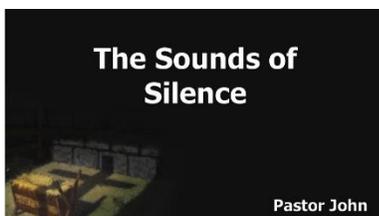


The Sounds of Silence

December 30, 2018

Luke 2: 39-52

³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. ⁴¹ Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. ⁴³ When the festival was ended, and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. ⁴⁴ Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." ⁴⁹ He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he said to them. ⁵¹ Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.



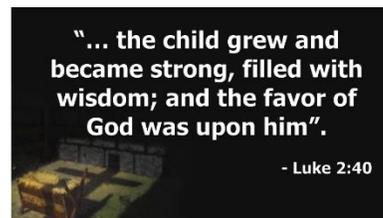
Let us pray...

As we continue on our journey in Luke 2 we learn about Jesus as a child. We have a lot of detail about the birth of Jesus. But from the birth stories in Matthew, Luke, and sort of in John, until Jesus is a man beginning His public ministry, these words from Luke are really all we have about the childhood and early adult years of Jesus. Matthew does give us a few stories about Jesus' childhood that we do not have in the other gospels. Matthew tells us of the visit of the wise men, of the period spent in Egypt while Herod massacred the infants, and of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus' return from Egypt. From there, Matthew picks up with the stories of John the Baptist that we find in the other gospels. Mark begins his gospel with John the Baptist preparing the way for the Messiah. In John, we jump from the "*in the beginning was the Word*" passage to "*the Word became flesh*" to John the Baptist being out in the wilderness proclaiming a baptism of repentance. In John's gospel, Jesus comes to John to be baptized as the unofficial start of His ministry.

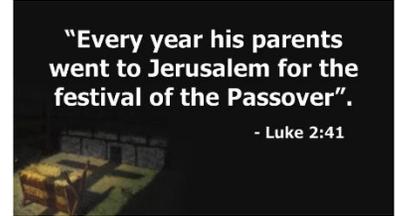
In our passage from Luke 2, we get some hints about the faith of Mary and Joseph. We know from the birth stories that they were faithful to the word of God brought to them through the angels. Then Mary and Joseph are obedient to the Law of Moses as they take the baby Jesus to the temple to be dedicated. After the seven days of purification required by the Law are over, Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the temple. Following the Law as given in the book of Leviticus, they make an offering and then have the baby circumcised and they present Him to God. Because Mary and Joseph were faithful, we read that "*the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him*". And then about 12 years pass.

"... the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him".

- Luke 2:40



As we pick up the passage in verse 8, we get another testament to Mary and Joseph's faithfulness as Luke tells us that *"every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover"*. They did not go once in a while. They did not go when the carpentry business was a bit slow and they had nothing else to do. They did not go up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover when it was convenient for them. Mary and Joseph and all of the family went up every year to celebrate the Passover. This is the scene that sets the stage for the heart of our passage today.



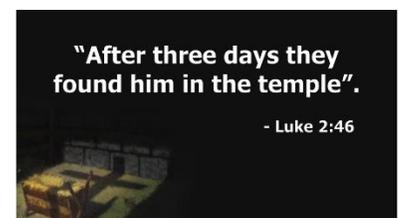
After the celebration of Passover, Mary and Joseph and the whole extended family from points north of Jerusalem gather up and begin the three-day journey home. Well, not exactly the whole extended family. After a day into the journey home, Mary and Joseph discover that Jesus is not with the traveling party. He is nowhere to be found. Imagine the panic for a moment. They searched among this cousin's children and then amongst that uncle's family. As the search continues, their panic would have grown. Little, small town Jesus left all alone in a huge city – all alone.

As I thought about this scenario, it reminded me of a time when our youngest, Abby, went missing. We had been at Hart Ranch and she had spent some time with one of her best friends. Jennifer was about eight years old too. Abby and Jennifer had become best friends at Hart Ranch. But their time together was limited each year as Jennifer lived in Denver. We had spent a few days at Hart

Ranch but moved back home as work called. We pondered going back for another day trip but then decided that we could not make it back to Hart Ranch as previously planned. Abby was pretty upset. She stormed off in a flood of tears. After a bit Kristin went to check on her. She was not in her room. Quick search of the house – no Abby. Maybe outside on the hammock – no Abby. A bit of panic began to set in. Quick trips to the neighbor’s house – no Abby. Our feelings of panic really began to rise. Then we discovered that her bike was gone. Kristin hopped in the car and headed down the hill and I hopped in the truck and headed up the hill. My heart was racing as I drove up the long hill. No Abby. No phone call from Kristin. I made the left turn south onto Highway 16 and was almost in tears. About a mile down the road I spotted Abby pumping her little legs fiercely as she was making her way to Hart Ranch to see Jennifer. I pulled over just ahead of Abby and called Kristin. Phew. I could feel the panic ease as waves of thanksgiving and joy flooded over me. I picked up Abby and just hugged her.

Our passage tells us that *"after three days they found him in the temple"*. After THREE days. I was about to have a breakdown after three minutes, never mind

three days. Imagine missing your child for three days. If my panic level was 10 out of 10, Mary and Joseph’s must have been 1,000 out of 10. Luke tells us that Jesus was just sitting there, chatting with the teachers. Jesus was at home as at home can be. He was listening to them, answering their questions, and asking them questions. Jesus must have really been filled with wisdom as verse 47 tells us, *"all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers"*. While that is all good and well, I can bet that when Jesus saw the look on his



parents' faces and when he sensed the release of emotion that they felt when they had finally found him, he was humbled.

Mary and Joseph immediately ask him the "what were you thinking?" question. Jesus' innocent answer

astounds them. He replies, *"Did you not know that I*

must be in my Father's house"? Essentially, Jesus asks them, 'Where else would

I be?' Right at that moment, Mary and Joseph do to know what to think of

Jesus' response. But one day it will make perfect sense. Our passage wraps up

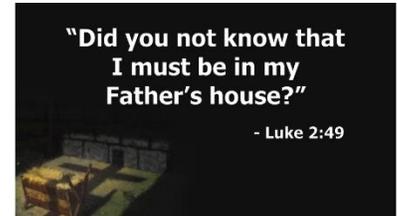
with these words: *"Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and*

was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And

Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor". Jesus

grows up; He matures in faith. And then, at age 30, Jesus appears on the scene

again to begin in public ministry.



There is a long gap in Jesus' life in our Bibles – about 17 or 18 years. Part of our Advent season calls attention to the very fact that God took on flesh and dwelt among

us. God incarnate stepped out of heaven, was born in a manger, and lived as

one of us among all the mess and joy of life. We do not know for sure, but we

imagine that Jesus' life was much like our lives during our early adulthood years.

Even though there is a long period of silence, we can imagine what Jesus' young

life was like. Stinky diapers and feedings in the wee hours of the night. And

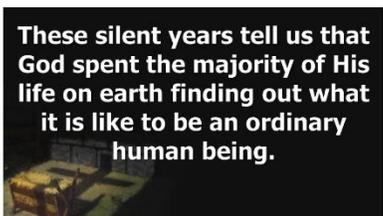
then joy in Mary and Joseph as he takes his first steps, as he loses his first tooth,

as he makes his first gift or project in the family carpentry shop. The pride as

Jesus takes on his first side job, perhaps building a cabinet for the neighbor or some bookshelves for the nice woman who runs a small shop. And, of course, there would be the urgings to eat all of his vegetables and to drink his milk. Let's not forget the scraped knees and the trips to the local emergency room at ten years old because he was a bit distracted when he was sawing that plank in half. It was only a dozen stitches. And, oh yes, remember those times when Jesus would want to run off to junior rabbi school without a coat in the dead of winter?

As we speculate about Jesus' life as he enters young adulthood, he would have experienced much of what we experience then too. He would have struggled with continuing to help with the family business while yearning to step out on his own. And then, while we believe he was still fairly young, Jesus would have grieved the death of his earthly father. Then the exhaustion that would come with being the oldest child - the one responsible for providing for his mother and all of his siblings. The long, long hours of hard, physical work, just to put food on the table, clothes on their backs.

In these long years of silence, Jesus learned what it was like to be one of us. The long years of silence filled Jesus with understanding and empathy and experience upon experience that would guide His ministry in the years soon to come. These silent years tell us that God spent the majority of His life on earth finding out what it is like to be an ordinary human being. Take a moment – read that statement to yourself, let it sink in...



Think about what that means concerning how God knows you and relates to you... Think about what that mean as Jesus intercedes daily for you and me. This is an extraordinary message that we get from these sounds of silence.

There is also a message here for us as we face the new year that lies just ahead. The silent years in between the birth and the beginning of Jesus' ministry remind us that God is patient, that God takes time before acting. God does not usually create change overnight and He rarely changes people quickly either. As we take time to take stock and to consider our habits and our lives on the cusp of the new year, let us remember that slow and steadfast are the path we are called to walk as Christians. Let us remember that God is also continually at work in us - shaping us, reshaping us, forming us, and reforming us. Let us remember that our faith is a long journey, one forged in the trials and the sufferings, one refined at the altar of forgiveness and repentance, and one made glorious and perfect at the throne of grace.

As we look forward to the new year, as we gather on this Christmas Sunday, may we know that God always remains present to us – in both the joys and sorrows and in both the exuberant praise and in the moments of silence. As I close the message this morning, I would like to share a video that illustrates this. Please turn your attention to the screens. *Play video: "Even There" (1:59)*

As we go forth, may we go with the promise that we saw in the video: "And my God was there". Throughout the new year, may we ever remember, in all times and in all things, our God is there. Yes, my friends, God is always there. Amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) Can we be both Jesus Christ in our “temple” and Jesus Christ in our community, work, school, home? What does this look like?
- 2) How is God at work in your life right now? What is God preparing you for in accordance with God’s timing?
- 3) In what ways do or can you bring Jesus into the ordinary of life?

The Way Forward – A Journey for the United Methodist Church

On each Sunday from December 30 through January 13, I will briefly unpack one of the three plans being brought to the Special General Conference in February 2019. At the last General Conference in 2016, there were various concerns, proposals, and so forth brought to the floor concerning the Book of Discipline’s wording, guidelines, and understanding of the topic of homosexuality. The Council of Bishops were asked to lead and guide the discussion on what has become known as the “Way Forward” as a way to lead our global church forward. The Council assembled a 32-member commission gathering leaders from the global United Methodist Church. This very diverse group included several people with nontraditional sexual orientations or with family members that had such an orientation. From the commission, three major plans have come forward. On each of these three Sundays, I will briefly unpack one. Then, on Saturday, January 19th, we will have a “Town Hall Meeting” to further unpack and discuss these plans and the potential impacts upon the global church and upon our church here in Winner. At this meeting one of the Dakotas Conference representatives to the Special General Conference will be present to help guide our time together. I am grateful that Beata Ferris has agreed to be here with us.

Plan One – The One Church Plan

I am beginning with this plan because it is the plan recommended by the “majority” of the Council of Bishops. As the group was diverse and from many different global and sexual orientations, not all of the bishops support this plan. All we know is that a majority support this plan. That being said, it could be just 17 bishops. All three plans have supporters among the Council of Bishops.

Here are the slides that I will present and talk through on Sunday, December 30:

A Way Forward

CONVERSATIONS
ABOUT A WAY
FORWARD FOR THE
UNITED METHODIST
CHURCH



The matters of human sexuality and unity are the presenting issues for a deeper conversation – one that brings our regional and cultural differences to the surface and which highlights **different ways of interpreting scripture and theological tradition.**

The Vision for the Commission

The Commission will design a way for being church that:

- maximizes the presence of a United Methodist witness in as many places in the world as possible,
- allows for as much contextual differentiation as possible, and;
- balances an approach to different theological understandings of human sexuality with a desire for as much unity as possible.

One-Church Plan

Council of Bishops Recommends

- ▶ Creates unity by allowing people of differing views to continue to be church together; allows for contextualization in different parts of the world.
- ▶ Removes the controversial phrase “incompatible with Christian teaching”.

- ▶ Removes restrictions that prohibit clergy from officiating same-gender weddings.
- ▶ Conference Board of Ministries decide whether or not to recommend ordination of GLBTQ clergy based on fruitfulness and effectiveness.
- ▶ Local churches decide whether they will allow same-gender weddings on their property.

- ▶ Adds protections for clergy who do not want to officiate same-sex weddings. This plan does not require clergy, churches, or Board of Ministries to act against their conscience.

▶ **PRO:** Allows for contextualization in different parts of the USA and the world.

▶ **PRO:** More coherent theology for unity. Does not assume that human sexuality is the defining issue for the UMC.

▶ **PRO:** Fewer trials.

▶ **CON:** Does not completely satisfy the progressives because it still allows for discrimination of LGBTQ in the UMC.

▶ **CON:** Does not completely satisfy the traditionalists because allowing homosexuality in the UMC violates their view of scriptural integrity.

Next Sunday, I will give a brief overview of the second plan, “The Connectional Conference”.