

January 7, 2018 Growing In Wisdom and Stature Luke
2:40-52

Sometime last Sunday my best friend, a colleague in ministry, the Rev. John Blue passed away. John Blue was born and raised in Madoc. We met in 1978 in the northeastern Ontario Presbytery of Temiskaming. I was serving in New Liskeard, the most southern charge in that Presbytery which is strung out along the northern route of the TransCanada highway. John had just graduated from Knox College and came to serve Knox Church in Cochrane, which had been one half of the two point charge I had served, Kapuskasing and Cochrane.

I mention these details for one reason. John and I became best friends. He requested of me that I be his mentor as he attempted to get his bearings in full time ministry. We attempted to get together once a month to talk. John would drive south from Cochrane, I would drive north from New Liskeard and we would meet at a restaurant on the side of the road at Kenogami. We would talk. About preaching, what we were reading, pastoral work, our churches. It did not take long for me to recognize I was receiving as much as I was giving. We prayed together. We spent the balance of the day in that quiet corner, drinking coffee, eating muffins, and supporting each other.

In fact the relationship was so stimulating, I recognized years later that what we were doing was of mutual

benefit because we were growing in wisdom and stature. The talk regardless of the subject could always be circumscribed by the general term “the faith”. We working on our faith and faithfulness, and we were doing so together. In later years I would come to understand how rare that was for 2 active ministers in our church. Like wine that has been stored for the purpose those days in Kenogami, we were mellowing and maturing. And we were defeating the common problem of isolation. It was important. More so than I could actually see at the time.

The Scriptures provide us with few insights into the childhood of Jesus. We have a considerable amount of detail about Jesus birth. We know how Jesus survived Herod’s attempt to eliminate HIM in Bethlehem. We know about Joseph’s taking the family to Egypt until Herod died. We know how he took the family to Nazareth in Galilee, and why. There is only one story in the Gospels about Jesus as a child. Moments ago I read it with you.

And yet the truth is, if we mine these 11 verses for information we can learn a considerable amount. In verse 40 we are told Jesus grew and became strong. We talk, and much has been made of this, we talk of Jesus as the carpenter’s son, and we assume apprentice was his role as Joseph’s son. As we learned quickly in visiting the holy land and walking in the footsteps of Jesus, there is very little wood by Canadian standards for the practice of carpentry. Today wood is

imported. By law construction of buildings involves either stone quarried from the landscape or cement which is fundamentally reconstituted stone.

The ancient ruins in places like Nazareth and Capernaum make it obvious the same was true in Jesus' time without the enforcement of law. Joseph may have known how to work wood, but he was in all probability a builder, working in stone, building stone walls. Jesus grew and became strong. Guess how? There is little doubt he worked with his father Joseph. He not only learned to build stone walls, HE obviously carried and gathered stone for his father's work as a laborer from his earliest years. There are real grounds for the portrayal of the crucified Christ as a lean, well muscled young man. HE was in a unique body building course from day one. "As HE grew," Luke says, "He became strong." Quarrying, gathering, lifting, carrying and building with stone will certainly achieve that. In the ancient world wood was used to build roofs. Walls and floors were built of stone. Jesus worked in heavy construction, until HIS 3 year ministry began.

Luke also says Jesus was filled with wisdom. He was one of those kids who was always we would say, "wise beyond his years." Not just smart. Wise. Mature. That is HE as a mark of character would take the knowledge he got in one area of experience and would apply it to real life situations. What would he learn from building by hand with stone? Foundations

are important. Balance is key. Place a stone precariously and it falls on your foot, or rolls out of the wall.

Spiritually, Luke tells us Jesus grew and the grace of God was upon HIM. What does that mean in terms of our experience? The Spirit of God was strong in HIM. HE studied the Bible because HE knew the texts. But what was HE after? Clearly HE walked with the Lord HIS God whom HE recognized at an early stage of life was HIS father. And I do not mean by that that HE did not love Joseph or think of him as a parent. But clearly HE was aware that HE also has a Father in Heaven with a capital F.

At the age of 12 a Jewish boy becomes a man and is recognized as such. When Jesus was 12 Mary and Joseph took him as they did every year, to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover. Given the limitations of this family, neither privileged nor wealthy, we need to conclude they were a very religious household. And frankly I would prefer the term faithful. Religious people could easily justify missing a year in Jerusalem. This family did not. They made choices that allowed each member of the family to pursue faithfulness, a personal relationship with God. So they go to Jerusalem. They rent a room. They attend worship as they did in Nazareth and they eat the Passover meal on the designated night. They celebrate the saving act of God when Moses led the people out of Egypt to serve God on the mountain. They celebrate the

miracle of the parting of the waters. Freedom. Israel. God is with, intimately involved with, HIS people.

They do their business, they keep the faith, they begin the journey back to Nazareth. They travel with friends and neighbors, a crowd. Then as now security on the roads is an issue. Where is Jesus? Have you seen Jesus? No one has seen HIM! All day long they look for HIM in the group of travelers. HE fails to show for supper. He is not with them at all. So they return to Jerusalem. In fact they search for 3 days in the city for Him. Jesus is nowhere to be found.

For some reason they go to the Temple. Was it a parentally desparate act of wanting to pray there? We do not have that detail. But they walk in on a scene they did not expect to see. Jesus is sitting with leading teachers of the Law, the Torah, first 5 books of the Old Testament. HE is listening, but HE is also asking questions, debating with them? And it is obvious this gathering of Rabbis is impressed. They were amazed at HIS level of understanding....HE is not the student of any Rabbi of note. His answers to questions, are...amazing! And when HIS parents do what parents do, when they have been worried sick, (Jesus gets the "how could you do this to us" treatment) HE replies to them, "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

The episode ends in quiet faithfulness. The family makes its way back to Nazareth. Jesus is characterized as an obedient son to Mary and Joseph. And this is information

gleaned from Mary. Luke knew her. Knew John who provided for her after everything that happened at Golgotha, the open tomb, and the upper room. Mary treasured these memories in her heart. And Jesus? He got bigger. He got stronger. And not just physically. He became even closer to the Lord HIS God. And people liked HIM, admired HIM, trusted HIM.

That's what Luke tells us about the childhood of Jesus, HIS becoming a youth and a man.

Let us Pray:

Lord we give thanks for Luke's carefully written account. And we thank you for something we often overlook: the importance of Mary in what we know about Jesus early years and HIS...development. We too, desire to grow in favour with God and man. We are never too old for growth. Lead us that we might be more like Jesus. Amen