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Hutterthal Mennonite Church

Luke 2:41-52; 18:15-17

14 August 2022

Summer of Stories: The Young Messiah

Opening Greeting and Prayer:

Hutterthal Mennonite Church, good morning. Good morning also to all of you who join us online. Welcome to each guest with us this morning. May your hearts and minds be encouraged by what you see and hear with us today.

Please join me in prayer: Incarnational God, who became flesh and bone, so that we might know the way to true life and hope. Even as a young boy, your presence was sought by teachers and parents. Open our eyes and ears that we may see, hear, and understand your scriptures today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Message: Summer of Stories 2022. Because of our backpack blessing during children's time, I skipped ahead a long way from our story last week in 2 Kings. We have crossed over from the world of the Kings of ancient Israel to the era of the Greco-Roman empire in the first century CE, almost 700 years later. Caesar rules the known world, including the land that the Israelites had come to call their own even after being taken away into exile in Babylon. Caesar has set a Roman governor over the city of Jerusalem and the surrounding region of Judea as well as an imposter king and high priesthood to keep the people in check. Each year around Passover, tensions heightened immensely as the Jewish people celebrated their ancient liberation from Egypt, longing for liberation again from the occupying powers of Rome and wondering why God

had not acted on their behalf as God had so many years ago. Riots were common during the Jewish yearly festivals, especially Passover as the population of Jerusalem would swell to sometimes double its normal population. Most commotion was crushed with impunity by Roman soldiers. Crucifixion was Rome's favorite method of execution, a reminder to the masses of what could happen to them if they tried to overthrow the authorities. This environment is the setting for our story from Jesus's childhood in Luke's gospel. Luke's gospel holds the only story about Jesus's upbringing.

As our children head to school for another year, we encounter this story again, a story about calling, about gifting, about where Jesus was discerning that he belonged even as a child. How much more can we relate as parents when we watch our children grow and develop, honing their gifts and talents into what could become skills for a future vocation? Maybe we notice personality traits and maturing character in our kids that lead us to encourage them to try or consider a new activity or class project. These musings about our children's futures are the mysteries in our story today just as they are mysterious to us in watching and shaping our children as they grow up.

What we do know is that 12-year old Jesus is walking with a group of Galilean pilgrims to Jerusalem for the Passover festival, the New Year's celebration of ancient Israel. Would Mary and Joseph have stopped to see Elizabeth and Zechariah while they were in Judea? Maybe John and Elizabeth would meet them in Jerusalem for the festival, while Zechariah was serving in the temple. How much time had Jesus spent with John leading up to this moment in Jerusalem? Had Jesus noticed a longing inside of him, something unexplainable that was drawing him to listen to each and every conversation among the teachers and scribes at the temple? Maybe Zechariah had spent time with John and Jesus when he was not in the temple, teaching them about the ways of

the Lord, YHWH, the God that had called their ancestors from Egypt. Maybe Zechariah had witnessed some of the corruption and violence of the chief priests who had been appointed by the Roman authorities and had told Jesus and John about what the Lord really desired from their worship at the temple. So much is unknown about this time in Jesus's life.

The gospel writer in Luke 2 seems to gloss over travel to Jerusalem, the Passover festival itself, and any of the experiences that Jesus and his family would have had. Right away though, the writer gives us the problem at the center of the story. Joseph and Mary have lost Jesus, but they don't realize it, that is, until they have travelled a full day with their pilgrim neighbors back to their home in Nazareth. While they are searching for three days, Jesus has decided that his time is better spent interacting with the teachers in the temple area. We hear most of Joseph and Mary's side of the story, but we are left to imagine how Jesus makes his way through those days by himself in the tensions and celebration of this New Year festival. Maybe he knew exactly which group of teachers that he wanted to learn more from. Maybe Jesus had found a group of street children that helped him navigate his way around the city even on his own, or maybe he had stayed behind with John before John and Elizabeth had gone home.

I wonder too about when Jesus finally decided to speak up and interrupt the conversation of the teachers? Did they respond right away to his comment or question, or did they just ignore him when he tried to interject? Did it take a shout or an unconventional comment for them to finally allow him to say a few words? Maybe they had noticed him for whatever reason as he wandered around with his parents and invited him to join them. We have no reference for how long that he had been conversing with this particular group of teachers, asking them questions as if he is the rabbi or teacher, and they are the students, nor do we know if he had interacted with others around the city before landing here.

Jesus had at least three days to figure out how to get their attention though, and he figured it out because when he is finally interrupted by his distressed and enraged parents, he does not sulk as he walks away, embarrassed by their worry and frustration or by being caught. No! The child Messiah actually gently rebukes his parents concern like the blossoming teenager that he is becoming. Is this a moment of humility for Jesus as he realizes that he acted brashly? Is it a moment of equal exasperation like his parents, when he sighs and tells them that he must be about his Father's business? Was this a stinging moment for Joseph as Jesus implies in his comment that his true father is God, and that his true business is not the one that Joseph has prepared or trained him for? Mary's accusation, rather than an apology for leaving him behind, leaves the emotional tension between her and her oldest son at its height, that is, until Jesus looks at her incredulously and possibly condescendingly, wondering how she and his father didn't see this coming. Jesus's self-awareness, as is the case for most in adolescence, is growing exponentially, and he seems to be realizing that what lays ahead of him is not construction.

Though the argument could have continued between them, Jesus concedes and goes home with them, not running away again. I imagine Jerusalem would not have been a difficult place to get lost. Jesus seems to have realized at least partly what his calling was, but his parents still couldn't see it. In fact, they don't understand his comment at all. I think of the conversations with young people that I have had as they express their frustration with their parents' seeming lack of understanding, and I wonder if Jesus is trying to get a handle on these early teenage tendencies toward independence and even arrogance. Maybe these were the conversations and reflections that Jesus saved for his cousin John whenever they could get together.

I wonder what the long walk home was like for this family. Jesus does not have the traveling group to insulate him from his parents' looks of scorn and irritation at his foolishness.

He has to walk in the heat of the sun and the heat of his parents' shaming. Did Mary and Joseph ask more questions of Jesus on the way home, trying to understand what he was telling them? Did they write off his comments as the words of a naïve little child? At this moment, I think of the long car rides home when I was in trouble or frustrated with my parents' seeming strictness or lack of understanding? Was it this particular memory, this walk home, among others that sparked Jesus' teaching in Luke 18 that children give us an example if we truly want to inherit God's in-breaking kingdom?

Our story ends with a description of Jesus's maturation that mirrors the description of the ancient prophet Samuel, a foreshadowing of Jesus' prophetic role. Jesus lives in obedience and honor to his parents until his ministry begins. I wonder though about his conversations with his parents from this moment. Did he and Joseph argue about Jesus's future? When did Joseph and Mary begin to realize that Jesus was going to become much, much more than just the next in line for the family business? What were the trips to Jerusalem for Passover like after this? The young Messiah is growing, maturing, and blossoming, but a lot of life is still ahead before he decides to embark on his journey of calling disciples, teaching the masses, and healing the broken. Possibly 18 more years of wisdom and favor await the young Jesus before his baptism and the Spirit affirm a new direction in his life. Maybe those 18 years and the twelve before them were just what the boy Jesus needed to become the Messiah that the whole universe needed.

Closing Prayer: Let us pray: Loving and gracious creator, empower us to take the posture of children as we come to you for understanding and wisdom. Fill us with your Holy Spirit that we would reach out to our neighbors with humility and gentleness as we invite them into your renewed family. Amen.