

When I Grow Up, I Want to Be...

The First Sunday after Christmas
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December 30/31, 2006
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52

I have to ask two questions of the adults in this room: When you were 12, what did you think you would be when you grew up? And when you did grow up, did you become what you thought you would? Just think about that for a moment.

I couldn't quite recall what I wanted to be when I was 12, but I did find the book I kept with school "stuff" in it which will tell me. It says on the cover here, "Nancy's School Years" and it has a couple pages and an envelope for each year I was in school. I could list my teachers' names, friends I had, activities I participated in. I could enclose my reports cards. Plus, up through 6th grade, it had a place to checkmark a career---"When I grow up I want to be . . ."

Granted, it is very sexist, but that was the 60's. Boys could checkmark the following: Fireman, policeman, cowboy, astronaut, soldier and baseball player. Girls could checkmark these vocations: Mother, nurse, school teacher, airline hostess, model and secretary. So, at the end of 6th grade, when I was 11 ½, I wanted to be either a school teacher or a secretary. (Looking at a piece of embroidery I saved from that year, it's obvious "seamstress" was not to be one of my career choices.)

I know that, in my middle and high school years, I fancied myself to be a writer and journalist. "Pastor" and yes, even "Mother" were not on my radar screen at the time. Nor does their absence surprise me. There was a lot of growing up to do, so how could I know fully and with such certainty? There were some skills I had, things I liked to do, role models I admired, but at nearly 12, was I sure about the future Nancy Rouse? No. I really had no idea. Maybe some dreams. But no idea what I would be when I grew up.

When we hear our Gospel lesson appointed for this day, we might think Jesus knew exactly what he would be when he grew up. In fact, we might consider him grown up already. After all, Luke records for us here a story of Jesus, a mere boy of 12, sitting and conversing with the learned scholars in the temple who were simply amazed at both his penetrating questions and his wise understanding.

We might hear this story and imagine Jesus as a fully developed grown up man in the confines of a 12-year-old pre-adolescent body. We might suppose him completely aware of his own divinity, his capacity for working miracles, his journey to the cross. And we might retain in our memory banks some stories about Jesus that are non-Biblical, that float around some corners of Christianity to back up this idea that somehow Jesus always knew exactly what he wanted to be and what his future would hold. Those stories, like the one where Jesus takes some clay, fashions it into a bird, throws it into the air, and makes it become a real bird that flies away . . . well, they are interesting to hear, but as the various Christian books and letters were gathered into the final canon of scripture we call the New Testament, those stories were pointedly left out. This lesson about Jesus in the temple is the only story retained in the canon of the young boy

Jesus. And it's not a story of his magnificent miracles or surprising healings or signs of his dynamic divine power. Instead, Luke tells us a story of this young Jesus who simply desires to learn and grow, following and obeying his heavenly Father. So we witness how he learns and grows through worship and study in the temple. And how he learns and grows as he spends time with other faithful people who also want to follow God. And finally how he learns and grows as he is raised by his earthly parents, Mary and Joseph, themselves faithful to the Lord God. The passage ends with Luke writing, "*And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.*" Luke presents us with a picture of the young boy Jesus we can truly understand and relate to—because he's like us. So Luke, besides giving us the birth narrative that we heard on Christmas Eve, gives us another moment in which to ponder the incarnation, God coming to us. Here in this wonderful passage we are reminded that God in Christ is among his people, learning and growing the way you and I learn and grow. God is so fully involved and invested in us, the human beings he created, that he himself follows us along the path into adulthood.

Now, to be sure, Jesus isn't just your typical pre-adolescent growing up in Nazareth. Luke makes that clear as well. When Mary and Joseph hurry back to the temple in Jerusalem and discover where Jesus has been all along, after presuming him to be with extended family on the journey home to Nazareth, they tell him in no uncertain terms that his unknown whereabouts created quite some anxiety for them. Jesus responds to them this way: "*Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?*" From the Greek, it could also be translated as "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's interests?" Regardless of the translation, I believe Luke is showing us Jesus' own emerging sense of vocation, mission, and identity. These are our Lord's stirrings, ideas, and dreams about what he will do "when he grows up." For we are seeing a young Jesus who knows he is to be obedient to his earthly parents, but now also realizes he has a duty above and beyond that. It seems Jesus is starting to understand there is a Jesus whom he, in fact, has been called to be. He may not have understood it all, known everything that would happen. But he knows something of it. Luke shows us the initial glimmerings of Jesus **taking up** the Jesus he is intended to be.

As we ponder this incarnation, our God coming to be with us in the flesh, we gain a new understanding about our own mission and identity, about living in our own flesh. It's more than simply a matter of checking off "cowboy" or "astronaut" or "school teacher" or "nurse." Those might very well be careers we can work at, but it is from the person of **Jesus** that we learn our **real** vocation—what it means both to be truly human before God, and at the same time truly connected to God. Jesus' faithfulness, his life of prayer, his service to others in God's name **are** the vocation you and I have been called to, the vocation God is busy preparing us to take up. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, further describes this "vocation." He encourages us to clothe ourselves in the Christ-like attributes the Holy Spirit has poured upon us ever since our baptism into Christ: Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness and, most especially, love. You see, we've moved way beyond just "What I want to be when I grow up." Instead, it's "What my gracious God is **calling** me to be—today, tomorrow, and all the days of my life." **AMEN.**

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