

Memorize & Ponder

**Brentwood Presbyterian Church
August 11, 2013
Celebrating the Lord's Supper**

The Education of Jesus

**Luke 4:16-21 & Ps 33:12-20
(350, 358, 118, 712)**

There are about 29 years of Jesus' life
about which we know virtually nothing.

We have two accounts of his birth,
in Matthew and Luke.

Their intent seems to be to emphasize the fact that this is indeed
the long-awaited Christ or Messiah
promised in the Hebrew Scriptures.

We do read of a incident when Jesus was twelve,
recorded only in Luke,

in which Jesus stayed behind in the Temple
after the Passover observances
amazing the teachers at the Temple
with his knowledge, his questions, and his answers.

Even at that early age, Luke suggests,
Jesus was a keen and capable student of Jewish traditions,
rooted as they were in the detailed study Law and the Prophets.

Luke concludes his account of the young Jesus in the Temple
with these words:

*And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years,
and in divine and human favor.
(Luke 2:52)*

So, as we explore some of my thinking about the education of Jesus,
it is good to remind ourselves
that much of this is speculation,
reading into these hidden years
a lot of assumptions
about the kind of education that would form
the kind of presence Jesus was
during his public ministry between the ages of 30 and 33.

In my thinking about this,
I give significant weight to the choice of text
Jesus made for his first sermon back in his home town.

We have seen signs in Luke's account –
the baptism and the temptations in the wilderness -
of God's favour on Jesus,
signs of the special affection God has for this person
in whom, in some mysterious and marvelous way,
God takes flesh and dwells among us,
full of grace and truth.

This mystery is called the Incarnation among Christians,
pointing to the embodiment of the divine in human flesh
to identify with, experience, and redeem
what it means to be fully human and fully divine at the same moment.
Understanding what God is revealing to us in Jesus, the Christ,
is understanding our full human potential and promise.

Following the baptism and the testings in the wilderness,
events that could be seen as the completion of Jesus' education,
Jesus goes home to preach.
The text he chose was our memorize and ponder passage this week.
Listen again to the prophetic wisdom of Isaiah:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

Then Jesus made a bold claim -
"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." –
and went on to suggest that most of his hearers,
those families among whom he had grown up,
were not those upon whom the favour of the Lord was shining.
Rather, they were the complacent and the comfortable.
They were people who accepted the ways things were,
who encouraged compliance
with the religious and political authorities of the day,
who ignored the urging of the prophets
to be active in their care for the poor, the imprisoned,
the misled, and the oppressed.
They were not witnessing clearly and courageously enough
to what God wanted for his human creatures.

What the education of Jesus had produced
was a teacher who stood in the prophetic tradition of the Hebrews,
a tradition he found most clearly summarized
in this passage from Isaiah
about the Spirit of the Lord shaping activists
who sought justice, loved kindness,
and walked humbly with their God.

When I went to Cincinnati for study leave this spring,
I got to listen afresh to the ideas of Walter Brueggemann,
an Old Testament scholar who had had a profound influence
in my theological education.

We've talked about his reminding me of the two covenants
that vie for loyalty throughout the Scriptures –
the unconditional Abrahamic covenant in which God takes the initiative
and promises to be with Israel so they can be a blessing
and
the Mosaic covenant in which God promises to be with Israel
if they follow the law and the commandments.

Brueggemann talks a lot about the 'prophetic imagination.'
That is what I think the education of Jesus shaped,
a 'prophetic imagination' that got applied to the conditions of Jesus' times.
They were times when the conditional covenant dominated.
They were times that needed to be reminded of the unconditional covenant.
They were times that needed to see and hear afresh
the prophetic promises and possibilities
for a new way of being with God
that was true to the original covenant with Abraham –
"I will be your God so you can be a blessing."

Here's the essence of the prophetic witness
as Walter Brueggemann has come to understand it.
It is "a sustained effort to imagine the world
as though YHWH were a real character
and the defining agent in the life of the world."
(*The Practice of Prophetic Imagination*, p.132)
It is a witness, an affirmation, a proclamation
that God is, that God shapes the commonwealth,
and that God does not abandon or forget.
God is faithful to the promise
to be with us and enable us to bless.

In conscious relationship with that presence,
we enjoy our own education in the prophetic imagination,
in what it means to think and act in this world
as if God is, as if God shapes the commonwealth, as if God does not abandon or forget.

That is a powerful need
in a world that has distorted, ignored, abandoned, forgotten, and dismissed
the basics of the Judeo-Christian way
of being with God, with others, and with ourselves.

What we have been engaged in together this year here at Brentwood
is an education in this kind of imagination,
in this way of seeing the world through God's eyes.

It is a process of re-deeming,
of re-seeing the nature of reality.

What is really real is not the violence, injustice, poverty, and oppression
that fills our media.

What is really real is the justice, kindness, humility, and faith
that we find the Jesus shaped so profoundly in his education
by the prophetic imagination of God's commonwealth on earth.

Every one of us, in our own ways and in our own circles of influence,
have the potential to be divine messengers to our neighbours,
to be for them the love that God is in Jesus, the Christ.

Let's step into that potential ourselves this week.

Let's find ways to bring good news to the poor,
to proclaim release for those who are entrapped in difficulties,
to help people see the presence and power of YHWH in their lives,
to encourage people to be free to flourish because of YHWH's grace,
and to witness to the joys of the commonwealth of YHWH.

*May the Spirit take these ponderings
and provoke in all of us
a witness of love and good deeds.*

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