

“Close to Home: Chosen Home”
Luke 2:41-52

A few years ago, we adopted a dog named Peter who was a beagle. He was the sweetest dog. The first few weeks, Peter was timid and afraid to mess anything up. He sat in the same spot and watched every move we made so as not to upset us. But when he finally realized that we were keeping him, all his mischief came out. It was so fun to watch him be himself, even though it meant discovering that he had a food fetish and that he was so smart at opening every cabinet in the kitchen. I have heard similar stories about dogs. There is something so special and amazing when we feel like we belong with the fullness of who we are. Home is about the experience of being able to find authentic belonging.

The sad reality for most of us is that it is hard to find that type of experience. We learn from an early age that it is not safe to be who we truly are and that certain parts of ourselves are not accepted. We learn to fit in instead of belonging.

Our Bible story for this week is about true and authentic belonging. This is the part of the story about Jesus when he was 12 years old. This is a significant time in the life a young Jewish boy under Roman occupation. He would have been entering adulthood with the rite of passage of Bar Mitzvah. But something interesting happens to Jesus. He stayed behind in the temple in Jerusalem and found his place among the leaders and teachers of his time. This was the place where he found true and authentic belonging. His parents were so concerned about losing him and he seemed to be telling them about what was to come for him as an adult.

Jesus was enjoying himself learning and discussing matters of faith and life with the religious leaders in Jerusalem, but his parents just did not get it!!! At first, Jesus seemed to be defying his parents and talking back to them. But if we dig a little deeper, we see that this was an important episode in the formation of Jesus as the new leader of the people of ancient Israel. We are very familiar with this story, but we hardly ever connect it with another story in the Bible. The story is that of Samuel when he was a boy and was ministering at the temple in Shiloh as recorded in 1 Samuel 2. Both Samuel and Jesus were boys. Both were participating in the Passover festival and its liturgy. Both are referred to as staying in the “Father’s house” meaning in God’s house. Samuel stayed in his “Father’s house” while his parents went home (1 Samuel 2:27). Jesus stayed in his “Father’s house” while his parents went home. Both Samuel and Jesus are described as growing in wisdom and favor with God and the people. In 1 Samuel 2:26, we hear that “the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with the people.”

This seems to be a running theme in Luke from the beginning with Mary’s song being similar to Hannah’s prayer which we read last week. So, why is this comparison important? Why would the author of Luke use such intentional comparison between Samuel and Jesus? The answer lies in the role which Samuel played in the life of the people of Israel. Samuel was the only leader in Israel who held the three offices of priest, prophet, and ruler. He was the greatest leader in the whole history of Israel. We can see

that the author of the Gospel of Luke was showing us the importance of the role of Jesus in light of his similarity to Samuel. The maturation process of Samuel from being a little boy to becoming a man was very significant and so was the maturation process of Jesus from being a little boy to becoming a man. Age 12 was the official time for Jewish boys to transition from childhood to manhood. The author of Luke was trying to tell us that Jesus was not just another boy maturing. He was the new leader of Israel. That is why his growing in wisdom was very significant.

Let's listen to Luke 2:41-52

⁴¹ Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. ⁴³ When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. ⁴⁴ Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ When his parents^[1] saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' ⁴⁹ He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'^[m] ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he said to them. ⁵¹ Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years,^[n] and in divine and human favor.

There is also another aspect to this. Palestinian Pastor Rev. Dr. Niveen Sarras writes this, "At the age of 12, Augustus gave the funeral oration for his grandmother Julia, the sister of Julius Caesar... Luke is interested in introducing Jesus as superior to Augustus. Jesus is the new promised Caesar appointed, not by the Roman Senate, but by God."

Jesus was taking his rightful place where he belonged. He belonged in the realm of spiritual leadership for his people. We often think of his calling starting at the time of his public ministry, but this story reminds us that the sense of calling began much earlier for Jesus. He knew his calling much earlier and spent a lot of years preparing for its fulfillment.

Jesus chose his spiritual home and knew that he needed to continue to work on this mission. He knew that in order to become a rabbi, he had to put in the time.

In following the example of Jesus, we are invited to find our soul's calling. We are here on earth to serve a higher purpose than what the culture around us often tells us. We are here to learn to give and receive authentic love. But life gets in the way. We may have an inkling or a glimpse early on in life who we are called to be but somewhere along the path, we lose touch with that. We sometimes also imagine that our soul call must be about

accomplishing big things, while in reality, it is as Mother Teresa put it: Doing small things with great love.

What helps you live out of that overflow of love? What hinders you? What are the choices that you can make each day to live in your home close to the heart of God?

I would like to end with a story from an unknown author that is about living out of that deep place of God's love in each of us:

On Christmas Eve, a young boy with light in his eyes
Looked deep into Santa's, to Santa's surprise
And said as he sat on Santa's broad knee,
"I want your secret. Tell it to me."

He leaned up and whispered in Santa's good ear
"How do you do it, year after year?"
"I want to know how, as you travel about,
Giving gifts here and there, you never run out.

How is it, dear Santa, that in your pack of toys
You have plenty for all of the world's girls and boys?
Stays so full, never empties, as you make your way
From rooftop to rooftop, to homes large and small,
From nation to nation, reaching them all?"

And Santa smiled kindly and said to the boy,
"Don't ask me hard questions. Don't you want a toy?"
But the child shook his head, and Santa could see
That he needed the answer. "Now listen to me,"

He told that small boy with the light in his eyes,
"My secret will make you sadder and wise.
"The truth is that my sack is magic inside
It holds millions of toys for my Christmas Eve ride.

But although I do visit each girl and each boy
I don't always leave them a gaily wrapped toy.
Some homes are hungry, some homes are sad,
Some homes are desperate, some homes are bad.

Some homes are broken, and the children there grieve.
Those homes I visit, but what should I leave?
"My sleigh is filled with the happiest stuff,
But for homes where despair lives toys aren't enough.

So I tiptoe in, kiss each girl and boy,
And I pray with them that they'll be given the joy
Of the spirit of Christmas, the spirit that lives
In the heart of the dear child who gets not, but gives.

"If only God hears me and answers my prayer,
When I visit next year, what I will find there
Are homes filled with peace, and with giving, and love
And boys and girls gifted with light from above.

It's a very hard task, my smart little brother,
To give toys to some, and to give prayers to others.
But the prayers are the best gifts, the best gifts indeed,
For God has a way of meeting each person's need.

"That's part of the answer. The rest, my dear youth,
Is that my sack is magic. And that is the truth.
In my sack I carry on Christmas Eve day
More love than a Santa could ever give away.

The sack never empties of love, or of joys
`Cause inside it are prayers, and hope. Not just toys.
The more that I give, the fuller it seems,
Because giving is my way of fulfilling dreams.

"And do you know something? You've got a sack, too.
It's as magic as mine, and it's inside of you.
It never gets empty, it's full from the start.
It's the center of light, and love. It's your heart.

And if on this Christmas you want to help me,
Don't be so concerned with the gifts `neath your tree.
Open that sack called your heart, and share
Your joy, your friendship, your wealth, your care."

The light in the small boy's eyes was glowing.
"Thanks for your secret. I've got to be going."
"Wait, little boy," said Santa, "don't go.
Will you share? Will you help? Will you use what you know?"

And just for a moment the small boy stood still,
Touched his heart with his small hand and whispered, "I will." Amen.