

“INCREASING WISDOM”

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Proverbs 22:1-6
Luke 2:41-52

A Young teacher explains to her class of small children that she is an atheist. She asks her class if they are atheists too. Not really knowing what atheism is but wanting to be like their teacher, their hands explode into the air like fleshy fireworks.

There is, however, one exception. A beautiful girl named Lucy has not gone along with the crowd. The teacher asks her why she has decided to be different.

“Because I’m not an atheist.” Then, asks the teacher, “What are you?” “I’m a Christian.” The teacher is a little perturbed now, her face slightly red. She asks Lucky why she is a Christian. “Well, I was brought up knowing and loving Jesus. My mom is a Christian, and my dad is a Christian, so I am a Christian.” The teacher is now angry. “That’s no reason,” she says loudly. “What if your mom was a moron, and your dad was a moron. What would you be then?”

She paused, and smiled. “Then,” says Lucy, “I’d be an atheist.”

Oh, the value of deductive reasoning and knowledge, even with someone of so few years! Gaining knowledge must begin very early, in the lives of our children! An important area of such knowledge is for Christian families to ensure that their beloved children learn of our Christian Faith, and how it has enhanced not only our lives, but the thinking, ethics, and economic values of much of our world.

So, here is a glimpse of such knowledge. A pre-primer!

How about that story of the young 12 year old Jesus; his precociousness and his commitment to learning? After all we are, back to school, and there is so much to learn! By way of a bit of early Christian history – you probably know that this particular story of Jesus as an adolescent, is the only story we have of Jesus as a child, a youth, in our Bible.

Mark’s gospel begins with Jesus as an adult. Matthew describes his birth, but then moves on to his adulthood years. John’s gospel begins with the pre-existence of Jesus, but then again – moves to his adult ministry. Only Luke’s Gospel narrates the adolescent boy. Otherwise the New Testament is silent about his early years.

This should come as no surprise, that as the years, generations passed by, stories began to be shared about Jesus’s young life – people wanted to know more about their Savior, their Lord! Stories of his childhood and youth developed. We have some of them, dating from the second century. They are not scripture. They are not credible. But they are interesting in how some followers wanted to explain what a young,

immature, developing savior was like. (Recall George Washington didn't chop down the cherry tree).

In the non-canonical "Infancy Gospel of Thomas" (written 200 years after Jesus' birth), we learn of the boy Jesus at five years of age...he was playing at the ford of a rushing stream. He was collecting the flowing water into ponds and made the water instantly pure. He did this with a single command. He then made soft clay and shaped the clay into twelve sparrows (probably reminiscent of the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 Apostles) But, He did this on the Sabbath day (ops- that's a "no no", it's the Sabbath, no work! Keep in mind, this is a Christian interpretation on a Jewish custom, which by this time in history, the Jews and Christians were at odds.) and many other boys were playing with him.

But when a Jew saw what Jesus was doing while playing on the Sabbath day, he immediately went off and told Joseph, Jesus' father: "See here, your boy is at the ford and has taken mud and fashioned twelve birds with it, and so has violated the Sabbath." So Joseph went there, and as soon as he spotted him he shouted, "Why are you doing what's not permitted on the Sabbath?" But Jesus simply clapped his hands and shouted to the sparrow: "Be off, fly away, and remember me, you who are now alive!" And the sparrows took off and flew away noisily. The Jews watched with amazement, then left the scene to report to their leaders what they had seen Jesus doing. (What a little scamp! This young Son of God, in the flesh!).

We are curious beings, are we not? We want to know things, about things. We learn, we create, we discover, we mature. (At least that's the plan.)

Youth grow and learn. Some have more difficult times than others.

Peter Hitchens, brother of the late intellectual, acerbic, opinionated, caustic, atheist writer, whom I still find worthy of reading, Christopher Hitchens, see things differently from his brother Christopher. Peter does a 180 degree in regard to his brother's religious thinking.

Peter's book entitled, "The Rage Against God" is his spiritual journey, (written with literary flair), from Atheism to Christianity to Belief!! Listen to his recollection as a youth... (who probably had read Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451").

"I set fire to my Bible on the playing fields of my Cambridge boarding school one bright, windy spring afternoon in 1967. I was 15 years old. The book did not, as I hoped, blaze fiercely and swiftly. Only after much blowing and encouragement did I manage to get it to ignite at all, and I was left with a disagreeable, half-charred mess... Thunder did not mutter. It would be many years before I would feel the slight shiver of unease about my act of desecration. Did I then have any idea of the forces I was trifling with?"

Implied is a great "No, I did not!" for as Peter grew, matured he was increasing in knowledge, gaining wisdom! He was maturing into a man of faith.

He was well educated – but is critical of the loss of religious and biblical content in those educated after the 1950's. He is spot on in his declaration and lament!

Western civilization, which includes Christianity, has a long history of the pursuit of excellence in education and learning. Of course it has had its ups and downs—that Galileo incident for a bad example. Christianity has had its own know-nothings over the centuries and sadly continues, but in limited fashion. I can recall a minister from another denomination telling me as a young person, not to read too many books. It could be dangerous. Actually he was right on that count. So right, that I thought my way out of his narrow way of thinking about religion and the world. Education is dangerous: to ignorance and parochialism!

Education is power. We must empower our children in society and in our Christian Faith! As Christians, we have a responsibility to teach our children values that will guide them throughout their lives. Included in the teachings of our Christian Heritage and faith, are to be those values that uplift and celebrate love, justice, compassion, respect for the individual and much more. Our children's values will come from somewhere—I can assure you of that fact. Question; will their values be learned in church among people who value God's creation and respect life and freedom? Of course their primary place to find their values, and learn of them, is in their home. Keep that in mind! Allow the Christian Church to help you.

Where are your children going to learn their spiritual and moral beliefs? Hopefully, here at the First Presbyterian Church, a Christian family that respects its past, and is open to the future.

Jesus' family knew the importance of their child's education. Besides attending weekly synagogue, every year the family traveled to the great temple in Jerusalem. Jesus was learning his spiritual and moral values. He was being taught the necessary knowledge, and was increasing in wisdom.

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.

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! And he was doing quite well indeed! He was learning his spiritual and moral compass.

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.

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 day" thing. I know I do, on the level as a parent. Thank God Mary and Joseph found that twelve-year-old scamp! But, again where he was found, and what he was doing are the main

issues here (really). When all is said and done, we read, “. . . and Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man.” Jesus is learning, 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.

Mary and Joseph believed Proverbs’ declaration to “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Proverb 22: 6)

Parents, hold on to that Proverb! Believe it! Implement it!

Peter Hitchens in an interview shared about his life without God. Then at one point “. . . I discovered in the end that what I had rejected was life.”

We all have much to learn.

We all need to increase in wisdom and stature, which includes – “in favor with God.”

Amen.