

Searching for Wisdom  
A Sermon for the Second Sunday after Christmas  
January 2, 2022  
The Rev. Robin Teasley

*The parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem every year for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. 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. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents 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." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor. Luke 2:41-52*

On this Second Sunday after Christmas, we fast forward from the nativity scene, beyond the shepherds and the heavenly host of angels proclaiming glory to God in the highest, to this story of Jesus that takes place in his growing up years. We hear another perspective on the power of the Incarnation and what it means for us.

This story gives us a glimpse of Jesus in the process of becoming who he truly is, and helps us understand that we are called to navigate this same transformation. As we prayed in our collect, "O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity..."

Sharing in the divine life of Jesus is our lifelong work as people of God. From the beginning, Yahweh is always about the work of restoring the dignity of human nature. Our Zoom Bible Study group had an up close and personal look at all the ways humanity is in sore need of restoration as we read about God's people in the book of Genesis this year. We've agreed that really, we are all a mess and in need of continual restoration. We see it writ large around us today in the uncountable ways we choose personal gain over the restoration of humanity, through our misguided choices politically, economically, and ecologically.

Sharing in the divine life requires our commitment and it also requires wisdom – not human wisdom but the wisdom of God. Jesus is the wisdom from God, Emmanuel, God with us. We sing about this in Advent – "O come, thou Wisdom from on high, who orderest all things mightily; to us the path of knowledge show, and teach us in her ways to go." Through the Incarnation we now share in the divine life, we have access to Wisdom from on high.

Looking at today's Gospel we can see Jesus as Wisdom from God, as he gently reveals to his parents the difference between human and divine wisdom. It is our tendency to equate our human assumptions and expectations with God's purposes, with God's wisdom. The twelve-year-old Jesus does things that challenge the usual assumptions and expectations in his world, and Jesus challenges us in this same way today.

Mary and Joseph have made their annual Passover visit to Jerusalem, traveling in a large group of family and neighbors to ensure safety. As they left Jerusalem, they assumed their son was in the group of travelers; they expected him to be there. But Jesus did not do what they assumed he would do, and it took them three days to locate Jesus. If you have ever been a lost child, or have lost a child, you know this frantic feeling, and that three days would seem like an agonizing lifetime.

Isn't it a fearful thing, and sometimes even agonizing, to let go of our own assumptions and expectations? It took three days for the real purpose of Jesus to be revealed, for Jesus to be found by his parents. It's also worth noting that at the end of his earthly life it would take three days for the world to know what Jesus was doing for us through his death and resurrection. Luke is hinting at the good news of Easter here and of the assumptions and expectations about the coming Messiah that would be shattered. For us three days can sometimes become three weeks, or months, or years. Letting go of the way we think things should be is hard, but until we let go we cannot receive God's divine plan for our lives.

When things are difficult and we are in need of true wisdom the best thing we can do is look for Jesus. When Mary and Joseph found Jesus, he was in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening and asking questions. All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. These people who spent their time worshipping, studying, and serving in the temple recognized God's wisdom, knowing it to be superior to their own. Time spent in worship, study, and service opens us to divine wisdom.

Mary and Joseph were astonished when they finally located Jesus, but instead of remaining in that surprised and wondrous state of focus on Jesus, they moved to self-focus, to their own needs. "Why have you treated us like this?" They still see him as a child they expect to control, and they are anxious. They express their displeasure that their assumptions were not met, and they let their anxiety get the better of them. We have been known to do that too; because we are human there are so many things about life that we attempt to control.

Even so, Jesus' response to them was calm, mature, wise beyond his years. Rather than answer their questions, he asked questions about their reactions. Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house? The King James version translates this as, "I must be about my Father's business." The Greek is literally, "in or among the things of my Father." Wisdom does not always do what everyone else is doing. Wisdom does not make assumptions about what everyone expects. Wisdom keeps its focus on the Father, on God, and God's desires for humanity.

But his parents did not at first understand what Jesus said to them. Whenever we do not understand what is happening or what is being said, taking time to be still in God's presence can bring wisdom that is beyond our own assumptions and expectations. It is sharing in the divine life that grants us wisdom from on high. Asking ourselves why we are afraid or anxious can be the kind of holy question that divine wisdom helps us answer.

In this scripture passage and in our lives, we can see all too clearly how assumptions can interfere with the transformation to become who we are called to be. We see how anxiety and a need to control can slow the plans and purposes of God, and bring tension to relationships.

What can we learn from Jesus in this story? Perhaps thinking about how we would answer the questions he asked his parents will help us gain some wisdom. "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (By the way, these are the first words Jesus speaks in the Gospel of Luke)

Why are we searching for Jesus? The shepherds and the wise men searched for Jesus. King Herod searched for him. His parents searched for him. The people searched for him during his ministry with his disciples. The authorities searched for him in order to kill him. Are we searching for Jesus?

Is it a holy searching for wisdom and love, or is it a misguided searching for personal gain? Do we let our fear and anxiety interfere with seeking out Jesus? Might our assumptions and expectations cloud our vision, and keep us from growing into what God hopes for us to become?

As we move into the season of Epiphany, where Jesus is revealed to us in many ways, may we be attentive to our human assumptions and expectations. May we be willing to listen and be taught by Wisdom from on high. May we forgive one another of those times we have forgotten that we were made in the divine image, times when we have not sought out divine Wisdom.

In this new year there is much that awaits us, much to search for, much to learn about ourselves and our companions on the way. May we increase in the Wisdom of Jesus, allowing him to transform us to share in the divine life with him. Amen.