

The First Sunday after Christmas
December 27, 2015
Luke 2:41-52
Pr. Craig Mueller



Church, Steeple, People

Can you image yourself as a toddler? The thought is either delightful or a bit terrifying!

Did you learn this rhyme when you were a child?

*Here is the church and here is the steeple.
Open the doors and see all the people.
Close the doors and hear them pray,
open the doors and they all walk away.*

On this Sunday after Christmas, we have two texts not with newborns, but with children. Both Samuel and Jesus were conceived with divine intervention. Both were given to the service of God. Both spoke the word of God.

We find the boy Samuel in the temple, ministering. And we find the boy Jesus in the temple as well. Actually Jesus is not three, but twelve, an in-between age. Can you remember yourself at twelve? Not an age I'd want to go back to!

This fall I was invited into one of our Sunday School classes. The kids had several tough questions for me. One was: why don't we have any more stories of Jesus as a kid?



Today's gospel is the only story we have between his birth and baptism. From our vantage point, several things strike us. Jesus stays behind in the temple, engaging with the adults in lively spiritual conversation. Certainly beyond his years.

But after his parents return home with a group of travelers, it takes three days for them to notice Jesus is gone. Really? And then his mother offers a bit of scolding. We can identify with a parent searching for a lost child. "Don't ever do this again. Your father and I were worried sick."

And yet, that isn't the main point of Luke's storytelling. He wants us to know of Jesus' special identity. Of his purpose and mission. Both Samuel and Jesus grow in wisdom and stature. In divine and human wisdom.

A strange gospel when Jesus is still in the manger in our nativity scene. For some, it can seem like Christmas is for children. With endless commercials with wide-eyed children awaiting gifts. With nativity pageants and anticipation of Santa's arrival.

Yet, now that we've settled down a bit. Cleared our heads. We can hear the good news that Christmas brings to adults as well. That God dwells with us in the stories of our lives. God dwells with us in our messy and chaotic world. God dwells with us as we try to figure out what our purpose in life. And as we seek to live as God's chosen ones. Clothed with love. The peace of Christ ruling our hearts. Thankful. The word dwelling in us richly.

Here is the church and here is the steeple. Most of us would agree that God isn't just found in churches and holy places. Even if they are sometimes called God's house. Yet in such sacred places we step back from our everyday lives. We may sense a divine presence within holy walls. But spiritually speaking, we hope that we will see all of life. And all places—where we live and dwell and work and play—infused with the spirit and energy of God.

Certainly Jesus needed to be in the temple. We know that he was a practicing Jew. Did you not know I must be in my Father's house, he responds to his mother, sounding a bit precocious to us. Yet Jesus had a complicated relationship with the temple. Later he would return to clean house there. And in another gospel he would talk about spiritual worship, and the temple of his body seeming to replace the physical structure of worship.



Here is the church, here is the steeple. Open the doors and see all the people.

Well, a lot of people have a complicated relationship with church—or organized religion—these days. Churches were full on Christmas Eve. Plenty of the folks were CEO's, a term I just learned. "Christmas and Easter only" people.

The fact is, as much as folks are hungry for God. Hungry for spiritual meaning. Hungry for community. Many churches are closing. Young adults are not necessarily practicing the faith of their parents. Large churches built a century ago can't afford maintenance on their building. A space that holds 400 may have 50 in worship.

We who love the church are wrestling with these demographic changes. At Holy Trinity are seeking to blend our heritage with contemporary needs. Ancient texts and rituals. Catholic Lutheran tradition. Yet held in tension with today's spiritual context.

It's a tough time to be the church. But also a hopeful time. Folks aren't coming to church from a negative place of guilt or obligation or the fear of hell. So the positive energy is palpable.

Open the doors and see all the people. What a blessing it is to see young adults and children here. People of different ages. Different religious backgrounds. Married and single. People of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.

We believe that we do on Sundays matters. Not only for our lives, but for the world.

*Here is the church, here is the steeple.
Open the doors and see all the people.
Close the doors and hear them pray.
Open the doors and they all walk away.*



The walking away. It's as important as the coming in the doors. All of you walking home. Walking to the bus, the el, your cars. Walking back to your everyday lives. To your places of work. To your homes. To your families. To your neighborhoods.

Having been in God's house. Having with Mary, treasured and pondered the deep love and grace of God. Having feasted at the table of the Lord. You leave. Sent with purpose and mission. To live the words we have prayed. To become the food we have shared. To be a sign of the good news of great joy for all people.

So we do it week in, week out. Open the doors, come in. Close the doors, go out.