

May 15, 2016

Confirmation Sunday
Making Progress?
Luke 2:41-52

Opening words: This is confirmation Sunday at Western Reserve. By noon today we will welcome ten new members into the life of this church. However, that is not really important to me. What is important to me is the salvation of their souls. Confirmation means they are ready to tell their world that Jesus is their Lord and Savior. Before I preach this morning, I want you to hear their names so we can pray for each one. God not only loves them but has a special purpose for their lives.

These are the names:

Nic Antonucci
Joe Bartholomew
Kennedy Eichert
Alyssa Ferguson
Nathan Ferguson
Samantha Kelley
Jason Kenner
Kennedy Miller
Olivia Pater
Abbie Serrino

Will you pray for them with me?

Luke 2:41-52 Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. ⁴² When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. ⁴³ After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴ Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." ⁴⁹ "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁵¹ Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

I love this story. You may remember me telling it in the past. When Pablo Casals (1876-1973) reached 95, a young reporter asked him, "Mr. Casals, you are 95 years old and considered the greatest cellist that ever lived. Why do you still practice six hours a day?" Mr. Casals answered, "Because I think I'm making some progress." As your minister, let me ask you this revealing important question: are you making any progress? I am not talking about the cello. I am talking about the faith. Are you making any progress in the Christian faith? If you are not sure how to answer that question, say, "**Amen!**"

Today, we find ourselves in the Gospel of Luke. Who was Luke? He was a Gentile by birth, well educated in Greek culture, a physician by profession and a friend of the Apostle Paul. Luke and its companion literature, Acts, were written about the year 80. His purpose was to introduce the Gentile world to Jesus. He does that by telling a series of stories like no one else. Luke was a master story teller. Today's story is the perfect example.

We find ourselves in the second chapter. According to the text, Jesus was twelve years old. (2:42) That was a significant year in the life of a young Hebrew man. For it was during that year, he would begin his studies to take his place among the men in the faith. Perhaps, that is why Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem? Or perhaps, they went to Jerusalem annually for the Passover, as was required by the law. We really don't know why they were in Jerusalem but we do know they were returning home. The distance between Jerusalem and Nazareth was and is 63 miles as the crow flies. In reality, it was more like 68 miles, because no road is perfectly straight. You do the math. If you walk about 4 mph, then it would have taken 17 hours to get home. The journey was not done in isolation. The pilgrims returned home in large packs. They walked with family and friends, who filled the hours of traveling with various discussions. Jesus was twelve years old and twelve-year-old boys are beginning to explore their independence. It would have been natural for Jesus not to travel with his parents. Mary and Joseph assumed their son was traveling with his friends. They assumed wrong. Jesus was missing. They send out a first century "amber alert". They asked everyone with ears the question, "Have you seen Jesus?" Everyone answered, "No!" With no other option, Mary and Joseph returned to the Golden City. (They had to go back! How do you tell God you have lost his only son?) After three days (2:46) of searching, they found Jesus in the temple. It is easy to feel their frustration and relief. They try to reprimand him, but their words seem to fall on deaf ears. They thought Jesus was lost, but he knew where he was the whole time. He was in his father's house. If you are glad that Jesus was safe, say, "**Amen!**" Listen to what I am about to say.

The story of Jesus at twelve years old is really our story. It is a story for anyone who wants to make some progress in the faith. Jesus models for us how to make progress. He models for us how to grow spiritually. Verse 46 tells us what Jesus did clearly. It says:

After three days they (Joseph and Mary) found him (Jesus) in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

What did Jesus do to get himself to grow spiritually? First, Jesus listened. The Master didn't talk, he listened. Second, Jesus asked questions. He didn't ask sarcastic questions to criticize. He asked questions to expand his understanding. If we spent more time listening and more time asking probing questions, then we would grow spiritually too. So if you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

Jesus Listened

First, Jesus listened. Jesus is sitting in the temple with the teachers and he is listening to what they were saying. Let me say it again. Jesus was listening, Jesus wasn't talking. You know it is true. We are not very good at listening. However, we are excellent at talking. Have you ever gone to church and tried to listen, but the person next to you won't stop talking? There seems to be a national shortage of good listeners.

I have to ask you this question: Do the people in your life consider you a good listener? When you come to church do you spend more time listening or talking? It is my job to communicate the divine Biblical truth in a clear way. It is your job to listen to the divine truth. American author Bryant H. McGill once said, *"One of the most sincere forms of respect is to actually listen to what another has to say."* How much do you respect the people in your life? How much do you respect me? How much do you respect God? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"** I don't want to shock you, but you don't know everything. You may want to stop talking and start listening.

Jesus Questioned

Second, Jesus asked questions. When I was young, I lived in a home that was built in the 20's. If you lived in a home built in the 20's, you know they weren't built like homes today. Homes built during that decade did not have air conditioning or decks. However, they did have front porches. We never sat on the front porch except when the weather grew hot. I have fond memories of those hot evenings, because the entire neighborhood sat on their front porches too. That is how we got to know our neighbors.

When I was young, I would journey to our neighbor's front porch. Her name was Mrs. Ortmyer. I thought she was as old as the hills. (She was probably about 59.) She served me the same snack regularly; ginger ale and soda crackers. Every night I would ask a mountain of questions. Why is it so hot in the summer? Why is it so cold in the winter? Why is the grass green and the snow white? How can birds fly and fish swim? Every evening our discussion ended the same way. She would cup her hands over her ears and say, "Russell, go home! When you get older you will have all the answers you want." I have to say it: Mrs. Ortmyer was wrong! I am older, but I still have a mountain of questions. Why are some born with so much and some so little? Why are all my friends fighting the battle of the bulge, yet someone dies in our world every seven

seconds from a lack of food? How can you raise two children in the same house and they end up so different? Have you ever asked those kinds of questions? When I get to heaven, I have a mountain of questions for God. How many questions do you have for God?

There is nothing wrong with asking questions. Jesus asked questions. Look at verse 46 again. It says, *"After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions."* There is nothing wrong with a sincere question. Asking God a sarcastic question just shows your arrogance. Asking God a sincere question means you are simply trying to understand. Look at it this way. If you don't ask questions, it means you don't care enough to try to understand. If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"** Ask God all the questions you like. Don't worry, He can handle it! Jesus grew spiritually because he listened and asked questions.

Over 2,000 years ago, a young Greek artist named Timanthes studied under a respected tutor. After several years, the teacher's efforts seemed to have paid off when Timanthes painted an exquisite work of art. Unfortunately, he became so enraptured with the painting that he spent days gazing at it. One morning when he arrived to admire his work, he was shocked to find it blotted out with paint. Angry, Timanthes ran to his teacher, who admitted he had destroyed the painting. "I did it for your own good. That painting was retarding your progress. Start again and see if you can do better." Timanthes took his teacher's advice and produced *Sacrifice of Iphigenia*, which is regarded as one of the finest paintings ever. I hope that is not your story. I hope you haven't become satisfied with yourself. The goal is to become like Jesus. Do you remember the question of the day? Are you making any progress?

This is Confirmation Sunday and on this day we will confirm ten wonderful people. They have been working hard. They began this process back in September. I have no clue how many hours they have sat in class. I have no clue how many questions they have asked. I have no clue how many hours they spent with their mentors. I have no clue how many times they helped in worship. However, I do know this. I am proud of each one of them. For this reason, I almost feel bad saying the next line. Today is not the completion of anything. It is only the beginning! In just a few minutes, they will become one of us, people who are always striving for an impossible goal, to be like Jesus! Are you becoming a little more like Jesus every day? Or are you satisfied with your present state? Are you making any progress in the faith? Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote, *"It is only because he became like us that we can become like him."*

Will you pray with me?