

# Sermon for Online Service: Pott Shrigley 10<sup>th</sup> January, 2021.

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Luke 2.41-52 *God's Treasure: Jesus at Twelve*

Things which are rare are always considered to be more precious: whether gems and metals, or antiques and artefacts. And, in the wonderful treasure chest which is the Bible there is one jewel which is particularly precious – because it is the only one of its kind.

Luke's account of Jesus at age 12 is the only glimpse we have into His life as he grew from the infant, who we remembered last week with the Magi's visit, to the 30-year old, who we will meet next week at His baptism. It's an intriguing and enticing glimpse, too: it tells us much, as we will see – but it also leaves us wanting to know more about those hidden years. In fact, that curiosity led a number of people, in the early days, to write accounts of Jesus' boyhood; attempting to have them accepted as part of the scriptures. One such is the so-called 'Infancy Gospel of Thomas' – clearly a work of fiction, or, rather, fantasy – which has the child Jesus modelling birds out of clay, which then come to life and fly off; or, more darkly, has Him curse a child who punches him, leading that child to shrivel up and die!

Unlike those fake accounts, Luke's story of 12-year-old Jesus' trip to Jerusalem with His family has the same ring of truth and authenticity which we find throughout the Gospels.

*Firstly, it shows us Jesus as part of a very human family.*

There is something wonderfully recognisable about his parents' exasperation when they finally find Jesus, after three anxious days: they don't know whether to punish or hug Him: "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you everywhere." No parent will fail to identify with Joseph and Mary here.

Yet again we are reminded that Jesus lived the life which we live.

But it is also at this very difficult human moment that a profound divine truth is revealed. Jesus is growing into an understanding that He is the Son of God: and, apparently for the first time – and to His parents' puzzlement and shock – He refers to His father as, not Joseph.....but God!

Jesus, Joseph and Mary are all on a journey of spiritual learning and growth – just like you and me. Jesus Himself had to grow in knowledge of His Father as he grew in years. Just look at how He is drinking in knowledge from those wise old men in the temple; absorbed in asking questions, forgetting the time and the journey home.

And this is one of those moments when their journey of faith takes a big leap forward.

What about you? Do you have moments where you take a significant step forward in your spiritual journey? Well, notice when this one occurs: in the midst of a very human and very messy situation; people flustered, upset, cross. If you want to receive insights and revelations from the Lord, it might not come in one of those 'religious' moments, like Sunday worship; it might well be in the midst of some mundane, everyday situation. So, stay close to him every day! You never know when God might show you something new, take you on that step forward.

Notice, too, that, even as He recognises that God is His Father, Jesus still knows His place as a child in the family; "He returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them". Already we are seeing the character of the Servant King emerging; developing within the context of an ordinary human family.

*But, secondly, this story also shows us Jesus as part of a wider human community.*

It is a large group – relatives, neighbours – who travel to Jerusalem for Passover. The journey takes a few days, and they walk it together, as well as no doubt camping together just outside Jerusalem for the 7 days of their stay. It's not each individual or family separate in their car, and hotel; it's a whole village sharing together in this important social and spiritual experience. Indeed, that's why it is only after a day's journey homewards that Mary and Joseph realise that Jesus is not with the party: they have confidently assumed that he is safe, elsewhere in the group, as they travelled.

We are currently realising, if we didn't already know, just how important community is. Even though in our modern culture we prize a certain amount of privacy, an excess of time spent entirely alone – cut off from the variety and stimulus of direct human contact and interaction – leaves our lives impoverished. We have always known this in the Church: if I had 10p for every time someone has said to me, 'Of course Vicar, you don't have to go to church to be a Christian' .....! And I have invariably replied, 'True. But if you *are* a Christian, that's where you'll want – and need – to be on a Sunday'.

There's something about the blend of old and young, of learning and praising, chatting and laughing, even crying and arguing together as a church family on a Sunday morning, which goes to the heart of who we are and what we do. It's a time to learn from and support one another, to welcome the newcomer or enquirer, and to be re-invigorated in our faith to face another week. I'm sure as I say this I'm making some of you very nostalgic and homesick for that distant memory: but it's important that we don't lose that vision – don't get *too* used to this fragmented and separated way of doing community (even as we thank God that we can stay connected); it's so important that we are ready again to embrace that

physical community, with all its joys *and* challenges, and to re-build it as and when we are able – however tricky that might turn out to be.

We can understand why the letter to the Hebrews says, ‘Don’t give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing’; Christianity is not a solo endeavour – it is something we share with a Christian community. During this time where our fellowship is impaired, please still take what opportunities there are to share with others; maybe you are in a Zoom home group, a WhatsApp prayer group, or you will meet for Zoom coffee after this service; maybe you can phone someone and share together matters of faith, prayers, as well as an everyday chat. While it’s not ideal, it is still so important to stay connected.

You might have thought that Jesus, Son of God, Word of the Father before time began, would not need other people – this wider human community. But he did. So do you.

*Thirdly, it shows Jesus as part of a spiritual community.*

I wonder if on that trip to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, the most important celebration in the Jewish Faith, there were devout believers – Joseph and Mary, for example – but also others who were struggling with their faith, or not sure what they believed? But they went along anyway, taking part in the services and rituals, because that was what was expected.

Now, that’s not always a good thing: the adult Jesus was particularly hard on people who go through the outward show of faith, but in their hearts are far from God. But still there are times for all of us when we *need* to be supported by the faith of others because our own faith is hanging on by a thread.

Perhaps we have hit a rocky stretch on the spiritual journey, perhaps things which are happening in our lives are making it difficult for us to believe. It is then that being part of a spiritual community – the church – can help so much. So, I’m finding it hard to pray; but others will pray for me, or with me: I’m finding it hard to rejoice; but, because I take part in worship *however* I feel, just saying and singing those words of praise and thanksgiving with others starts to lift me out of myself: I feel burdened with sorrow or worry; but in the church I find a community where we bear one another’s burdens.

That’s why it’s so important to be regular in sharing in worship and prayer with others – even when we don’t feel like it, when it is the last thing we want to do. Jesus’ understanding and relationship with His Father developed in the context of a shared faith, shared with others who were on their own faith journey. That is how your relationship with God will develop and grow, too.

*One final point.*

I started by describing this passage of scripture as a jewel. Mary knew that, too: she knew that this moment was something to treasure. “And his mother treasured all these things in her heart”. Actually, this is already the third time that Luke has said this of Mary. The first was after the shepherds came to worship the baby, and brought news of the angels’ song; and the second was at Jesus’ presentation in the temple, when old man Simeon recognised her baby out of all the crowd as God’s Messiah. Mary valued these moments of revelation, when something made sense in a new way, when she understood God’s ways a bit better.

God will give such moments to you, too, if you stay open to Him. But what will you do with them? Forget about them soon after? Demand ever bigger and better revelations?

Make sure, like Mary, you treasure them: store them in your heart, make them part of you, part of the *new* you which God is building, the one which is growing to be more like Jesus – whatever age you are!