

SERMON
“To Grow in Wisdom”
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St. John’s Chapel UCC

Luke 2:40-52

The child grew and became strong [in spirit], filled with **wisdom**, and the favor [grace, in love with] of God was upon him.

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was **twelve** years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. 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. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. 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 (or in stature), and in divine and human favor.

Herein ends the readings of Holy Scripture.

SERMON

Today let me come to you as more teacher, than preacher. I figured there would be a smaller number of you than usual, hence making for the more intimate teacher-student setting. Plus, it would seem to me that there are a few things we need to get in order as we start a new year. Now the only problem with this is, that there will be so few of you to do **the work of passing on the knowledge**. But alas, isn't that the way of the world?

First, let me educate or re-educate you about the lectionary. The lectionary is a system that lines out the scripture passages to be read on any given Sunday, and upon which the preacher is to preach. 900 hundred million Christians belong to churches that use the lectionary system. Today, all over the globe, a potential 900 million Christians, in some eight denominations, will read and hear the story of Jesus in the temple at age twelve. You hear the word *potential*, because the trend towards low attendance on the Sundays after Christmas is universal. What a shame for today's story is such a great story!

These appointed readings involve a three-year cycle, and we are in Series C this year. This means that the appointed readings primarily come from the book of Luke. This year, I counted, we have a potential for 43 sermons from Luke in the calendar year. The Christian year started with Advent. In case you didn't notice, we shifted to Luke on November 29th with the beginning of Advent.

The lectionary will also throw in a few readings from John, as John does not have a series of its own. In our denomination, we also have the freedom to choose other texts than those recommended by the lectionary. And there are occasions when I waver, but I basically stick with the lectionary. I like the awe of knowing that possibly 900 million other people are studying with us the same text on any given Sunday. It also keeps me from only focusing on my favorite

topics. And it gives you a step by step unfolding of the Jesus story as told by each of the gospel writers.

The problem is, that to do any given gospel real justice, for us to become saturated in the uniqueness of each gospel's theology, requires some building blocks of learning—it's necessary to build on what we learned last Sunday, and the Sunday before...which is hard when your students vary weekly.

For instance, have you noticed that Luke has a propensity for women? He uses two in his birth narrative. These stories are uniquely Luke's. He almost gives us an archetype, (*ar ke tip*—the model from which all other things are made) of the feminine sacred in Mary. Or as Chuck Gackstetter said in the dialogue sermon we did together December 20th, we are given in Mary, someone who stands on equal footing with Jesus, in the degree to which both were blessed by God. This feminine aspect of Luke's theology ripples throughout his gospel as it does today.

The gospel writers all struggled with the point at which Jesus was infused with divinity. Mark has it happening at Jesus' baptism. Luke points to Jesus' conception as the kick-off point of his divinity. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit. Yet, it also seems important to Luke that we realize that his divinity was not full blow at his birth. His growth in wisdom came upon him gradually. Jesus grew...he increased in wisdom.

Actually, Luke sandwiches his "Jesus in the Temple" story between two wisdom statements. In verse 40, right before the temple story, Luke tells us that as a child, Jesus filled with wisdom. He was not full of wisdom...He filled with wisdom. Then at the end of the temple story, Luke reports that the now boy-child increases in...grows in wisdom. Herein is the original pattern from which all Christian are to be cut. As Jesus grew in wisdom, so are we to grow. Not only when we are children, or boys or girls, or teenagers, or young adults, but

throughout our WHOLE lives. Our whole life long, we are to grow in wisdom and have the wisdom of God living within us.

Now to be infused with the divine does not just take wisdom. Luke tells us that Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God, and in the eyes of other people. This is a quotation from I Samuel 2, about Samuel. Luke adds the word, “wisdom.” It is this wisdom part of the divine with which Luke is most interested.

If you have not figured it out by now dear students, the question you need to be asking yourself is: What is wisdom and what does it have to do with the feminine aspect of the divine? It’s not a word we use much anymore. For some reason the word has fallen on hard times, but we usually know when it is absent.

This one man was in charge in the control towers with only a novice to back him up. He’s been at it for way too long, and is terribly tired and needs a break. He turns to the young novice, who has never directed traffic and says to him, “Everything is going smoothly right now. All you have to do is call me down stairs if anything happens”. The young man can hardly wait for his opportunity. He’s only sitting there a few moments when a voice comes over the speaker saying, “This is American 1-2-3 asking permission to land.” He responds, “You have permission to land on runway North A.” Almost as soon as he’s through another voice comes over the speaker saying, “This is United 4-5-6 asking permission to take off. He says, “You have permission to take off on runway North A.” The man from the American Airlines hears this and calls in saying, “You just told someone to take off on the same strip I’m to land on.” He says, “Yeh, I know. You all be real careful now.”

There is definitely an absence of wisdom going on here. I think we also recognize wisdom when we experience it, but can we name it so that we can more fully apply it to our lives?

Actually, our sisters and brothers from antiquity referred to what we call wisdom, by giving it a proper name: the ancient Israelites with their development of Hockma, and then the Greeks and their attention to Sophia. Hockma and Sophia are both female names, for our brothers and sisters of antiquity saw wisdom as a feminine attribute of God. For wisdom to be, it had to exist in the concreteness of life...not in some abstract form...for wisdom comes from relational engagement with the conditions of life. It is a knowing that comes from being in relationship with whatever we want to know. Knowledge may come from abstract, clinical, and objective distancing, but wisdom comes from a very feminine way of knowing, that involves developing a nurturing closeness, and a relational engagement that speaks to the fullness of life. And any of you men who have ever had to sit through a “woman flick”, knows how much we women are into the relational stuff. And wisdom rests in this metaphor of woman, until the Greek philosophers got hold of it, and turned it into the abstract concept of Logos.

But here in Luke, it is still Sophia. “And the little child grew, and became strong in spirit, being filled with Sophia and the grace of God was upon him.” Then again, “Jesus advanced with Sophia and in stature, and in favor with God and humanity.” (Translation from *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, pp. 154 -145). In other words, Jesus had growing within him, both the feminine and masculine attributes of God.

Wisdom has to do with the capacity to understand connectedness to the whole of things. I am not, and you are not, an isolated module, free-floating in the universe. We belong. We are engaged and engaged by everything around us. And to live in harmony with that level of

connectivity, with that level of engagement—well, to do that well is to be wise. To do that well, we must apply what we have come to know from being in relationships with Sophia. Any novice in a control tower would have been taught, that you cannot give permission for planes coming in and going out at the same time to use the same runway. But, until he put that knowledge to use... he was a fool.

To be wise involves a willingness to be a walking, a talking, and a sliding into the intimacy...the oneness of...the interconnectedness of Sophia and Hockma. As your teacher, I ask that you keep this in mind as we move with Luke through the New Year that awaits us. As your pastor, I pray we can become a people who allow for the development, the growth of the feminine, and the masculine, as we grow in stature and favor with God and humanity. Amen.