

Jesus, Who?

In Luke's gospel the events move rather quickly. We've gone from the foretelling of John the Baptist and Jesus, to the visit of the Angel to Zechariah and Mary, to the birth of John the Baptist, to the Nativity of Jesus, to his baptism, to his family tree, to his temptation in the desert.

That's roughly 30 years in four chapters! Luke is not messing around in getting to the important stuff of Jesus' ministry. And lest you think Jesus was only tested after his baptism and during his trial, let me remind you that Jesus went through what many young people do. The testing of their credentials.

Did any of you grow up in the shadow of someone else? You weren't necessarily known by your own name but as someone's brother or sister, daughter or son, spouse, employee, etc.? For many parents, once their child starts school they cease to become their name, and are known more by their title...Someone's Mom or Dad.

When I started high school I went to the school where my Dad was a teacher. Every year, on the first day of school, all children of employees at the school were called to the office. We received a lecture that went something like this. "Your job is to blend in, not stand out. If you do something well, don't expect to be congratulated on your achievement. If you do something wrong, expect the wrath of God to rain upon you."

Nice, eh? This was to remind us that we would not receive preferential treatment because our parent worked at the school or for the school board. My brother David is 8 years younger than I am. He received a gentler version of the speech, yet was warned that there would be no preferential treatment for those students either.

I was known as David's sister for a long time, especially when I got involved in Scouting leadership. I was known as Eric's daughter when I was at school.

Jesus had been tested by the devil, moments after his baptism. He was tried and tested by the devil, in the desert wilderness.

Let's back up a little bit. A chapter or so ago, Jesus, aged 12 was walking with his parents to the Temple for the Feast of the Passover. Something that they did every year. This particular year he got separated from his parents.

Likely he was walking with his peer group near the back of the crowd, as the walk would take several days.

From the second chapter of Luke:

After three days they 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? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he said to them. 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 favour. (Luke 2.46-52, NRSV)

Jesus knew, at the age of 12, that he was no ordinary young man. He was stretching himself to learn about the scriptures, as it would help inform his heavenly ministry.

Fast forward two chapters and we find ourselves back in Galilee where Jesus is not only learning, but now also teaching.

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. (Luke 4.14-15, NRSV)

That all sounds great, right? Strangers are hearing of this young itinerant preacher from Nazareth and they are liking what they hear. Everything is grand until Jesus returns to Nazareth, where he was raised.

Jesus has just finished reading from the scroll of Isaiah, Chapter 61. Verses 1-2 This is from the Douay-Rheims Bible,

THE spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me: he hath sent me to preach to the meek, to heal the contrite of heart, and to preach a release to the captives, and deliverance to them that are shut up.

To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God: to comfort all that mourn.

(Isaiah 61.1-2, Douay-Rheims)

Jesus rolls the scroll back up, hands it to the attendant and sits back down. Every eye in the place is on him. He says "This day is fulfilled, this scripture in your ears." (Luke 4.21, DRB) in other words "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4.21, NRSV) Or in other words he's telling them in a round-about way, that the "me" that was read on the scroll is him. The Spirit of the Lord was upon Jesus.

And that's where today's reading ends, but if we stop here, we miss a larger part of the story.

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' He said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself!" And you will say, "Do here also in your home town the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum." And he said, 'Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. (Luke 4.22-24, NRSV)

The sweetness of this "of the moment" preacher suddenly sours as the community of Nazareth tries to comprehend what they have just been told. This kid, this son of Mary and Joseph the carpenter - HE is the same one that the scroll of Isaiah mentions? It can't be. Not that weird kid who studied with his mother and learned carpentry from his father? No, not that kid.

When I arrived in Dorchester I was introduced to my two Wardens. One I had not met before. The other one was a neighbour from when I first lived in London. I was born in London and my family left there in 1981, when I was turning 13.

He and his family moved from the street when I was six years old and in his mind, although I was standing before him as a fully accredited and licensed priest, I was only six years old. He had some difficulty reconciling that I was grown. I was just over 40 years old when I met him (again). It took a couple of years and more than a couple of disagreements, but he got there.

I imagine that this was some of what Jesus experienced. They knew him as he grew up. And although his parents were well-known and well-respected, especially Joseph, there was simply NO WAY that this boy Jesus, who was 30 years old, could be the one to set them free.

And when Jesus challenged those who scoffed, he stoked their anger so much that they tried to drag him to the edge of town and push him off a cliff...talk about a prophet who has no respect in his hometown! Yikes!

We'll come back to that next week. A literal cliff-hanger!

So let me ask you this...when we move away from where we live to go off to university or college, or move for work, or get married and move away, does time stand still for those we leave behind?

I left home when my brother was 12. We have not lived in the same house since then. When he was giving a speech at his wedding, I looked at him and wondered when he stopped being 12 years old? He was 29 years of age.

Why do we have such difficulty in seeing young ones grow up? Why are we so dismissive about age? At what age is the sweet spot where we are accepted as a knowledge-keeper, while not yet being dismissed as being too old?

I think I'm in the sweet spot right now. I'm not challenged or dismissed as often when I voice an opinion, depending on the circumstances of where I express my opinion. I get called ma'am more often, which I prefer to being called "miss".

I don't find the need to mention or show my credentials as often, while I am getting left behind with popular music, video games and technology in general. It's bound to happen, right?

We start out having to prove ourselves, to create a space where we belong. We work to prove we have the knowledge and gain expertise. Slowly we continue to gain expertise and don't have to prove ourselves as much. Our knowledge has been tested enough to be more readily accepted.

Then we begin to see others who are starting their own journey. We challenge them in their expertise and, hopefully, learn from their knowledge.

Eventually we begin to step away and our expertise is not necessarily as important or relevant as it once was. And the cycle begins anew.

I wish we, as a settler society, would embrace the elders as our indigenous siblings do. That we would sit at their feet, the knowledge and language-keepers and learn from their wisdom. Not that we would be discarded and rejected because what we know has little or no value in the world.

The word crone has had negative connotations for centuries. It is defined as “an old woman who is thin and ugly.” I was shocked when I read that definition. To my mind, a crone is a woman of advanced years who has earned every wrinkle and line on her face. She holds the secrets of many, never divulging them. She knows a great many things and will share those things with you, if she deems you worthy.

Anyway, all of this to say, age is not something to fear. Nor is it something to dismiss. Every day is a gift, even if we are unable to see that gift. And every day there is something to learn...sometimes it is something we've learned before and forgotten. Or learned before and we need a nudging reminder.

Whether from Nazareth or Galilee, Jesus was a prophet, and more than a prophet, he was the Messiah. He healed the sick, tested the arrogant and changed water into wine. And no matter how much he did, some would always see him as Mary and Joseph's weird kid.

Whenever you find yourself making a judgment based on age, try and take a step back and ask yourself if this is how you would like to be treated. It may not change how you interact with that person, but hopefully, it will give you pause for thought.

Giving thanks to God for all blessings. Let the Church say, AMEN!

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