

Choosing Health, Trust, and Faithfulness
A Sermon on Luke 2:41-52 by the Rev. Philip Major
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When I was a young man, an older, wiser friend made this observation. "All families have issues." Then with a twinkle in her eye, and a chuckle in her voice she said, "And if they don't have issues, I'm not sure they are really families." All families have issues, so we strive to have healthy, supportive relationships in our families. And part of creating a healthy family is to be willing to admit when there are issues or at least questions to be considered.

Jesus was aware it takes work to create and maintain healthy relationships in our families. The story of Mary and Martha from the tenth chapter of Luke is a good example. In the story of Martha and Mary there is a conflict between the two sisters.

For me, the main point of the story is not that one of the sisters is better than the other, but that one of the sisters tries to get Jesus to intervene in the conflict. Martha wants Jesus to fix the issue for her. We call this triangulation. Triangulation happens when there is an issue between two people and one of the people drags a third person into the conflict. Jesus refuses to be part of the triangle. Jesus doesn't want to have anything to do with Martha's attempt to control her sister's behavior.

Jesus is compassionate. Jesus is engaged in helping others. Jesus heals many people. Jesus is also resistant when people try to control or manipulate others. Jesus helps us understand that loving other people means being centered and balanced. Loving other people means being fully present with them without trying to control them. Loving other people means showing them you care while supporting them in making their own decisions.

In Matthew chapter twelve we read the story of Jesus' mother and siblings trying to get through the crowds of people to see him. Jesus was healing people and preaching to a large crowd of people. In the middle of all this activity, Mary and Jesus' siblings arrive and demand to see him. Anyone who has had much experience in a family can see what is really happening.

Mary and Jesus' siblings are surprised by the effectiveness and power of his ministry. Large crowds of people gather around him, and a group of committed disciples spend most of their time listening to Jesus and travelling with him. The real issue for Mary and Jesus' siblings is they are afraid they will lose their special relationship to Jesus. Their intrusion into Jesus ministry is real life; this is what people do in many families. They try to control and manipulate others, especially when they feel they are losing control.

Jesus refuses to be controlled or manipulated by his mother. We follow Jesus' example when we refrain from controlling or manipulating others. We follow Jesus' example when we have healthy boundaries. Having good boundaries is about creating healthy boundaries, not for other people's behavior, but for yourself. Having healthy boundaries for myself means that I don't blame you for things I am feeling. Having healthy boundaries means each person choosing and taking responsibility for their own behavior.

When children are young, they need their parents to create boundaries and structures for them that are positive and healthy. As children grow into adults there is a transition.

Older children and young adults need to be encouraged to make positive, healthy decisions for themselves. By the time children are eleven or twelve they are beginning to make adult decisions, decisions that will have life-long implications for their lives.

This is what is happening in our story from the Gospel of Luke. *When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents were unaware of this. Jesus has made his choice about what he should be doing with his life. After three days Mary and Joseph found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously looking for you."*

This is real life. This is one of the ways we know Jesus was born among us as a real, fully human person. Like any normal middle school aged kid, Jesus is not thinking about his parents. It would be great if Jesus could just tell them, "I love this place. This is where I need to be, in the Temple, studying scripture with the priests and rabbis." Jesus acted like a normal twelve-year-old, because twelve-year-old kids are not very good at saying those kinds of things.

Jesus' actions would be terrifying for any parent, but Jesus was also doing the healthiest, most important thing for a twelve-year-old. Jesus was thinking about what is most important, and making his own decisions. Jesus was thinking about what God intended for his life, and making choices based on what he knows is right.

Our service of Holy Baptism is one of the most important things we do as a congregation of God's people. Baptism is a liturgy where people make decisions about the direction of their lives. When parents bring their young children to be baptized, they are making promises about the direction of life they choose for their children. Parents are choosing and promising to have their children grow into young adults surrounded by people who are committed to following Jesus, surrounded by Holy Scripture, surrounded by the community that strives to be witnesses to the resurrecting power of God's love in our lives.

When an adult or young adult chooses to be baptized, they are making the same kind of decision Jesus made as a twelve-year-old boy. The twelve, or twenty-two, or forty-two year old who is being baptized is turning away from ways of evil that corrupt and destroy the creatures of God and turning toward God's way of doing things. They are turning toward a way of life that builds relationships of trust and service. They are turning toward a way of life that builds relationships of faithfulness and health.

Our entire congregation has an important role to play today, because none of us can follow God's way on our own. We cannot make everything go right for her, we cannot make life easy for her, but we can support Kira as she strives to fulfill the promises she makes today.

So this is a time of joy and hope and strength for our community. In this baptismal service we promise to support Kira in following the Lord of love and the Prince of peace. In this baptismal service we renew our promise to follow God's way of health and strength in our lives.