Biblical Text: Luke 2:40-52

**Introduction**

For how many of you is this a recognizable situation? At 16 everything seems to be going impossibly slow. Everything your parents do or say is annoying. You might not be exactly sure what you want to do, but you know you can do it, and opportunity is passing you by. Nothing you are studying feels at all relevant. If there is anybody dumber than your parents it is teachers. It feels like **the time**.

Then let’s say around 30, everything is going so fast. You’ve had a start, but aren’t sure exactly what to do now. You do the work, but it gets you nowhere, or at least nowhere visible. Opportunities present, but none of them feel right. All of a sudden your parents won’t give advice. “That’s an interesting one son, I’m sure you’ll figure it out.” Mentors and teachers have moved on to younger folks. All you wish is that you could read that one book, hear that one person that crystalizes things. **The time** presents itself, but you don’t feel ready and keep delaying.

In mortal life most of us are beyond those points. We might be reconciling the choices made or not made. Glad we seized the day, recognized the time, or sorrowful that we missed it, or were too afraid of the moment. But unlike this mortal life which flies forgotten as a dream, we are the heirs of eternal life. I’m not sure if many of us get past 16 in the spiritual life. And this isn’t exactly an age that encourages the things of the spirit. But it is that Spiritual life I want to contemplate with our texts today.

**Text**

But at least attempting to be a responsible teacher in these things, I have to ground whatever I say in the literal text of Scripture. There is a refrain in Luke about the childhood of Jesus. “He grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.” So we can say that the childhood stories of Jesus are about that word wisdom. A word that is notoriously difficult to define and even worse to teach. We know it when we see it. The only school most will learn wisdom from is experience. But even experience is not a guaranteed teacher. As many of us will do the same foolish things over and over. But Jesus is given – as the hymn would say – as childhood’s pattern. Should we desire to grow in wisdom and the favor of God, we pay attention to this pattern.

And it is the juxtaposition of two things right at the start that sets off a tension. It is Passover. Jesus has gone with his parents to Jerusalem for the Passover. Now, we know what would happen on a Passover a couple of decades hence. The second fact that Luke gives us is that Jesus is 12 years old. This is roughly the Bar Mitzvah age for Jews. You could say the age of accountability. Now nobody actually thinks a 12 year old is of equal standing to the older person, but there is an acknowledgment of a status change. The child counts towards a minyan – the necessary number gathered for prayer.

And the 12 year old Jesus appears a bit like our hypothetical 16 year old. He feels like it is his time. And his understanding of his time right now is “being in his father’s house.” It’s a fascinating alternative view of what the time of the messiah could have been like. You’ve got a child prodigy out of nowhere, who shows up to the learned men of his day and more than holds his own. “Listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.” That’s the story of many an eastern Guru. Not exactly the story of The Buddha, but only because Sidhartha’s parents forcibly kept him unaware, if you know the story.

**Christology**

The world constantly wants to make Jesus into just a great teacher. Make him just another guru. And that path was open on this early Passover in Jerusalem. He was of age. Mary’s questions back to him are in some ways inappropriate. The scolding of “why have you treated us this way?” And the casual “your father” referring to Joseph. “Why were you looking for me?” It is my time. I am doing what I am here to do. I am no longer your responsibility. In a formal way, true. “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” Did you forget the entire Christmas story and miraculous birth. Did you forget your own song – the Magnificat. That work has to begin. And now seems like the time. Or at least now could be the time. This could be the path.

But Jesus isn’t just another guru. He isn’t just a great teacher. This isn’t the time of His Passover. And Jesus – growing in wisdom – recognizes this. But it had to be a heady and enticing path. A heck of a temptation by the world. On the one hand a pair of Galilean peasants taking him back to nowhere, and on the other the learned scribes of the temple hanging on his every word. And it wasn’t without biblical support. Hannah would bring Samuel to Eli about this age. But 12 year old Jesus closes this path. “He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.”

In his wisdom, he walked away from the adulation of the priests and scholars of the age. He walked away from this Passover in Jerusalem. Today towards Nazareth. A place completely the opposite of Jerusalem’s glamour. But always walking toward a very different Passover. Not as the teacher of Israel, not as another guru, but as final sacrifice, as the Lamb of God that John would proclaim. All the gurus of the worlds can teach you wisdom, but even the best students fail to live it. Jesus would live it for us.

**Moral**

So then the question in some was is how is this a pattern for our spiritual life?

In one way I’d say it is a call to gage rightly our spiritual age. Are we 16 sure that it is the time? If the path looks too good to be true we probably should ask ourselves if it is more temptation than appointed time. What Jesus asks of his followers is to pick up their cross and follow. But maybe more important here is Jesus’ attitude toward Mary and Joseph. While his assertions that he was justified in what he was doing were true, he submitted himself to them. The spiritual life, even the of Jesus, begins in submission. We have a LORD. That’s the very first creed – Jesus Christ is LORD. The spiritual life is about learning what that means for ourselves. And it is different for each disciple. God is in no way fair about this in how we would define fair. Some work the entire day and others but an hour. But he does love us.

But there is something more here. Jesus submits to his mortal parents. Most of us were probably taught the faith originally by our parents. Our first submission was to their instruction. But this is part of learning the Spiritual life. Learning to recognize when someone has come into our lives that if we wish to grow in wisdom and stature and favor, we must learn to submit to what they have to give us. And this is probably the toughest part for this age. We are mostly spiritual teenagers. Doing it our way.

In a couple weeks we will have the wedding at Cana, at which Jesus says to his Mother “It is not my time.” But then he performs the first of the signs. Something more like the confusion of our 30 year old. Maybe we’ll spend more time on this then. But maybe the problem in our Spiritual life is not the restlessness of youth which would not submit to wisdom. Maybe the problem is knowing what we should be doing, but not wanting to walk the way. At some point the spiritual life moves on from growing in wisdom and stature to living it. It is the maturity to know that God has laid out the path in advance for us to walk in. And then to willingly walk it. To walk it in love.

**Eschatological**

Because of Jesus walking the path in love for us, we are the heirs of eternal life. This mortal life is something borrowed. And it will be taken back. But at the resurrection we will be given something of our own. Something that lasts. Something that will not be taken away.

So maybe part of the submission is learning a line from Mary. To treasure up all these things in our hearts. Because it is by that meditation that we can learn what time it is. It is by treasuring up what Christ sends to us that we might learn how to live. Not just live here and now. But how to live in eternity.

Because that is something that we know absolutely nothing about. Nothing other than what Jesus taught us. That His Father loves us. That he is preparing a place for us. And that the way of the cross, any return to Nazareth, is preferable to whatever adulation the world might give us. That even if we think it is **The Time** and are wrong. That Time is not lost. Because That Time is in our LORD. And we await an eternity of time in Him. So we can live today as we are called to.