

## Out of the Mouths of Babes

Our gospel reading this morning comes from the gospel of Luke 2:41-52. Listen now for a word from God.

<sup>41</sup> Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. <sup>42</sup> And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. <sup>43</sup> When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents were unaware of this. <sup>44</sup> 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. <sup>45</sup> When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. <sup>46</sup> After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup> And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup> When his parents<sup>[i]</sup> 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." <sup>49</sup> He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"<sup>[k]</sup> <sup>50</sup> But they did not understand what he said to them. <sup>51</sup> Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them, and his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

<sup>52</sup> And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years<sup>[c]</sup> and in divine and human favor.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray. O God may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts O Lord our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

So, like many others this past fall, I have been captivated by the recent movie adaptation of the musical *Wicked*. I'm sure you at least know about it, even if you haven't seen it, but it's a musical adaptation of the book by Gregory Maguire, which tells the Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West, all based on the original work *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum. The musical opens on the land of Oz where the citizens are singing "No One Mourns the Wicked" and celebrating that the Wicked Witch of the West has been defeated, melted by Dorothy and her friends with a bucket of water.

All of Oz is singing, and dancing, and celebrating, until the pomp and circumstance are interrupted by the voice of a child, who asks the question, "Why does Wickedness happen?" This question prompts Glinda the good witch to tell the Wicked Witch's story, about her childhood, where they met at school, about their unlikely friendship, and to ask the question in response "Are people born wicked, or is wickedness thrust upon them?" This is the question the rest of the film will seek to answer, "are people born wicked, or is wickedness thrust upon them,"

along with other questions like why the flying monkeys fly, where did the Wicked Witch get her iconic hat, and of course, why is her skin green.

The reason this story is so compelling, is because we get to see the other side of the story. In the Wizard of Oz, the Wicked Witch of the West is a relatively static character, uniformly despised by the world she inhabits. She is bad for the sake of being bad. She is just the villain, seemingly without any interesting depth of character. But when we see the other side of the story,

We are fascinated with the backstory. If you look at the books and movies that are being released, so many of them are prequels and biopics, telling the story of what came before. We don't just want to know what happened, but how it came to be. The backstory captures our imagination because it helps give color and depth to the way we hear the rest of the story. And the story of Jesus is no different. For centuries, people have been telling stories about Jesus's childhood, imagining the circumstances that led to the man that he would become. The infancy gospel of Thomas, one of the apocryphal texts that didn't make it into the biblical canon, tells stories of the child Jesus shaping sparrows from clay and breathing life into them. Stories of Jesus healing. Of his teachers which try to teach him. Thomas even tells a version of this story, where the scribes and the pharisees say to Mary, "Blessed are you that the Lord God has blessed the fruit of your womb, because we've never seen such wisdom of praise and glory of virtue."

And yet, by comparison, the version of the story that Luke tells is remarkably restrained. There are no miracles, no healings taking place, no birds of clay breathed to life. Jesus is an ordinary 12-year-old boy, who gets lost at the Passover festival. This is, if you will, Luke's version of Jesus' backstory, and it will ultimately shape the way we hear the rest of the story. Luke is moving from the nativity story, from angels announcing the birth of this child who is the Messiah, and who will bring good news of great joy to all people, to the ministry that Jesus will eventually carry out. Luke shows us that, like any other twelve-year-old-child, Jesus is still figuring himself out. He is growing up, coming into his identity. He gets lost, like we all do at some point.

### **Jesus gets lost**

My family often tells the story of when I got lost at a swim meet when I was an early adolescent. My friends and I were on the swim team at our neighborhood pool, and we had traveled to Washington D.C. for an away meet. It was the only team in the league that had an indoor pool, and an observation deck to watch the swimmers from above. So, when we arrived to the pool, we set up camp in the observation deck. Laid out our towels, snacks, the games that we would play in between events, and our parents sent us down to the pool deck to warm up before the meet.

Except, instead of following the pack of my friends and the signs all over the building, I thought I knew a better way down to the pool deck. I had seen a stairwell, that I thought would be the quickest way down without having to weave through the labyrinth of locker rooms, and so I peeled off from the rest of my friends to go my own way. When I reached the bottom of the stairwell, I realized that the door that would lead out onto the pooldeck was locked, and when I turned around to go back the way I came, I found that the door at the top of the stairwell was locked as well.

I was young. I thought I knew better. And now, I was trapped, and lost. I can still remember how scary it was to feel like no one knew where I was. To be alone and wonder what would happen if they never found me. And to feel the relief of being found, when a janitor heard me knocking on the door, and unlocked it for me.

Jesus gets lost. This isn't an insignificant detail. Whether he thought he knew better, or he got distracted, or he was simply being foolish, he ends up alone in a strange city, his parents unaware that he's even been left behind. Jesus gets lost. And even though when his parents arrive, he plays it off pretty cool, like he knew exactly what he was doing. Like he didn't care that his entire family was leaving without him. He got lost, and for a moment in this story, we remember that the one whom the angels sing, and for whom shepherds search, and who is at the

center of this cosmic message of good news of great joy for all people, got lost. Was perhaps scared and alone, grasping for something that felt familiar, and found his way to the temple. Until his parents who have sought him out, arrive to find him.

In this Jesus, we see a reflection of our own humanity. We remember the places in our own lives where we have felt abandoned, alone, afraid, and without direction, and we know that we are not alone. And we remember the places where the grace of God has found us

And this shapes the way we hear the rest of Luke's gospel, because this is the Jesus who will later in Luke's gospel, say that the Kingdom of God is like a shepherd who, having 100 sheep and losing one of them, leaves the 99 sheep to go after the one who is lost, and when having found it, calls together his friends and neighbors to throw a celebration. He will say that the Kingdom of God is like a woman who loses a coin and who sweeps the whole house to find it because it is so precious to her. And again who calls together her friends and neighbors to celebrate. And who says the Kingdom of God is like a man, who having lost his son, runs out to meet him when he returns, to embrace him, and to welcome him home.

This Jesus knows what it means to be lost. This Jesus knows what it means to be scared and alone, in a strange place, not knowing what will come next, or if he will be found. AND This Jesus knows the surprise, and the relief, and the joy of being found. This Jesus' we can take comfort in the promise that Christ is the one who seeks each of us out, who finds us, and who welcomes us home.

### **Jesus grows up**

Luke closes the story with this verse.

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years and in divine and human favor.”

It sounds just like a nice happy ending to the story right. “And they lived happily ever after.” The end. But more than signal that this is the end of this part of the story, Luke is suggesting that this experience had something to teach Jesus. He went back with his parents to Nazareth and was obedient to them, and he continued to grow in wisdom, and in years and in divine and human favor. The word favor in the Greek is *charis*, which can mean grace, favor, kindness, blessing. Jesus continued to grow in favor. He continued to grow in kindness. Jesus learned from this experience and continued to learn throughout his life, until he became the person, we know him to be, who would teach and heal be crucified on the cross

and rise again from the dead. He had to learn, and to grow to be that person, which is to say that.

Just as Luke wants us to see our own humanity reflected in Jesus, Luke also wants us to see the image of Christ reflected in ourselves. He wants us to see that Jesus wasn't just born bursting wisdom from him the moment he was born into the world. He grew into that person over the course of his life. And just like Jesus, we aren't just born the people God calls us to be, it doesn't just happen, it is something that we grow into over the course of our whole lives. We live, and we grow, and we make mistakes, and we do our best to learn from them. And we find ourselves lost again and again and again to be found by the grace of God. And by God's grace the image of Christ grows in us.

So, what is your backstory? What are the stories that give color and depth to your life, to your faith, that shape how you will live the rest . When have you been lost, alone, and afraid, and when have you been found by the grace of God?