

The gospel reading from Luke contains a saying that is one of my favorites in the Bible. After the story about Jesus in the temple at age 12, it says simply that Jesus “grew in wisdom and in stature,” or in another version: he “increased in wisdom and in years,” the same thing that was said about John the Baptist, and also about the great prophet Samuel. This is not to say that Jesus is just another prophet, but it does surely say that Jesus had a human side to him, that he did not know everything in his childhood, that he learned things over time as we all do. It upholds the theological proposition that Jesus was both fully divine AND *fully human*.

It is a very comforting thought, that Jesus, so great and so divine, like us needed to grow and learn about many things; in this morning’s lesson, it is implied that Jesus’ learned he needed to check in with his parents before going to a 3-day conference and sleepover with teachers in the temple. Twelve year old Jesus figured he better get their permission for such an adventure, if he wanted to live under their roof and be fed into his teen years, so the reading says he went back home and was obedient to them. It is comforting to know Jesus also heard what most of us have heard as kids: “We’ve been worried sick about you; where have you been? Don’t do that again!”

So little is known about Jesus’ life between his birth and the start of his public ministry at about age 30! And this story of Jesus at age 12 is quite short, so much is left to our imaginations, much to “read between the lines.” I think one obvious conclusion is that Jesus himself had teachers or mentors that he learned from. He was with the rabbis (rabbi means teacher!) in the temple “asking and answering questions”... and all were “amazed at his understanding.” Yes, he was a VERY

precocious 12 year old. He knew he was like the spiritual teachers, experiencing the presence of God, and that the temple was “his Father’s house.” He knew that his long Q and A session with the rabbis was beneficial to all, all deepening in knowledge of the Divine Spirit. So it is with us: our dialogue with great spiritual teachers increases our own wisdom as our years increase. So I took advantage of some “down time” this week to read about and see videos about Desmond Tutu, after learning he has passed on to be with his God and his ancestors.

We all know the highlights of his life - that he was the first black archbishop in South Africa, that he won the the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984, that he was appointed by Nelson Mandela as Chairman of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1995, that he fought continually for human rights during the Apartheid cruelties that separated blacks from whites, making them 2nd, 3rd or no-class citizens, without even the right to vote (Desmond Tutu did not get to vote until 1994 when he was 63 years old!) We know that from about 2007 to 2012 he was part of a group called “The Elders,” which included Jimmy Carter and other world leaders, all doing their best to be Peacemakers in violent areas around the world.

There is so much to say and learn from Archbishop Desmond Tutu, but I will share a just a few things I learned this week. It was very interesting to me to hear Tutu say that he “is not a pacifist.” I myself have said on a few occasions that I am “not 100% pacifist.” Tutu used the example of an elephant stepping on the tail of a mouse, saying that the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality! The implication is that we may have to influence or force the elephant to release his oppressive grip on the mouse. Tutu could understand why Nelson Mandela and the

African National Congress were advocating taking up arms against an inhumane government. He also used the example of not standing by silently while Hitler threw children into gas chambers. Jesus did tell Peter to put away his sword, that “if you live by the sword you will die by the sword” But that may be more of a realistic warning than a prohibition. Yes, there are some justifiable uses of force and war, though Jesus clearly wants to increase peacemaking and forgiveness, and decrease making change through violence!

Another thing that struck me about Archbishop Tutu is his continual emphasis on interfaith dialogue and understanding. Many of us have read his recent book with the Dalai Lama called the “Book of Joy.” It is indeed affirming to hear a great Christian leader, an “archbishop” of the Anglican Church say “No faith contains the whole truth about God.” He laughs and asks, “How could God meet my friend the Dalai Lama and say “sorry, you cannot come into heaven since you were not a Christian!” Archbishop Tutu was always a part of interfaith dialogues, like the World Council of Churches in London, and he and the Dalai Lama were honored guests at an “Interspiritual Discussion” at a convention center in the University of Washington. One Muslim leader there made the comment that “interfaith dialogue” is like the “olympics of spirituality.” Yes, hard work, deepening work! I have been to several interfaith seminars and led one here and once at Brooksby Village; they do test and deepen our faith so much to discuss similarities and differences in our spiritual paths. We need more of them! Themes we all have in common are Love, Compassion, and Forgiveness. We could spend days on each word, but simply put: Whatever we can do in our chosen spiritual

path to increase Love, Compassion and Forgiveness in the world, Halleluia, praise God!

Let me leave you with my opening thought, that as human beings, we all have teachers and mentors, our whole life long! Take a moment to pause and consider who has taught you important lessons of life... parents, friends of your parents... grandparents or other elderly folks... school teachers, Sunday school teachers ... people who differ with us, even people we thought to be enemies? As Desmond Tutu says, “There is no self-made person in the world.” ... “My humanity is bound up in yours. We can only be human *together*.” We need other humans in order to learn and grow. Jesus himself grew in years and in wisdom. Surely in those unknown years between age 12 and age 30 he must have been in the company of other teachers or “rabbis” like himself, in the Jewish faith, and probably in other faiths, as many think he may have traveled to the East as well.

Our closing hymn, Once in Royal David’s City, makes the interesting claim or admonition that Jesus is “our childhood’s pattern,” even though there is so very little written about his childhood! But this one memorable story from age 12 can set a “pattern” for us... to be one who is always involved in dialogue, discussions about “God” and our spiritual and moral life. May we grow in wisdom with our years, following Jesus’ example, and the example of other wonderful teachers in our lives. Amen.