

“A Gifted Student; A Great Teacher”

Luke 2:41-52

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‘Blessing of the Students’ Service

This morning our attention is drawn to an event in Jesus’ life that occurred when he was twelve years old. It is the only story in the gospels we have of Jesus as a child after he was dedicated in the Temple as an infant.

Jesus accompanied his parents to Jerusalem to observe Passover. This annual spring festival commemorated the release of the ancient Hebrew children from Egypt in search of a new and better life.

Thousands attended Passover each year, and most people traveled in caravans from surrounding villages and faraway places. It appears Joseph and Mary joined many of their friends and neighbors on this journey from Nazareth, as was their custom.

This particular story does not focus upon what happened during Passover but what occurred afterward. Evidently, Jesus was left behind after his parents began their trek back home.

We don’t need to be too hard on Joseph and Mary. They were probably not the first parents to misplace a child during Passover.

When people traveled on foot in caravans, the women and children usually started before the men because they walked more slowly. The men and older children would catch up with their family members before the end of the day.

Apparently, Mary thought Jesus was going to walk with Joseph, and Joseph thought Jesus had gone ahead with his mother. It wasn’t until evening when Joseph reunited with Mary that both of them realized Jesus had been left in Jerusalem.

The next morning, Mary and Joseph made their way back to Jerusalem where they found Jesus sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. Even though Mary and Joseph were relieved to find Jesus and to know he was safe, they were still upset.

“Son, why have you treated us like this?” Mary asked. “Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”

“Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” Jesus replied. (2:49b)

Jesus’ reply confused Mary and gave her another reason to ponder, just as she had done at Jesus’ birth.

Luke concludes this story by telling his readers that Jesus returned to Nazareth with his parents and was an obedient child. According to Luke, Jesus continued to “grow in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” (2:52)

How does this story speak to us today as our children embark on another school year, and they participate in our annual “Blessing of the Students” service? I pondered this for some time last week and want to tell you how it speaks to me.

This story reveals two things important to the twelve-year-old Jesus—**learning from wise teachers and respecting his parents.**

The phrase Luke used to describe what Jesus was doing in the Temple when his parents found him, “listening to teachers and asking questions,” was Luke’s way of describing students in a classroom setting. Engaging students in a dialogue was the common method of teaching in that day. Instructors and students interacted with one another as information, ideas, questions and opinions flowed naturally and freely.

Clearly, Jesus was a student searching for knowledge and understanding like any conscientious twelve-year-old. Evidently, he took learning seriously and was a good student because the elders marveled at his insight and depth of understanding.

Luke wanted to make sure his readers knew Jesus continued to study and to learn even after this incident. “He grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men,” Luke wrote. (2:52)

Even though Jesus impressed those much older and more experienced with his wisdom and understanding, this did not make him haughty or rebellious. Instead, Jesus maintained his humility and recognized the need to be a cooperating and contributing member of a growing family.

He was still a boy who needed to respect and to listen to his parents. There were things they knew that he didn’t, and he was wise enough to know this. Besides, honoring parents was one of the Ten Commandments, and Jesus intended to obey it.

Our children need to follow Jesus’ example. Learning from their teachers and obeying their parents will serve them well now and for years to come.

What do they need from us in order to be like Jesus? How can we help our children become good students and grow into model citizens? Let me offer some suggestions.

In your home, foster an atmosphere of learning.

Years ago when our children were starting back to school, I drafted a list of “Cool School Rules” and posted it on the refrigerator. I don’t recall everything on the list, but I think I can reconstruct the first one. I believe it read like this.

“If you have a question about homework, especially math, science, social studies, health, English or any other language; if you need help with a project; if you need money for a school function; if you need transportation to an event; if you are upset about a grade; if you have an issue with another student or a teacher; or if you think you have found the love of your life and the person you want to marry even though you are just 11 years old, see you mom. For all other problems, see me.”

I don’t think you will be surprised to know that particular rule was revised.

It has been proven children take a greater interest in school when their parents show an interest in what they are learning. Provide a safe place for your children to explore the mysteries of life and faith by asking questions and listening to their answers like the scribes and Pharisees did with Jesus when he was twelve.

Encourage your children to be curious, to search for truth, to think for themselves, to ask questions, to wrestle with tough issues and to voice their opinions. They were created by God to learn. He is delighted when they do.

Your child’s brain is the most sophisticated computer ever designed. Challenge him or her to use it wisely.

I heard a neurosurgeon say something last week that shocked me. He was talking about how magnificent the human brain is.

“If you learn one new fact every second,” he said, “it would take you three million years to exhaust the capacity of your brain to process it.” I am still grappling with this little known fact. At the least it tells me how important it is that we foster a learning environment in our homes. God expects us to do this!

At the same time, bring other people into your children’s lives who can help them learn and be a positive influence upon them. Parents and guardians cannot meet every need their children have inside their home.

I am confident Mary and Joseph exposed Jesus to the wisest teachers in Nazareth when Jesus was a child. This is obvious by his level of understanding the day Mary and Joseph found Jesus interacting with the elders in the Temple.

In the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, another reliable account of Jesus’ life and ministry which was not included in our New Testament, the scribes and Pharisees responded to Mary with praise for Jesus by exclaiming, “For such glory and such excellence and wisdom we have never seen or heard.” (19:4)

Home, Temple and synagogue formed Jesus into the man and teacher he became. It took a village to rear Jesus, as it does all children.

Surround your children with good role models whose influence can make them better and wiser. Take advantage of programs our church and community offer and enlist the help of good people who will love your children and care for them as you do.

Before I leave this topic, let me mention one more thing. Parents, spend money on tutors, if necessary. If you have to make a choice between more clothes, toys, gadgets or a tutor, spend the money on their education. They will thank you later.

If you want your children to be good students, and I know you do, pray for them every day. Don't leave God out of this equation.

Remember, they are God's children, too. God is depending upon you to guide and protect them, and God expects you to consult with Him every day about their needs.

Ask God to help you to be a good role model, to make wise decisions on their behalf, to see their potential, to identify the people who can be positive influences in their lives, to encourage them when they are disappointed, to love them when they make mistakes and to pick them up when they fall.

Ask God to give your children a healthy self-esteem, the desire to be good students, the wisdom to select good friends, the confidence to accept big challenges, the help needed to achieve their dreams, the ability to persevere when the road gets rough and the protection they need from those who would harm them.

Do you recall what Jesus said to his parents when they returned to Jerusalem and found him in the Temple with the scribes and Pharisees? "Did you not know I had to be about my Father's business?" (2:49 KJV)

What is the business your Heavenly Father has for you right now? If you are a parent or guardian of one of the children we are getting ready to recognize and bless, I have to believe helping them to be the best students they can be during this new school year ranks at the top!