

Sermon  
Rev Ralph Clarke  
Eaglehawk Uniting Church  
Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> Dec 2012

1 Samuel 2:18-20,26; Luke 2:41-52

The baby Jesus is not left in the cradle for long. A week after Christmas and Jesus is a 12 year old being taken to the Passover Festival in Jerusalem. Luke encourages us to move beyond worship of the baby Jesus to see who he is, and who he is to become.

This story of Jesus in the temple has some links to things he would be known for later on in his life. At the Passover Festival he learned the Jewish story of how God saved his people. Later, Jesus would lead a new Passover and become the Saviour of the world. In the temple, we can see the beginnings of the commitment and obedience to God that marked Jesus life. In the temple he was learning the Jewish laws. Later, he would summarise these laws into the law of love that commits us to love God and neighbour. In the temple, Jewish leaders were surprised by Jesus questions and answers. Later they would be angered by his questions and answers and look for ways to kill him. As a 12 y/o, Jesus is blamed by his own parents for staying behind. Later his own people the Jews would blame him unfairly for blasphemy. This story strangely foreshadows the life of Jesus in the years to come.

This story may also remind us that like Jesus, young people need to learn and develop their own faith rather than simply inherit their faith from others. (A story.) Rudi had visitors for Christmas and they brought a chook with them. Rudi cooked the chook and

all enjoyed the meal. Being a poor man Rudi kept the bones and other bits of the chook to make soup.

Other people heard about the chook and also visited Rudi but all he could give them was chicken soup. That was all right for the first lot but as others came Rudi had to add more water to make the soup go further. When the third lot of visitors came the soup was getting a bit thin, and when Rudi placed a bowl of the very thin soup before these visitors they asked indignantly, "What is THIS?" "This, said Rudi, "is the soup of the soup of the soup of the chook." The late Anthony De Mello says, some faith is like that, handed on from one generation to the next w/o being freshened up by new input.

The teachers in the temple were amazed that the 12 year old Jesus is interested in matters of faith, and his parents are astonished that he would stay behind in church instead of joining the family group on the trip back home to Nazareth. Perhaps Luke is suggesting that God was already at work in Jesus life inspiring him and setting him on a unique path.

But Luke doesn't want us to think of Jesus as a miracle kid, the sort who could read before he was one, and change the colour of rainbows if he wanted. Luke is not saying Jesus is different from our children. He is reminding us of Jesus humanity and telling us how astonished the parents and teachers were that a young person could be inspired to learn about God.

One of the cries I keep hearing these days is that children and youth are no longer interested in faith. We might find that what they are not interested in is copying OUR FAITH. Often they want to know why we believe, why things are important for us. Young people also need adults who are inspired by God.

But younger ones are also mobile these days and able to go off w/o their parents just like Jesus did and find new teachers and mentors. Many of us are aware that we have only a few years to influence our children before they leave for study or work.

Younger ones don't always respond when we tell them we need more people on church committees. They don't always accept our need to go to church and listen to a preacher. Some want more involvement or flexibility. They may want to discuss, see, and experience things. They often like different music to us. They want the church to be inclusive, intergenerational, and ecumenical. They expect it to be concerned about people as Jesus is. They are interested in relationships, and they want to be committed to things that seem real. Our challenge is not only to work out our own faith but to take seriously that our children need to work out their faith.

The great Swiss theologian Karl Barth said at the end of his very productive life of learning, teaching and writing all his volumes of theology, that "in the spiritual life, we must always be learning and growing," and, "in the life of the Spirit", he said, "we must all be beginners." It was a humble statement from such a learned man, and an indication that Barth felt he was still a learner himself. Today, the story of Jesus takes us back to being beginners, to a 12 year old learning the ways of God.

At the end of this year, we adults may look back at our failings, and need to let the New Year be a new beginning for us. We may find we are standing with younger ones in being learners and beginners, wondering where God will take us in this next year. Of one thing we can be sure – that God will be in this learning also. That is affirmed when Jesus came into this world.