

Tell Me the Stories of Jesus
MOVING JESUS OUT OF THE MANGER

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

On Wednesday morning, Karla sent me a text. “Do you have time today to talk about Good Friday and Easter?” Thirteen days after Christmas, just one day after the Day of Epiphany, we were “moving Jesus out of the manger.”

On Wednesday afternoon and evening, several folks were in the sanctuary “undecorating” — taking down the Chrismon tree, removing the greenery, storing the Advent wreath until next year, and “moving Jesus out of the manger.”

On Wednesday afternoon, Karla and I talked for an hour about music and worship for Good Friday and Easter services on April 3 and April 5. We talked about shadows and crosses and nails and suffering. We were “moving Jesus out of the manger.”

In today’s Gospel reading, Luke is “moving Jesus out of the manger.” This is a story of transition, found only in Luke’s gospel. This is the only story we have about Jesus as a child/young person, other than the Christmas stories of his birth in Matthew and Luke and the stories in Luke about his circumcision and being dedicated to God in the Temple. Luke moves Jesus along in the story of his life — chronologically, physically, and in terms of knowledge. Today’s story is framed with these two comments about Jesus growing up:

* “The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.” (Luke 2:40)

* “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.” (Luke 2:52)

Tyler Dixon has assumed the role of LOGOS host and snack server on Wednesday afternoons. This nine-year old boy does a wonderful job of welcoming everyone who comes in the door — child, teenager, adult — with a warm greeting, a listing of the day’s snack, and a polite, “Would you like popcorn, water, or apple juice?” This past Wednesday Tyler and I were talking in the hallway and we got on the topic of how old different LOGOS participants are. Tyler told me he was 9 years old. Then he mentioned how people who are 19 or 20 are considered “young adults.” Someone’s name came up and Tyler said, “I think she’s 12. That means she is what we call a ‘pre-teen’” .

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... which makes Jesus a “pre-teen” in this story, with everything that means for him and his parents. Many of you remember what it was like to be a “pre-teen.” Some of you are parents of “pre-teens” right now. You’re living what Mary and Joseph experienced in the Temple. Some of you ARE “pre-teens” right now, so you can imagine

how Jesus felt when his mom told him, “Young man, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been half out of our minds looking for you!” (*The Message*) Some of of you parents are anticipating the “pre-teen” years and wondering what they’ll be like. So, each of us can relate to Mary, Joseph, and Jesus in our own way.

While today’s sermon isn’t about child development or family systems, this “transition story” about the pre-teen Jesus does offer us some insight into that important, exciting, and anxious time of life. We know about the tumult that can accompany the pre-teen and teenager years. Much of that turbulence comes from “cutting the apron strings” and “learning to fly” with your own wings. A necessary and important life stage, it can be full of challenges for everyone involved!

A key component of this stage of life is beginning to claim the faith as your own. In many cultures, when a child reaches the age of 12 or 13 (the age of accountability), he or she participates in a ritual of transition. In faith communities especially, the life transition is marked by a study of the faith and life’s big questions, with the taking on of additional responsibilities as a member of the faith community.

In a little over three weeks, thirteen pre-teens and young teenagers will continue on their faith journey as we begin Confirmation 2015 with a lock-in here at the church. Please join me, the elders, and these young peoples’ parents in praying for Garrett Bullard, Madelyn Coombs, Jane Caroline Minchew, Hill Lanier, Elizabeth Sills, Anna Grace Carr, Mary Kellan Creech, Colby Phaneuf, Ellie Carone, Sarah Pearl Farrior, Lydia Thompson, Cameron Blue, and Rachel Ann Cottle. Along with Regina Simpson and me, elder covenant partners, and other members of the congregation, these young people will explore what their faith means to them and what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. The session has set May 17 as Confirmation Sunday — the same day our young people will lead us in worship and we will celebrate with our high school graduates.

In the Jewish tradition, the age of accountability at 12 or 13 is marked by a bar mitzvah/bat mitzvah ceremony (means “son/daughter of the covenant”). There is no particular reason to think that Luke’s story about the 12 year old Jesus in the Temple is his bar mitzvah. However, in his listening to, asking questions of, and answering the teachers, Jesus is laying claim to his faith. In his answer to his mother’s irritated (?) and anxious comments, we hear Jesus’ first words in the gospel of Luke. And what are they? “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” Some translations say, “Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s interests?” Even though Luke tells us that Jesus went home to Nazareth and was obedient to Mary and Joseph, we now know that Jesus has moved out of the manger and is moving on in his life and in his mission.

When the shepherds visited Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger, and told them what had been made known to them about the child, “Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.” When Mary and Joseph presented the baby Jesus in the Temple and the old man, Simeon, blessed him, they “were amazed at what was being said about him.” Simeon told Mary what was in store for her son, and

he said to her, “and a sword will pierce your own soul too.” When Jesus told Mary that it was necessary — he **had** — to be in his Father’s house, “they did not understand what he said to them.”

Don’t you think Mary probably wanted to keep Jesus in the manger? Every parent approaches the pre-teen, tween, and teen years with both apprehension and hope. There’s the excitement for your child as he or she spreads wings. There’s anxiety and worry, because you know how hard a place the world can be. Imagine what Mary and Joseph must have felt and thought as they looked ahead for Jesus. They probably weren’t too eager to move him out of the manger.

And, it seems, neither are we, even though all of our Christmas decorations have been packed up and stored away for another year. We’d probably rather sing “Away in a manger, no crib for his bed, the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head” than “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” We’d probably rather light our candles from the Christ candle on Christmas Eve, lift them high to throw off the darkness, and sing “Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright ‘round yon virgin mother and child! Holy Infant, so tender and mild, sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace” than to snuff out the candles, plunge this sanctuary into darkness, and sing, “Upon the cross of Jesus mine eye at times can see the very dying form of One who suffered there for me.”

Someone has written about what the 12 year old Jesus in the Temple means for our lives: “It is easier to keep him in the cradle. But this story forces us to move with Jesus out of the cradle, out of the loving, sheltering arms of his parents, into the world, a world that will be filled with sin and death and great need, with powerful people who oppose Jesus and with desperate people who turn to him for life. Just as the story moves from Nazareth to Jerusalem, so we will have to move with Jesus on the long road to Jerusalem again, to the Temple again on another Passover, where he will upset the money-tables and upset the authorities and upset, ultimately, all the powers and dominions of the world. This passage, with its humor and humanness, carries us relentlessly toward the cross. . . Twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple makes us take his power — and his claim on us — seriously. With him we move out of the safety and serenity of cradle and manger, into adulthood, into maturity, as disciples of the one who called God ‘Father.’ Like Mary, we will keep all these things in our hearts until we understand who he really is. And then we will know how great this gift truly is, this sacrifice of love that claims us and calls us to follow him, out into the world, into demands and needs and confrontations; out into the world, away from this safe and gentle place, to the call that claims our own lives.”¹

When the handbell choir met for practice on Wednesday night, we found that Karla had taken all of the Christmas music out of our folders. We’ll soon begin practicing music for Lent and Easter — probably songs such as “The Old Rugged Cross.” We practice one song every year leading up to Christmas, but so far we haven’t played it in worship. It’s a beautiful song, but it sure is hard to play because of the syncopated

rhythm. Many of you are familiar with the song, especially the version by Clay Aiken, called “Mary, Did You Know?”

The song asks, “Mary, did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters? Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new? This child that you delivered will soon deliver you. Mary, did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation? Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day rule the nations? Did you know that your baby boy is heaven’s perfect Lamb? The sleeping child you’re holding is the Great I Am.”

Mary, did you know that this twelve-year-old would one day return to the Temple and claim his authority from God, at the cost of his own life?

Mary, did you know that this twelve-year-old would be about his Father’s interests throughout the rest of his life, even to the point of giving up his life?

The more important question is, do **we** know?

Do **we** know that the baby we greeted in the quiet and calm of this sanctuary on Christmas Eve grew up to deliver us from our sins?

Do **we** know that the baby whose birth we celebrated just two-and-a-half weeks ago came to make us new, came to deliver us, came to rule the nations?

As we move Jesus out of the manger, are we willing to follow him?

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, may we be filled with the knowledge of your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, that we may lead lives worthy of you, fully pleasing to you, as we bear fruit in every good work and as we grow in the knowledge of you and your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

NOTES

¹Karen Chakoian, “Luke 2:41-52,” *Interpretation* (April 1998), p. 190.