

# **“Faith Filled Children of God”**

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**September 18, 2011**

**First Presbyterian Church  
Wilkes-Barre, PA  
Luke 2:41-52**

Well, it's back to school! I love education! But don't tell anyone, when I was a young boy, I felt and thought otherwise. I didn't like school. But, thank God, because of some teachers, I came to enjoy learning, to actually look forward to those school days.

Oh, I heard about this rather sarcastic teacher who said to his class; “If there are any idiots in the room, will they please stand up.” After a long silence, one freshman rose to his feet. “Now then mister, why do you consider yourself an idiot?” enquired the teacher with a sneer. “Well, actually I don't,” said the student, “but I hate to see you standing up there all by yourself.” (Of course no teacher or student would act that way.)

Did you hear about the teacher of the earth science class, who was lecturing on map reading? After explaining about latitude, longitude, degrees and minutes the teacher asked, “Suppose I asked you to meet me for lunch at 23 degrees, 4 minutes north latitude and 45 degrees, 15 minutes east longitude...?” After a confused silence, a voice volunteered, “I guess you'd be eating alone.”

Thinking about school, education and learning, according to Michigan's Dept of Education; “The most consistent predictors of children's academic achievement and social adjustment are parent expectations of the child's academic attainment and satisfaction with their child's education at school. Parents of high-achieving students set higher standards for their children's educational activities.” And sorry, but it appears that too many homes do not emphasize reading, learning or culture.

In a study of 4,508 middle-school students published a few years ago in the journal Pediatrics, researchers found that weekday TV and videogames were strongly correlated with poor school performance. Which brings me to good old Sponge Bob. I recently learned that a study has concluded that four year olds watching only 9 minutes of Sponge Bob can cause short-term attention and learning problems. Just 9 minutes!

Child development specialist Dr. Dimitri Christakis warns, “What kids watch matter, it's not just how much they watch.”

Reading among the young is also in decline. The National Endowment for the Arts, in a sobering report a few years ago found that a mere 30% of 13 – year olds read for fun daily (a number that has been shrinking), while 13% hardly ever read for fun (a number that has been growing). Americans aged 15 and over, spent less than 22 minutes a day on voluntary reading of any kind.

My friends, we have our work cut out for us. Our Christian faith has historically uplifted education. Pursuing knowledge and wisdom is paramount to our faith. There is no premium on ignorance! I'm reminded of II Timothy, 2:25 – Paul to his young preacher; “Study to show yourself approved by God...” Proverbs 8:10 makes the point. “Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.”

The Puritans of the 17<sup>th</sup> century believed in education. They wanted all to read their Bibles. Subsequently that knowledge blossomed into all disciplines. They had near 100% literacy.

In this morning's gospel lesson, we find Jesus, a twelve year old, with his parents in Jerusalem, in the Temple. They were being good Jews, good people of their tradition. They traveled down to the holy city for Passover. Jesus' parents were committed to taking their son to church, to synagogue. They knew this was important.

This story describes how Jesus at an early age was involved in his tradition, and was of course quite precocious! There he is, in the Temple asking questions and listening to the teachers! There he was – Back to school! And he was doing quite well indeed! He was learning the moral, religious and intellectual life of his society. He was being taught how to live a good life, a godly life!

Now the story introduces issues that are disturbing – at least for anyone who is a parent. The story's message is about Jesus' placement in the Temple (where he belonged – the place of God), and it functions as a linkage of his birth to adulthood.

Precious little is noted in the gospels about Jesus as a boy – this is pretty much it.

The fact that he stayed behind, and it took his parents three days to find him – probably reflects the church's understanding of Jesus' superiority even over his parents, and the three days may point to the cross and resurrection narrative.

My guess is, most of us have a hard time getting over this “missing three days thing.” I know I do – on the level as a parent. But, again, where he was found, and what he was doing are the main issues here (really). Jesus – back to school! – the place of learning, gathering knowledge, discussion and debate.

When all is said and done, we read... “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man.” Faith filled, with learning, knowledge, and developing wisdom.

Jesus is learning from his tradition, he is engaging the intellects of his day, he is sifting and sorting what he is hearing and experiencing. He is preparing for adulthood – for engaging his world.

I recognize this is an anachronism, but Jesus was receiving his liberal arts education, among the best that was offered to contemporary Judaism!

Encourage your children to learn, to study, to be inquisitive. Give them opportunities to “increase in wisdom.” Include, by all means the teaching and learning of faith principles. Your children need to be faith filled to fulfill their lives!

God help us to uplift those hungry to learn; to challenge our youth to excellence, and to teach them the values that will enhance their lives! And to all of you – Children of God – it’s never to late learn!

Amen.