

## **Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ**

**Brentwood Presbyterian Church  
Feb 16, 2014**

### **Jesus' Childhood**

**Matthew 2:22-23 & Psalm 119:1-8  
(528, 357, 350, 348)**

I can't really imagine what it must be like  
to be a refugee.

The violence that forces you to leave your home,  
the travel in strange and strained lands,  
the dangers of being vulnerable,  
the stress of being poor,  
the fear of the future –  
all take their toll on the security, affection, and potency  
that are the foundations of flourishing human life.

But Jesus turned out OK –  
better than OK, actually.  
And I found myself pondering, "Why?"  
What kind of support did this child,  
born into a hostile world,  
enjoy to move through and beyond this experience  
and launch the kind of ministry that he did at the age of 30 or so?

Three dimensions of support came to mind –  
God, parents, and community.

Let's begin, as we always should, with God.

Every indication from Jesus' later life  
points to a very thorough religious education  
in the traditions of the Jewish faith.  
It would have centred on God's covenant with Israel  
to be God's people and, as such, be a blessing to the creation.  
God's patient faithfulness to Israel in the Exodus,  
and through various crises, defeats, and exiles  
would have been emphasized.  
The rituals and festivals of purification and formation  
would have been learned and followed.

In all of this, God's Spirit would have been working  
in Jesus to form a deep and lasting relationship  
upon which Jesus could depend,  
no matter what happened to him.

This is really the core of the Jewish tradition,  
and it remains central to the ways Christianity appropriated and transformed it.

God is faithful to us.  
God unconditionally loves us.  
God is active in establishing deeper and deeper relationships with us.  
Flourishing for humans flows from that relationship.

Like the Israelites, we lose sight of the centrality of that relationship  
to our physical, emotional, and intellectual health.

Like the Israelites, we are distracted and attracted to false gods  
who promise easy, but empty, salvation.

Like the Israelites, we wander or run away from the brilliance of God's love,  
engulfed by the darkness of a world that does not acknowledge God,  
huddling in fear and isolation,  
dispirited and disabled.

Like the Israelites, we are not left in fearful loneliness by God.  
God reaches out, pursues us,  
with loving, though at times stern, invitations  
to return home where we belong,  
where, in God's mind, we really are  
and that's in intimate, supportive relationship  
with God, others, and ourselves.

This is the foundational support that Jesus enjoyed as a child.

But it was mediated or incarnated,  
handed down through,  
his parents and his community.

Mary and Joseph were faithful Jews.  
They raised Jesus in the Judaism of their day.  
The faith shaped their home life.  
The faith shaped their worship life.  
The faith shaped their social life.  
Everything was focused on letting God shape this child  
into a faithful son and friend of God.

Specifically, they would have prayed at meals,  
read and reflected on the Scriptures daily,  
observed the preparations for the Sabbath the day before,  
attended synagogue on the Sabbath,  
and observed the festivals and high holidays  
that commemorated key events in the history of their people.

In all of these activities, they would have consciously seen  
God, themselves as parents, and their religious community  
working together to form a faithful disciple.

They were probably surprised at just how faithful that disciple  
ended up being,  
challenging the distortions of the Jewish tradition  
that had come to define the faith in his day.  
But you get the sense that they,  
and especially Mary,  
found the reforms that Jesus advocated  
faithful to the original intent of the tradition.

There are some interesting parallels here  
between Jesus' day and our day  
that provoke further reflection.

Whether individually or as a church community,  
we too are refugees.  
Many of us have left our homes in one way or another.  
In some cases, willingly.  
In others, not.  
We have been physically or psychically uprooted.  
Old sources of security, affection, and potency are gone.  
We need new ones.

They are found, quite simply, in God,  
and in those through whom God chooses to work in this world.  
Whoever they may be,  
they embody God's faithfulness to our flourishing.

Whether individually or as a church community,  
we too need to be educated and formed in the faith,  
to learn and internalize the stories of the faith  
so deeply that they shape the way we see everything.  
We need to find ways of learning the faith  
that make our relationship with God in Christ through the Spirit  
our primary source of security, affection, and potency.

In small congregations like Brentwood,  
we don't have a lot of the traditional educational programs  
that larger churches have.

We come to know God in Sunday morning worship and Jazz Evensong,  
in the learning we do through Memorizing and Pondering each week,  
in getting together for our Bible Studies and Youth Gatherings,  
in conversation over lunch after church and at our world food potlucks.

These influences, in dependence on the Holy Spirit,  
then flow into and through the families and individuals in the congregation  
as they seek to bless everyone they encounter  
with the grace of Jesus Christ.

The question this text leaves with me this week is this:  
“What are the best ways to educate and form each other  
in our relationship with God?”  
“Can we improve what we're doing?”  
“What are your ideas this?”

Let's explore this a bit over the next few weeks.  
Let Session members know your ideas.  
We've got Lindsay Moir redesigning and updating our website.  
How might we use that more effectively in forming friends in the faith?

What we do know is that God wants us to grow  
in our relationship with him.  
That's how Jesus became who he was – and is.

Written and delivered by The Rev. Dr. Brian Fraser, Brentwood Presbyterian Church, Burnaby, BC