what a better world it would be if we all – the whole world – had cookies and milk about three o'clock every afternoon and then lay down with our blankies for a nap."

This summer's worship, we have tried to focus on some of the blessings of our lives. There is lots to be said about education, but what in your life is the real blessings of education? My education journey went from high school to college – which was only one year and then I went to work. After three years in the work force I knew that I needed and was capable of more schooling and I went back to college.

My education wasn't just in the classroom. During some of my 'off hours' I worked at a little Coast to Coast Hardware Store in River Falls. The only employees were the owner, his wife and me. She was very sweet. He was a bit of a curmudgeon and told me the first week. "There are over 10,000 different items in this store and if you don't learn something new every day – you're fired." I learned the most during yearend inventory, as I counted all of the 2 penny nails, 4 penny nails and 8 penny nails along with the bins of hex screws, machine screws, sheet metal screws; slotted heads or Phillips heads.

And despite the fact that one afternoon I didn't have the cover on tight on one of the paint cans when I put it in the shaker machine – shooting paint all over the carpeting, I was never fired. That day I also cleaned up the paint mess and never forgot to pound on the cover every time after that.

I was dating Bob my Junior year at UW-RF and it would have been easy to leave school to go north at that point and be a farm wife. But Bob, who had already finished his college degree, told me he wouldn't marry me until I finished my bachelor degree. So I finished. I was 25 then.

Thirteen years later I began to know God's call on my life to be a pastor. How could I go back to school again? I was terrified, yet knew I had to at least try. One of the concepts that I learned my first year of Course of Study School, was the phrase and thought of 'Life-Long Learning.' I wasn't done with my education.

None of us can afford to quit learning in today's world. Here is the first big blessing of education: the choice to learn. But there is more: the second big blessing of education is the choice to teach. I learned a lot from the owners of the hardware store because they were willing to invest in me – teaching me many things that I never knew I would need, but that I have used!

We have the opportunity to be an example and an encourager of everyone that comes within reach of our journey. Ask the children how school is going – then celebrate or sympathize as each case warrants. Share your story and not just the “I had to walk 5 miles to school each day – both ways uphill” story; instead, how you made it through the tough days, and who you are today because of it.

Ask them what their favorite part of school is, take in interest and they may even become a teacher for you...Tell them to let you know when they have a test or project coming. Be specific and ask for the day and time and then pray for them.

I know that I prayed myself through way too many tests over the years, but I have also prayed my boys, many students and Confirmands, and now grandchildren through their test times. Let them feel your support and know that you are faithful in your blessing to teach.

School is starting and we are in this together...let's pray:

At the beginning of a new school year, O God of wisdom,
we offer thanks and praise for the gift of new beginnings
and for the opportunity to learn and to wonder.

We pray for teachers, students, and staff that this year might be rewarding for all.

Be with us as we face the challenge of new tasks,
the fears of failure, the expectations of parents, friends, and self.

In our learning and in our teaching, may we grow in service to others and in love for your world,
through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.