

**Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ**

**Brentwood Presbyterian Church  
Feb 23, 2014**

**The Unknown Years**

**Luke 2:52 & Psalm 119:33-40  
(403, 748, 656, 655)**

I have been a bit obsessed these past few weeks  
with imagining the education Jesus got  
as he was growing into the courage to launch his public ministry.

We've looked at the social context  
into which God chose to come as Jesus.  
It was not into the palaces and temples  
of those in power.

It was into the tough life  
of the family of a working-class woodworker.

It was into that occupation  
that got handed from father to first-born son.

It was into a small town in the country.  
It was into a small congregation/synagogue  
where people gathered  
to learn the Law of God.

This particular synagogue,  
along with this particular family,  
must have had a different read on that Law  
than those in positions of power and privilege in that day.

When Jesus began his own public ministry,  
his real focus was on the prophetic teachings in the Jewish tradition,  
those sections of the Old Testament  
that had the courage to criticize what was happening  
in light of an alternative vision of what God wanted.

The religious and political authorities of Jesus' day  
saw the Law as a code of conduct to be followed  
in order to be pure and thereby gain the favour of God.

That take of the Law  
did not ring true for Jesus and his teachers,  
whoever they may have been.

They saw the Law as a gift from God to guide their response of gratitude  
for the grace of God.  
The grace came first.  
Their very breath, from first to beyond last,  
emanated from that gracious love.  
The Law was the compilation of God's wisdom  
on how to live out this gratitude  
in the service of God's purpose for this world.

This is the Spirit in which Psalm 119 should be read.  
It is a pray for help,  
with strong elements of thanks and awe.

The Psalmist wants God to teach him or her.  
That's an interesting stance from which to begin one's education –  
a desire for God to teach us.

I've mentioned it before recently,  
but it bears repeating.  
Old Testament scholar and sage, Walter Brueggemann,  
Points out that the prophets saw the world differently.  
They presented an alternative story and sense of meaning.  
It consisted of three key beliefs or affirmations:  
God is;  
God is in control; and  
God is creating a flourishing community that encompasses the whole world.  
We are invited, by God's grace, to be part of that creation.  
The Law must be seen in this context –  
a guide to the best ways to express our gratitude for God's grace.  
That desire to be what God is calling us to be  
Is the most powerful motivation  
used by the Spirit  
to help us increase in wisdom  
and in the favour of God and our fellow human beings.

The author of Psalm 119 wants to learn from that God,  
just like Jesus did.  
He or she understands this kind of learning  
shapes one's whole being.  
It pays attention to the instincts of the faith,  
to the emotions of the faith,  
and to the ideas of the faith.  
All are aligned to shape a grateful and faithful  
response of graittude for the grace of God  
so freely and unconditionally given for all.

That kind of education brings delight.  
It grounds us in the ways God wants to see things evolve.  
It reminds us constantly that we have a role to play in that evolution,  
a role given to us by the God who is guiding the process.

We are, in the words of the covenant, to be blessings.

That's how I imagine Jesus' education,  
As he was formed and shaped and equipped to be a blessing  
in everything he did.

As a child, wise beyond his years, he blessed those he encountered.  
As a youth, learning his father's trade,  
he blessed his customers,  
not only by the quality of his work,  
but also by the compassion of his relationships.  
As a young adult, taking more of a leadership role  
in both the business and the community,  
he modeled the way of a righteous life,  
continuing to learn more and more  
about what it meant to live in intimacy with God  
and serve God in everything he did.

That's the desire that the Holy Spirit  
is stirring up in each and every one of us  
and all of us together.

This congregation is about creating with God  
a physical and psychic space  
where this desire to learn about God's relationship with us  
can be discovered, nurtured, and satisfied.

Our ways of doing it are not fancy.  
We don't have dozens of program, or multiple staff,  
or deluxe facilities.  
It's a simple community, made up of dedicated people,  
who welcome each other with the love they have experienced from God,  
and who desire to learn more about how to live out that love  
in the service of the commonwealth of God.

It's bit like the community in which Jesus grew up.

I find that encouraging and inspiring.  
It only takes people and prophetic passion.

We've got that.

And I'm convinced in the years ahead  
we can faithfully serve God by educating people  
into the alternative way of participating in God's mission in the world  
that will bring blessing to all who we encounter.

Know that the Holy Spirit will guide and support us  
as we increase in wisdom and stature,  
finding divine and human favour.

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