

“Parents Wonder”

Luke 2:41-52

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The boy Jesus astounds the rabbis and his parents and everyone around him with his questions and with his wisdom. Good questions lead to deeper truths. Our scientist friends have taught us this! So often, when I’m listening to a radio interview, the one being interviewed will respond saying, “That’s a good question!” Good questions drive the search for meaning and for truth.

So, I love this Biblical scene at the temple, the house of God, where Jesus shocks the teachers with his questions. The storyteller doesn’t tell us the specific questions Jesus asked, but we can imagine them. I can hear him asking: What would it take to establish peace in the world? Are the poor as valuable as the rich? What needs to happen for the power of love to overcome the power of fear? Are there any limits on who my neighbor is? Has anyone ever thought of showing compassion to our enemies?

I love it when these kinds of questions come from children and youth. I tend to take them more seriously because they come from a place of innocence, from a place of purity, from a place uncolored by cynicism or political aspiration. When these hard questions come from adults, it’s easier to brush them off. But when they come from children or youth, they catch us off guard, and we owe them a thoughtful reply.

As a parent and a grandparent, I count on being awed by the questions and the wisdom of children! When the church council was approving the final plans for our new addition in 2009, it was a youth who suggested that the new social hall should face High Street instead of the back alley. He said, "People going by can look in and see what's going on and come on in." Brilliant! A young South Dakota girl, viewing her great grandmother's body in the coffin asked, "Is Grandma going to need that dress in heaven?" A profound question! And one of our own children, after burying our dog, Tucker, in the backyard, asked, "Will we see Tucker again?" Astounding! It was a South Church youth who pointed out that David, in the Bible, played his guitar; so why don't we have guitars in our church services? Because of that question, we do now have guitars from time to time.

The last verse in the Bible story for today says, "His mother treasured all these things in her heart." From the get-go, Mary knows there is something extraordinary about this child. And it is no longer she alone who knows. Now, the rabbis know. The word is out. The rabbis tend to be awed by Biblical scholars and theologians and PhD candidates. But, here we see they are astounded by a child. And Mary notices this. She sees in the rabbis' faces the kind of wonder that I feel most Wednesday nights when I help teach the Confirmation class. The wisdom and the questions that come from our own teenagers is humbling! They may not have the financial resources to pay all the bills at the church, but they have spiritual resources that our church desperately needs.

In a way, Mary is the quintessential parent. Though she scolds her child for wandering off and not staying with the family on the journey home; she also is filled with wonder at the child's depth.

I would say that Mary invites all parents and grandparents and great grandparents and church school teachers also to be filled with wonder by the God-presence children bring into the world. When our children leave us pondering all these things in our hearts, we know we are living in the greatest of hope. Amen.