

When Did He Know and Does It Matter?  
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Luke 2:41-52  
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*Why were you searching for me?  
Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?*

Good morning!

Reflecting on our Lectionary passage from Luke, I would like to address a few questions in my meditation today: First, what constitutes a legitimate call to ministry (Just in case God has been keeping any of you up late at night) And, when did Jesus know he was who he was? And, how were the Gospels written and in what ways might that answer affect our understanding of question number two? And, does any of this matter? Merry Christmas by the way!

Let us pray!

Lord your light calls us forth to follow and serve.  
Your light still shines for all to see in this world.  
May we continue to reflect your light in our lives,  
in our service, in our words and in our deeds

Over the years, I frequently find new acquaintances are interested in why I became a minister, especially here in Eugene. They'll say, *What made you decide to become a pastor?* Or... *When did you know you wanted to be a minister?* While others put it more bluntly, *Why did you want to be a minister?*

I must say I find it a little curious that people do this. After all, I doubt they would ask the same question of their attorney or tax consultant or even professor ...professions that take at least as much education and preparation and dedication.

I suppose they don't ask such questions of those professionals because they are able to identify more readily with a possible attraction to them. There is something a little mysterious and unknown about the ministry, which prompts their questions I think. Perhaps people also believe that for any one going into ministry there must have been an extra level of discernment. Somehow, you must be chosen to do such a vocation. Which only tweaks their interest more!

Now, to be honest, I believe many are chosen for their life work. When gifts and vocation are well matched there is something significant and even holy about the combination. Yet, I do understand the intrigue about a call to ministry. I remember the very first time I encountered such curiosity...I was hanging my coat in the cloakroom of the First Baptist Church of Lexington as the newly hired 22 year-old Seminarian. A parishioner standing next to me said, "Good Morning," and then asked me to "tell me about your call from God." Not your usual inquiry encountered at 8:15 in the morning.

It was obvious she needed an answer to hang her hat on before I could start my ministry with her church! Now, I don't remember exactly what I said. Maybe that I didn't have a specific moment that felt holy or special when I felt called by God (no Burning Bush or voice in the night), but rather that I experienced a slow compelling force guiding me over the years toward ministry. I might have added later in my career I only rec-

ognized a true sense of call upon reflection, as I looked back through my faith journey for confirmation that I was on the right path.

Yes, I don't remember what I said but I do remember the look of panic in the poor woman's eyes as she listened to me. My answer just didn't suffice! In fact, she was so perturbed she merely scrambled to get out of that room and away from the young clergy phony as fast as she could! It was a rather inauspicious start to my ministry I must say!

But, in a way, her reaction points toward an important distinction about the call to ministry. Unlike most professions, clergy can only serve when the people we are serving feel assured that we are worthy of offering such service. Does that make sense? So, it is one thing to personally feel called by God to be a pastor, but it is merely a feeling until it is affirmed by the people around you.

I remember 25 years ago when a new member of our church asked to go before our governing board to make an appeal for sponsorship on his quest to be ordained. He had the right credentials: He had finished seminary a year prior to arriving at our doors. He was raised in the church and was comfortable with the theology of the UCC. And he certainly had passion!

But, there were a few warning signs. First, his ordination paper was absolutely festooned with exclamation points. Not just one at the end of a remark, but 6 even 7 after every sentence and on occasion 8 if he really wanted to drive home his point! One paragraph alone had 36! Victor Borgé would have had a field day with his tome! Frankly, it was easy to think *thou exclaimith too much!* In that paper we also learned, with lots of punctuation for emphasis of course, that the candidate was in fact a direct descendant of Mohammad.

Yes, THE Mohammad! And, that his mother was grooming him for ministry... since birth. AH... there is a clue!

Well, needless to say the Board had a difficult decision to make. He was a sweet man, and he was really trying, and he had finished 4 years of Seminary, but it also felt like he was trying to live into something that wasn't authentic! So, we turned him down. It wasn't easy but it was in keeping with our polity as a church. A call to ministry must be embraced by the congregation for it to be truly legitimate.

Which leads me to the next question. In our passage this morning we have a 12 year-old Jesus full of the spirit making a rather bold claim to his exasperated and worried parents. "What are you worried about... Did you not know I need to be in my father's house?"

By the way, I think it is safe to say that his mother was blessed with a fair amount of patience! Imagine searching for your kid for three days only to get a rather rebellious, "Did you not know..." It had to have been more than a little maddening for the young mother, to say the least. I suppose the gospel writer was showing the better part of discretion by not writing a more realistic, "And Mary ponder all these things in her heart... after she stopped screaming at her beloved son!"

The question remains - Did Jesus know he was who he was at such a young age? Well to answer that question it might be good to consider why Luke wrote what he wrote in his gospel.

One of my favorite theologians, The Rev Donald Gall (otherwise known as Don Gall in these parts) wrote the following for our 9 AM class last month. "Most scholars agree that the Gospels were written *backwards*. The Gospel writers began with what they considered the most important thing about Jesus, namely his

crucifixion and resurrection, and then added miracle stories and other remembered sayings and deeds to support their faith portraits of Jesus as they worked in reverse. For Matthew and Luke, that meant a birth narrative was added last. Consequently, the two stories about Jesus' birth are Christological rather than biographical and should be read as theological statements about the person of Christ rather than as biographical details about Jesus' birth. They were written by looking backward through the experience of the resurrection in order to claim for *The Risen One* an origin that was as God-revealing as was his ending."

So, with that in mind, it is safe to say that Luke added this story about the 12 year-old Jesus to confirm that Jesus WAS special from a very young age. And that he knew it.

Which leads to my final question... Does it matter? In my mind...not so much!

I think what is more important is that year after year the followers of Jesus have been compelled to answer the question, *Who was this guy?* They have found comfort and challenge and deeper understanding of life and a pathway to God by his words, his example, his very Spirit. There is something truly authentic about Jesus that we resonate with don't we? We may not have a full grasp of what it is that compels us to follow him but it takes a hold of us right here.

Isn't that why we have come here today, just two days after Christmas - when all the pageantry has ended and the crowds have dispersed? We feel compelled to be here because there is something special about this Jesus person, we and the Gospel writers and countless followers over the centuries have all tried to understand who he is really and why it makes a difference to follow him.

Here is the thing. It does make a difference.

When we understand through his words and example that we have a God that accepts, no, embraces, everyone for exactly who they are it makes a difference!

When we feel as though God is closer to us somehow through the Spirit of a person that experienced the worst humanity had to offer and still offered life, changing grace, and a love that would not end... it makes a difference!

When we feel our own value as a human being is greater after learning how Jesus honored the gifts of every person from the oldest to the youngest, from the most honored to the most despised, from the disenfranchised and unfairly judged... it makes a difference!

When we more clearly know our purpose here on earth because of our faith in a person who offered love to all who stood up for justice wherever it was threatened, and who worked for real change countless times in his ministry... it makes a difference!

We have all been given a simple yet beautiful and life enriching gift on Christmas morn, the gift of God's all encompassing love. Let us cherish this blessing and nurture it like a fragile new born and let us see what new life it will bring into our lives! Merry Christmas everyone!

Luke 2:41-52

<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 did not know it. <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 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," <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>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. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup>And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.