

Faith Mennonite Church
June 29, 2014 – Parent/child Dedication
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The child Jesus in the temple
Luke 2:41-52

The story of the boy Jesus in the temple came to mind as I was communicating with families to set a date for today's service of parent/child dedication. I don't know that we've used this passage on other Sundays of parent/child dedication, but it seems very appropriate and all the more so on this day that coincides with Gay Pride weekend.

The setting of this story is the Passover, an annual holiday at the heart of Jewish communal life, for it celebrated liberation from slavery in Egypt. Families who lived too far from the temple to make a weekly or even monthly visit, made a pilgrimage once a year to be at the temple on this holy day. We don't know at what age Jesus began making this pilgrimage with his parents, but we can be sure it was formative in his growing understanding of the faith of his people.

His family's celebration of Passover likely formed his deep compassion for people who were bound by disease, by sin and stigma, by poverty, and religious exclusion. But since Passover was only a yearly event, we can also be sure that Mary and Joseph were not depending solely on the temple for the faith formation of their son Jesus. As the story unfolds he knows far more about the Hebrew Bible than he would have from occasional or hit-and-miss teaching. Jesus no doubt heard his parents regularly pray the Psalms and his family likely gathered with others in their community to listen to the reading of the Torah.

The faith formation of our children is a shared task between the gathered congregation, through worship and Christian education, and the conversations and rituals we create in our family settings and the service and protest activities that we involve them in.

Another feature of this story is the extended family in which Jesus grew up. His family was traveling with a community and his parents traveled a whole day on their return trip home, not worrying that they had not seen their 12-year-old son, for they assumed he was with relatives. One of the things we seek to do here at Faith Mennonite Church, through our Parenting Partners, is to create this connection of intergenerational relationships so that, even if we do not have extended family close by, our faith family steps in and no one raises their children alone.

We witnessed a powerful testimony of this last fall when Nikki Nafziger had a medical emergency while on a business trip. Her husband Adam got word as he was on greeter duty at the front door before worship began. He left in a hurry to arrange a flight to Chicago, leaving Linus and Freya behind, knowing they would be in the care of this family until Nikki's parents could come up from St. Peter later in the day.

Everyone—not just parents of children—but everyone who is part of this community, should never feel alone in a moment of crisis, or on the good days. As the church we are brother and sister to one another and any of us can call any other of us in time of need, to share a life celebration, or just to share company in ordinary time.

But this story also contains insecurity. When we act on love and open our lives to welcome a child(ren), we accept the unknown. We do not know, nor can we guarantee or control who our children will be in the world. Nature and nurture are strong, no doubt, but we must embrace holy mystery if we are to be parents in the Judeo-Christian heritage. Ours is a heritage where the first is last, where the greatest serves, where God chooses the youngest to be the leader, where the racial and sexual minorities find a place of honor. Just as Mary said to Jesus, "why did you treat your father and me this way?" there will be times when our children will mystify us. And as Jesus responded, "Didn't you know that I would want to be here, talking about all the things you have been teaching me?" our children may run with the ball we throw into a different direction than we had imagined. But we entrust that path to God. We pray that our children will be and become all that God desires for them; and we pray that we'll recognize it and respond with openness and acceptance.

Parents/families who are bringing a child today: Mary and Joseph, your own parents and grandparents, and this congregation all walk with you to encourage and bless you.