

Growing Up is Hard to Do
The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
Rev. Jennifer M. Gingras
January 3, 2020

Luke 2:41-52

Oh, pre-teen Jesus... I'm going to try and set aside my feelings of parenting an adolescent right around the age he is in today's gospel. Because if I dig too deeply into my own imagination, I just might focus too heavily on that snarky grin that was surely on his face and miss the point entirely!

As parents, relatives, teachers, guardians, and friends of children we are concerned for their well-being. Our job is to protect and teach them and ensure their health and safety. We all need someone to guide us. Growing up is hard to do!

Growing up means establishing our identity and figuring out our place in this world. It involves creating relationships, setting priorities, making decisions, choosing values and beliefs that center our lives. Along the way we will make mistakes, get lost, backtrack, and sometimes just need to start over. Ultimately, growing up means moving out and finding a new home of our very own.

So, it is no surprise that Mary would be in a panic when she discovers that twelve year old Jesus is not with the group of travelers. With great anxiety she and Joseph search for him for three whole days. When they finally find him, what I hear her say is *"Where have you been young man? Your father and I did not survive angel visits, a birth in a manger, and living like refugees in Egypt only to have you get lost in Jerusalem."*

But Jesus isn't the one who is lost. He knows exactly who he is and precisely where he belongs. Growing up is not about how old we are. It is really about moving into deeper and more authentic relationships with God, our world and each other.

Children have a way of doing that to their parents. They challenge us to look at our world, our lives, and ourselves in new, different, and sometimes painful ways. That is exactly what Jesus' question to Mary does. She had put herself and Joseph at the center of Jesus' world. His question was about to undo that.

"Why were you searching for me?" he asks. *"Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"* Jesus is telling Mary she should have known where he was. It is as if he is saying, *"Remember, the angel told you I would*

be the Son of God. Remember that night in Bethlehem. Angels praising God, shepherds glorifying God. Remember the three men from the East, their gifts, and adoration. Remember Joseph's dreams that guided us to Egypt and back. Where else could I be but here?" Jesus has put God at the center of his world and asks Mary and us to do the same.

Authentic growth almost always involves letting go. Mary's next step is to begin to do a little of that, to begin to let go of her "boy Jesus" image. Yes, Jesus was born of Mary but he does not belong to her. She can give him love but not her thoughts or ways. He is about the Father's business.

This is not a rejection of his earthly parents but a re-prioritizing of relationships. It is what he would eventually ask of Simon and Andrew, James and John. "Follow me" would be the invitation for them to leave their homes, their nets, their families and move to a different place, live a different life, see with different eyes.

It is today what he asks of you and me.

Growing up spiritually involves leaving our comfort zone, letting go of what is safe and familiar, and moving to a bigger place.

It means we must leave our own little homes. Homes of fear, anger, and prejudice. Homes of grief and sorrow. Homes in which we have been told or convinced that we don't matter, that we are not enough, that we are somehow unacceptable, or unloveable. Homes in which we have been or continue to be hurt or wounded. Homes in which we have hurt or wounded another. Homes of indifference and apathy. Homes of sin and guilt. Homes of gossip, envy, pride.

Every one of us could name the different homes in which we have lived, the ones that keep our life small and our visions narrow. The problem is that sometimes we have become too comfortable in these homes. They are not the true homes God offers us. And while we may have to pass through them, we do not have to stay there.

Jesus says that there is another home for us and invites and guides us there. It is a place in which we can know ourselves and each other to be God's beloved children, created in God's image.

So why would we continue to pay rent on a place that can only impoverish us when we could move to God's home for free? That's where our place at the banquet is set. That's where we find rooms of mercy, forgiveness, joy, love, beauty, generosity and compassion.

Leaving home does not necessarily mean leaving our physical home, though sometimes it might. It does mean examining and re-prioritizing the values, beliefs, and relationships that establish our identity and give our life meaning and significance.

It means letting go of an identity that is limited to our biological family, job, community reputation, ethnic group, or political party and trusting that who we are is who we are in God. It means that we stop relating to one another by comparison, competition, and judgment and begin relating through love, self-surrender, grace and vulnerability. It means that we let go of fear about the future and discover that God is here in the present and that all shall be well. We stop obsessing over past guilt and regrets and accept the mercy and forgiveness of God and each other. We see our life not in opposition to others but as intimately related to and dependent upon others.

So I wonder what are the little homes in which you live? How have they bound up your life, stifled your growth, and held you back? What might you have to leave behind in order to grow up and move to a better place? Those can be hard questions, painful questions. Ultimately, however, they are questions founded on love.

"Child, why have you treated us like this?"

"Because I love you. I love you enough to grow you up, to find you when you are lost, and to bring you with me into the Father's home." Amen.