
Church of the Beatitudes United Church of Christ

Facing Our Future

A Sermon by

Jeremy Lopez

Scripture: Luke 2.41-52

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We find ourselves at the end of 2009, on the verge of a new year. For some, this may be a time of uncertainty. What will you bring to the new year? What will the new year bring to you? Will this be the year you get that promotion at work? Will you even have a job as this new year begins? What opportunities await you in this coming year? Will you manage to stay ahead of your financial obligations as they continue to mount in the coming months? Are you heading into the new year with new life in your family? Who will be missing from your life this year? What health issues will you face in this coming year?

We all have a new year in common, but what matters is how we choose to approach it. Many of us may approach the coming year by adopting “New Year’s Resolutions.” If you’re like me, you need to make these resolutions every year, because they don’t usually last the first two months. Listen to the top ten resolutions that people will be making this year:

1. Get organized
2. Help others
3. Learn something new
4. Get out of debt
5. Quit drinking
6. Enjoy life more
7. Quit smoking
8. “Tame the bulge”
9. Fit in fitness
10. Spend more time with family and friends

Maybe you heard one or two resolutions in that list that you will adopt this coming year.

Our scripture lesson finds the young boy Jesus in the temple. Luke paints an image of Jesus as having the curiosity of a child, yet with an intellectual acuity that surprises the religious leaders. Jesus is engaged in his tradition, learning from the religious leaders, asking questions that concern his faith, listening for the voice of God. He felt the call of God so strongly that the gospel tells us he was away from his parents for three days, which caused his parents anxiety that I hope I never have to face myself.

Maybe you have found yourself in this situation, the anxious parents or the lost or runaway child. Imagine Mary and Joseph’s concern about Jesus being missing for three days. In fact, Jesus got in so much trouble with his parents over this incident that they grounded him until he was thirty years old, when he emerges onto the scene again.

When his parents found him, his response to them was “I must be about my Father’s business,” and this time he wasn’t referring to Joseph. The consensus among New Testament scholars is that Jesus probably did not say these words, because this statement implies that he had foreknowledge that he was the Messiah. However, I think that this interpretation misses the point.

When he was twelve years old, Jesus surely did not know that he would be a great teacher with many followers. He could not have known that he would perform great miracles of healing. He had no clue that he would be crucified and resurrected twenty years later, and he certainly did not know that his life would have an impact on so many others, even 2,000 years later. Jesus did know, however, that he was to be exactly where he was at that time. He was listening to the voice of God in that temple, encouraging him as he studied, stimulating him to ask questions about his tradition and faith, and inspiring him to formulate his own identity within the context of first-century Judaism. For Jesus, this was “being about his father’s business.” Harry Emerson Fosdick said that “He who chooses the beginning of a road chooses the place it leads to.”

As we approach this new year, many of us may have different feelings about our future. For some, the new year brings excitement and hope. For others, apprehension and fear. For some, the new year brings new opportunities, a chance to make a fresh start, to make those needed changes to your life. For some, this coming year may bring for you what you feel your whole life has been building up to. For me and my family, I will graduate seminary this year. We are full of excitement and hope for the new opportunities that God will provide this coming year: that first call, participating fully in ordained ministry, being a pastor.

For some, the new year brings a feeling of uneasiness. It can be difficult to look forward to a new year without a home, without job security, and without the company of that loved one who has passed on. Just like the twelve year old Jesus in today's Scripture reading, none of us know for sure just what our future will bring. As Abraham Lincoln has noted, "The best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time." I believe that if we look at it that way, we can go full forward into our future, listening for the voice of God in each situation.

For some of us, that voice of God may not always be as obvious as we would like, but we know when we are on the right path; we can *feel* it. For some of us, we face our future with hope and expectancy.

In this passage, Jesus, even as a child, teaches us a lesson. He teaches us that we have a responsibility to listen to the voice of God as we move into our future, because we do not know the legacy that we will leave behind. I am reminded of the story of an old man in ancient Israel who was planting a fig tree. When a Roman general happened to pass by, he said to the man, "Don't you realize it will take twenty years before that tree will grow enough to give fruit, and you will be long dead by then?" The old man responded, "When I was a small child, I could eat fruit because those who came before me had planted trees. Am I not obliged to do the same for the next generation?"

Mary too, teaches us something. Notice how with graciousness she responds to God's continual revelation through her precious little boy. Will we also recognize the work of God when we see it?

Jesus knew he must be "about his Father's business." This was not merely a post-Passover resolution for him; this was an active way of living into his future. This approach to his future would take him down a difficult path, one which would ultimately lead to his death.

However, his doing so would set an example for future generations who seek to live God's call on their lives into their futures.

This passage concludes with the line, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor." Will the same be said of us by future generations? With this new year comes new opportunities to respond to our world's problems in a better way. Maybe this year the citizens of this country will find ways to transcend the current state of our political discourse: the name-calling, the partisanship, the finger-pointing, and the shoring-up of our own resources which so clearly reflects that spirit of greed that brought us to this point today. Maybe our world will take the ideal of peace more seriously, and wars could be avoided and conflicts resolved peacefully. Maybe our church, and the church as a whole, will find new and creative ways to respond to the still-speaking voice of God and to minister to the ever-present needs of the people in our communities.

Let us all, together, move forward into our future, listening for the voice of God, and being about God's business.

Praise be to God, Amen.