

“Taking Calvary to Our Community: Schools”

Luke 2:41-52

8th in a Nine Week Series by Brian Henderson and Anne Jernberg

Special Interview Guests: Norma Wick, 2010-2011 President of the *Denver Teachers’ Award*

Of the four gospel writers, Luke is the only one to include a story from Jesus’ childhood. The second chapter of Luke is known for its first 20 verses – the story of the birth of Jesus. And immediately after we read about the shepherds glorifying God because of the birth of baby Jesus, Luke jumps ahead 8 days to the presentation of Jesus in the Temple. Here, Jesus receives a prophetic blessing from one of the elders, Simeon. But then we have an even larger time leap... 12 years (!)...and that’s where we see the boy Jesus again in the Temple, this time, sitting among his elders and with teachers, “*listening to them and asking them questions,*” (v46).

From infancy to adolescence...we just have these quick snapshots of Jesus and his mom and dad – isolated moments in time – but moments that show us the religious dedication of his family over the years...going to the Temple for important ceremonies and festivals, etc.

But between these quick scenes – all crammed into just one chapter of one gospel - we are left to fill in the gaps. And if you’re like me you’re curious

about his life and especially his early years...What did Jesus do as a boy? Where did he play? Who were his friends? Was he a loner or was he always running around with other little boys – doing things that little boys do? Playing with slingshots, building things, taking things apart, and then building them again, teasing girls, having mud fights, hanging around the carpenter shop with dad, circling his mother’s feet in the kitchen?

There is more that we don’t know about Jesus’ childhood than we know. But *what we do know* has everything to do with education – with learning...with his schooling. For the first century Jew, religion, law, history, ethics and education were inseparable. Through both the written law (*Torah*) and the oral law (*Mishna*), teaching was passed from generation to generation. Rabbi’s, teachers, and synagogues were highly esteemed aspects of society. The “synagogue” (translated “house of assembly”) was the Jewish place of both worship and education.¹

¹Accessed on 20 August 2011 at *Jesus Central.Com: Where People of All Backgrounds Learn About Jesus* (<http://www.jesuscentral.com/ji/historical->

So much like our own kids, Jesus spent HOURS in school...and quality education was important and valued...but it was simultaneously his education in the faith too. We have a challenge today because we have to balance our education within these walls with the education we receive outside these walls. Both are equally important. But we give them unequal attention. Students spend hours at school each day. We can't do that with church...we can't spend all our time here...at a bare minimum we hope the kids are here at least 2 hours a week...learning and being a "student of the faith" – learning what it means to love God and love one another, learning Bible stories and Scripture verses, learning how to pray and how to worship. And we hope you are too.

No matter what our age, as followers of Jesus we are forever students - always learning - and in order to equip us to be the presence of Christ and shine the light of Christ in the community...we have to learn about and study about and grapple with just who this Christ is that we're following and sharing with others?

Ya know, before Jesus became a teacher (our teacher) – he was a student first. After he's presented at the Temple as a baby, Luke writes, "*The child grew and became strong,*

jesus/jesus-firstcenturycontext.php#Educational).

filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him," (2:40).

And then Luke writes the passage we read today about the boy Jesus in the Temple and concludes the chapter with, "*And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor,*" (2:52).

There are subtle differences between these two verses that tell us a lot about Jesus' childhood, and how he learned. The first verse suggests Jesus allowed himself to be "*filled with wisdom*" – which suggests he perhaps was an "empty vessel" of sorts – ready to learn – ready to take in the knowledge of his teachers and schooling. Kids are like sponges, are they not? Absorbing all kinds of knowledge and information from others. In other words, Jesus was not born into the world all-knowing and all-wise. He had to be filled with wisdom...presumably by his parents and rabbis and teachers. And yet even at this early stage in life – we read that the favor of God was upon Jesus.

But then we get to the second verse – 12 years have passed...and instead of the phrase "*filled with wisdom*" we read the phrase "*increased in wisdom*"...in other words...as Jesus grew and aged, he didn't discard the wisdom he was given as a little boy and all along the way as he grew...he just added that wisdom to the wisdom he already had...synthesizing it

together. He didn't remain "an empty vessel" for long (none of us do. Once he started learning he had to constantly be incorporating the new knowledge he was learning with the knowledge he had learned earlier in life.

We all have to do this, right? We are always learning...and rather than it getting easier, one could argue that learning gets harder...because sometimes "new knowledge" that we receive or gain clashes or doesn't quite jive with "older knowledge" within us that has been with us for a long time. Learning is never as cut and dry as just filing away information...especially when it comes to our faith.

Learning, growing wise, discerning truth from scripture, evaluating life experiences...all of these things are processes that unfold gradually. In trying to think about an analogy for this, as I was sitting in front of my computer, I thought of files on our computer. It's not like we can just download new information onto the "USB flashdrive" of our minds and it's just there...sitting side by side with all the other knowledge we've downloaded. All documents nicely separated. It's not like we can just click and open that one document or that one piece of knowledge to see what it says...apart from our other knowledge. (If you are not a computer person – think of file cabinet...you

can't just file knowledge that we learn in neat and tidy categories and keep them in their folders. Everything is always mixing with everything else. Things aren't so black and white. The more we learn – perhaps the more grey things get.

To continue with this computer analogy, when we download new knowledge into our minds it is forced to mingle and merge with existing knowledge. In other words, if everything we ever learned were on one page word documents...these documents don't just sit side by side and isolated in our minds. Each time we download a new one...it gets copied and pasted into the others...creating one really, really long paper – perhaps a thesis of life and faith and knowledge – and each time new information is copied and pasted into the existing document...we have to sort and rearrange the existing information to make sure it still makes sense...sometimes this means shuffling paragraphs around or doing some research to fill in gaps...sometimes it means deleting information...sometimes it means just rephrasing a thought or adding adjectives or nuances to an argument.

And when we're brave enough to let others read our forever developing thesis on life and faith (in other words...whenever we open our mouths to speak about our faith), we

reveal where we are in the learning process. And to do so is a vulnerable act...because we could be critiqued or corrected...we could be perceived to be ignorant or we could be perceived to be wise. And it's vulnerable because we are exposing ourselves in the midst of the "learning process." We are admitting we don't have everything figured out. Our faith is never a finished product. And we are all at different places in the heart and mind when it comes to our faith.

It's like the difference between a PDF file and a Microsoft Word file. I think the key to life-long learning is never saving the really long document that is "what we know" as a PDF file...because PDF files cannot be changed...cannot be edited. They are universal in that anyone and everyone can open them up and read them - but they are static. They exist as they are until a new copy is re-saved over on top of it...and the only person who can do that is the author of the original file itself.

Perhaps the document of our knowledge and wisdom needs to be more like a Microsoft Word file...a document that can be changed by others...where people can edit and add thoughts or comments. It's not that we have to take their suggestions, but at least we hear what they have to say - we hear their knowledge and experience - and we have the chance to then incorporate into our own.

This is what I've appreciated about these Congregational Conversations we've been having about our church family becoming more explicitly welcoming and affirming of all people, and specifically to people whose sexual identity or orientation is different than our own. Around these tables, true differences of head and heart have been shared. Passionate perspectives of faith and scripture have been shared. And we all are the better for it.

I have been to all three of these conversations thus far and I haven't walked away *unchanged* yet. I'm incorporating the thoughts and words and scriptural interpretations and emotions and stories of all of you who are sharing in those gatherings into my own thoughts and words and scriptural interpretations and emotions and stories. And even though, as a whole, my beliefs have not radically changed as a result of these conversations...they have been nuanced...and they have helped mature my beliefs into even more educated, and faith-filled convictions. It's like the main idea of the "thesis" hasn't changed...but the details of how I describe it or explain it or work though it have - because of you --- *your* words, *your* thoughts, *your* stories. This is the gift of the community of faith. And I'm grateful to share in this gift here at Calvary. I just want to go back to those two

verses I read earlier that bookend our scripture passage today. There's another noticeable difference in those two verses – upon increasing in wisdom throughout his life, Jesus not only continued to gain *God's favor* (which is mentioned in the first verse)...notice that Luke adds that he gained *human favor* as well. I have a feeling that's because he was just one of those people that emanated wisdom when you were around him. You know those people, right? Where you just want to be around them or ask their opinion or seek their advice because you know it's well thought through and grounded and is full of perspective? That's true wisdom...and it's not gained quickly.

Even as a boy – Jesus was *learning by listening* and *teaching by asking*. Learning by listening to others. Teaching by asking questions. What a model...whether we're talking about schools or churches...how we learn is the same...it involves a willingness to keep being “filled” with wisdom and to keep being “formed” and “re-formed” in the faith.

“Reform” is a word we hear a lot about in relation to schools and public education in the United States. But no matter what you think about any proposed school reform...at least it's looking at change and growth. The church can learn a lot from our school systems and non-profits and local businesses in that way. They are

forced to always be re-forming. Why should our personal faith or our faith communities be any different?

On the Denver Public School webpage it says: “*Our Mission is Clear: ‘To provide all students the opportunity to achieve the knowledge and skills necessary to become contributing citizens in our society.’ Keep watching as Denver Public Schools continues to **challenge** itself, **reform** and **grow**.*”²

Calvary – our mission is clearly stated on our website too: “*To be a Christ-like community that experiences and shares God's love.*” So now may the Lord and may the world keep watching as we continue to **challenge** ourselves, to **reform** our community and continually **re-form** our faith, and to **grow** in our love of Christ, our knowledge of Scripture and in our relationships with one another and our surrounding community.

And then may it be written about us...years after we've left the walls of “*this Temple*” at 6500 E. Girard Ave.: “*And Calvary-ites increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.*”

Amen.

² Accessed on 20 August 2011 at DPS Website under Communication “Newsroom” Homepage (<http://communications.dpsk12.org/newsroom/55/>).

