



Rev. Shane Page
Colossians 3:12-17, Luke 2:41-52
December 27, 2009

Talk about growing up all too quickly. It was only, what, three days ago when we had a sea of people flowing through this place celebrating the birth of Jesus, and now Jesus has advanced 12 sudden years, getting into certain mischief, staying behind in Jerusalem, leaving his parents frazzled at his behavior in our lesson this morning.

And notice how it was hardly by accident that Jesus remained in Jerusalem. Luke tells us he stayed behind on purpose, deliberately, by firm resolution. At last Mary finds him in the Temple three days later (three days!) and asks, “Son, why have you treated us so?” which I doubt would have been the way my mother would have phrased it; and Jesus replies, in an almost snide fashion, “Why did you come looking for me? Didn’t you know that I must be in my Father’s house?” It’s just like a 12-year-old, right?

I was at one of the stores in my area some time ago, shopping for vitamins or something along those lines, with one of my children riding in the cart, making a loud scene everywhere we went. Another customer, I recall, was on the same aisle with me, listening to my child’s little tantrum, giving me a look of sympathy. I looked at her and said, “Ever have one of those days when you wish you could make them grow up?” And she laughed. “Let me tell you, honey,” she said, “you’ve got it made. Just wait until that child turns 12 or 13.” What an encouraging word of support, I remember thinking.

Twelve-year-olds. I remember being 12. My grandfather had a name for me: The Twelve-Year-Old Ph.D. I knew everything. My grandparents would be in a serious conversation about something and I would interject my two cents and my grandfather would look at me, saying, “You hear that 12-year-old Ph.D.?” I thought it was a compliment until I got older.

That is the thing about 12-year-olds. They get a mind of their own, start thinking for themselves. At least with babies you have a certain element of control. I love it when my 11-month-old son crawls around the floor, somehow able to find something with a sharp edge on it, and I can place him gently in the playpen, subjecting his little will to mine. With 12-year-olds, though, forget it.

Maybe that is why we love baby Jesus. Everyone loves baby Jesus. I know irreligious people who despise the church and yet have no problems with baby Jesus. I am reminded of one of the dumbest movies I have ever seen called *Talladega Nights*, starring Will Ferrell as the main character. Dumb movie. I remember how the main character kept praying to baby Jesus over and over again. *Oh, baby Jesus; dear baby Jesus.* Finally, the character’s wife said, “Hey, sweetie, you know, Jesus did grow up. You don’t always have to call him baby. It’s a bit odd and all putting a prayer to a baby.” And Will Ferrell’s character objected, saying, “Look, I like the Christmas Jesus best and I’m saying grace. When you say grace you can say it to grownup Jesus

or teenage Jesus or bearded Jesus or whoever you want.” He then clasped his hands in prayer and resumed, “Dear eight-pound, six-ounce, newborn infant Jesus....”

Our culture has no problem with baby Jesus. A baby, after all, is unlearned, unable to speak. Yet we know quite well how this child will grow up and will place some holy demands on us. I recall a sermon I heard years ago about this time of year – I think it was the Sunday after Christmas Day – at what was then my home church in Gastonia, and the punch line of the sermon was more or less this: Will you take the baby home? For some reason, that sermon has stuck with me all these years.

I remember he preached about how it is easy to hold a child or to gawk at a baby through a hospital nursery window, and then head off to do other things; and so many people want to do that to the Christ child. They want to hold him or to baby-sit a little while and then go on their merry way, doing their own thing. What God wants you to do, though, is take his boy home, letting him grow with you, shape you, transforming your home and yourself into something you could have never imagined otherwise.

On Thursday and Friday, Jesus was in the manger, speechless, and this morning he is in the Temple, saying his first recorded words in all the gospels, his first words posed in the form of a question: “Didn’t you know I must be in my Father’s house?” Did you notice that? Luke says Jesus was in the Temple, listening to the great teachers of the law, and asking them questions. Any parent or teacher who has ever spent time with a 12-year-old will tell you, of course, how asking questions is what they do best. I was in one of the confirmation classes a couple of months ago, listening to our leader give a great presentation on the United Methodist Social Principles, when a hand went up, followed by a question: “Um, could you explain why it is so wrong to write dangling participles?” What?

That is one kind of question 11-, 12- and 13-year-olds ask. But there is another kind of question 12-year-olds often ask as well, and it is the question probing why we do the things we do, the question that challenges us or puts us on the defensive or makes us rethink our common assumptions. I had a conversation with someone about the Civil Rights Movement, who remembered a question she asked her mother way back in the 1950s. She must have been about 12, she said. How come we have to drink out of this water fountain and they have to drink out of that one? It was a good question at the time.

We had just returned from a visit to a nearby church in town, when the next day one of the students, 12 or 13 years old, I believe, asked: “How come they wouldn’t let us take communion at their church when they kept calling us their brothers and sisters in Christ? I mean, if they aren’t going to let us come to the table, then why call us brothers and sisters? I just don’t get it.” That is a good question. How come you...? Why do they....? Why do you...? Kids, especially teen-agers, refuse to take the world you and I have created – that generations preceding us have created – at face value.

Jesus in the Temple asked the teacher’s questions, and you just know they were the kinds of questions challenging their conventional wisdom about God. According to all the gospel writers, Jesus never stopped asking his questions either, never once did he acquiesce to our way

of doing things, letting our easy answers determine how he would live. *What profit is there to gain the whole world and yet lose your soul? If you only love those who love you, what credit is that? Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye but do not notice the wooden beam in your own eye? Why are you anxious about what clothes to wear? Why do you call me "Lord, Lord" but do not do what I command you?* I sometimes wonder where this idea came from, according to which Jesus is the quick answer to all that ails us. If you read the gospels, you realize that Jesus is the question, and we are the ones whose lives have to supply the answers. And this morning, another question: *Didn't you know I must be in my Father's house?*

Some translations of the Bible have Jesus' question here as, "Didn't you know I must be about my Father's business?" I have to confess I am partial to that particular interpretation. Business. Think about that word. Business. It comes from a word that means anxious or busy or preoccupied, and Lord knows that describes us. We can hardly rest, we are so busy. How to advance, how to get ahead, how to make something of ourselves – it's our No. 1 preoccupation these days, our big business. But what the 12-year-old from Nazareth wants to know is whether that business is really worth it and will it be worth it in the end?

My Father's business, Jesus called it, my Father's house. It's the two things he cared about most; it's the two things he wants you and me to care about most as well. You know what will start happening once you do? You'll start caring about people left out on the sidelines. You'll start bristling when you see people taken advantage of; you'll start caring about places like this, about worship, prayer; you'll start asking different questions. You'll even be a little strange to everyone else. I watched Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer again this year with my four-year-old daughter, and I started thinking about those characters on the island of misfit toys: the flying lion, the cowboy on the ostrich, the Charlie in the box, even the elf who wanted to be a dentist, misfits. They never quite fit in, these characters, even Rudolph, he never fit in either, but they ended up saving Christmas. The misfits saved Christmas. You know who's going to help save this world? It'll be the misfits. Sure enough, it'll be the misfits, the ones who care about the Father's business.

Well, here it is, the Sunday after Christmas day, and Jesus has already started growing up, asking all kinds of questions, learning how to be a misfit himself. And, according to Luke, if you ever need him, you'll know where to find him – right here in his Father's house, doing his Father's business. Next year I hope each one of you will want to join him.