

MARY DID YOU KNOW MAY 9 2010  
ST. LUKE'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
M. KENT MILLARD

At our 9:30 service this morning we received 21 seventh and eighth graders into the faith and fellowship of this congregation through confirmation. These young people have been through confirmation classes since January and make a total of 70 seventh and eighth graders who have been led through confirmation by KEVIN DAVIS, our Director of Youth Ministries since last fall.

These young people are 12 or 13 years old and it reminded me that when Jesus was 12 years old he went through a kind of confirmation discussion with the wise elders in the Temple in Jerusalem.

Here is how Luke tells the story about Jesus in Jerusalem at age 12.

*Read Luke 2:41-52: 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 travellers, 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, and in divine and human favour.*

...they found him in the temple sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

INTRODUCTION:

To introduce the message today I would like to invite ALLISON TALBERT and BEAU SCOTT to join me up here.

Allison/ Beau, could you tell us about your family, where you go to school and what you plan to do after you graduate from High School?

You have both been involved in our church youth group during your junior and senior high days. How has being a part of our church youth group helped you to grow personally or spiritually?

What advice would you give to the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders being confirmed today to encourage them to continue participating in our youth ministry program after they are confirmed?

Finally, since this is Mother's Day, can you tell us some of the ways you are thankful for your mother?

Thank you for sharing your journey with us.

Let us pray.

This morning we confirmed 21 young people who are 12 or 13 years old in the faith and fellowship of our congregation.

When Jesus was 12 years old he went with his parents, Mary and Joseph, to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. While he was there he went to the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, which was the central place for the worship and praise of God during his lifetime.

We always think of Jesus as an adult preaching, teaching and healing but today I want us to think about Jesus as a 12 year-old young person. When you think of Jesus at 12 he was probably about the size of some of the 12 year olds confirmed today.

When young people attend confirmation, it is an opportunity for them to read the scriptures, listen to their confirmation teachers and mentors, and ask questions about God, Jesus, and their faith.

In a similar way, the boy Jesus went to the Temple to read the scriptures, listen to the religious teachers in the Temple and to ask them questions. Luke says: JESUS SAT AMONG THE TEACHERS, LISTENING TO THEM AND ASKING THEM QUESTIONS.

Just as our 12 year olds came to the church for the past four months for confirmation training, so the 12 year-old Jesus came to the Temple in Jerusalem for his confirmation training and for deepening his growth in the faith.

The picture on the screen depicts Jesus as a boy listening to the wise elders and asking them questions about scripture, about God and God's will for our lives.

You probably didn't notice it, but I would like to point out that some of the wise elders depicted in this painting are bald. In the past, baldness was often seen as a sign of wisdom. I just thought you might be interested in this irrelevant observation.

You may have heard the story that if you are bald in the front you are a thinker. If you are bald in the back you're sexy. If you are bald in the front and back, you just think you're sexy.

Now, back to the main point. Jesus came to the Temple in Jerusalem to do what our young people have been doing for the past four months: listening to our leaders talk about God and faith and asking them questions about what it means to trust in God and experience God's living presence in your life right now.

It seems to me that what Jesus did in the Temple that day we all should be doing every day of our lives: reading the scriptures, listening to wise teachers and asking questions.

One of our challenges we face today is that families and young people often see confirmation as a kind of graduation from reading and learning about the faith. Young people are brought faithfully for the confirmation classes and then when they are confirmed as members of the congregation, they often stop attending and participating in our youth education programs.

Some people estimate that about 60% to 70% of our young people drop out of participating in youth ministries after they are confirmed. They see confirmation as the end of the process of learning rather than just the beginning of it.

We are trying to reverse that trend here at St. Luke's. We have an excellent youth ministry program here with great staff and volunteer leaders and our hope and prayer is that all of the young people confirmed this morning and last fall will continue to grow in their life and faith through participating in our youth educational, fellowship and service programs.

At the end of the text I just read from Luke's Gospel, it says that JESUS INCREASED IN WISDOM AND IN STATURE AND IN FAVOR WITH GOD AND OTHERS.

What that means is that after he had visited with the wise elders in Jerusalem, he continued to increase in wisdom and grow in his learning. Visiting with the wise elders was not the end of his journey, it was just the beginning and he continued to grow in his faith and when he was 30 years old he began his public ministry of preaching, teaching and healing in Galilee and Judea.

Jesus increased in God's wisdom as he grew up and we should all always be growing in our faith whether we are teenagers, young adults, middle aged adults or mature adults. What Luke said about Jesus should be true for all of us: we all should be reading, growing and increasing in wisdom and faith every day of our lives here on earth.

Last Monday night, I returned from a ten day pilgrimage to the places where Jesus walked and talked in the Holy Land and a five day experience in interfaith relationships in Istanbul, Turkey involving about 30 people, most of whom were from St. Luke's.

About 10 days ago, our group went to the Western Wall or sometimes called the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem where hundreds of people come to pray every day.

(Put picture #1 on the screen of Jewish people praying at the western wall in Jerusalem)

In 70 AD Roman soldiers, came to Jerusalem to put down a Jewish revolt against Rome and in the process they destroyed the Jewish temple which had been built by King Herod about a hundred years earlier. All that is left of that Temple today is the western wall so many people of faith have been coming to that wall and offering prayers for healing and guidance and blessing for years. If you look at the picture on the screen you will see dozens of Jewish people reading scripture and praying at the wall.

During Lent we invited members of the congregation to write prayers to God for blessings, healings or whatever request they had on slips of paper and we would place them in the crevices between the stones as our way of offering these prayers to God. We took more than 500 slips of paper with prayers on them to the western wall and put them in the crevices between these ancient stones.

(Put picture #2 on screen of people putting papers with prayers written on them in the crevices in the wall.)

We felt fortunate to find a big crevice in the wall where we could put many of the prayers of people in this congregation.

Men and women are separated for praying at the wall because it is administered by Orthodox Jews and they separate men and women for prayers. All of us had prayer slips to place in the crevices. Some of our women told me that the crevices on their side were already so full they had a hard time poking them all in. On one occasion some of the prayers fell out of the wall, and Jewish women around them picked them up off the pavement and helped to find a place for them in the wall.

We are glad to report that if you wrote out a prayer for us to take, it was prayed over by us and then surrendered into the loving hands of God as symbolized by putting it in the Temple wall at Jerusalem.

For me it was amazing to stand beside that wall and pray and realize that Jesus and his disciples stood and prayed beside that same wall 2,000 years ago. When you reach out and touch that wall it may be where Jesus or his followers reached out and touched those same stones and prayed when they lived and walked on this earth years ago.

(Put picture #3 on screen of Kent praying at the wall.)

A member of our group taught us a prayer that she found very helpful to pray in all circumstances and I prayed that prayer at the Wailing Wall.

The prayer goes like this:

GOD, I LOVE YOU.  
I'M SORRY.  
PLEASE FORGIVE ME.  
THANK YOU.

For me it was a powerful experience to place my hands on those ancient stones and confess my love for God; acknowledge my failures; experience God's forgiveness and then end with a deep feeling of thanks and gratitude for all God has done for me.

(Return to sermon slide of Jesus with the elders)

During our trip we decided to pray this prayer for everyone we met.

On one occasion we had a Jewish settler talk to us about how he believed God had given this whole land to the Jewish people and the three million Palestinians who had lived in this land for centuries should all leave it for the Jewish people.

While he was talking about excluding Palestinians from Israel I prayed this prayer for him. I began by silently saying to him: I LOVE YOU. I'M SORRY FOR THE SUFFERING YOU HAVE ENDURED IN THE HOLOCAUST. PLEASE FORGIVE ME AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HUMAN FAMILY THAT CAUSED YOU THIS SUFFERING. THANK YOU FOR SURVIVING.

Later, we visited a Palestinian Refugee camp where 10,000 Palestinians who are descendants of those who were displaced during the 1948 war have lived for the past 62 years. As the leader of this refugee camp spoke to us I found myself saying the same prayer for him:

I LOVE YOU. I'M SORRY FOR THE SUFFERING YOU HAVE ENDURED IN THIS REFUGEE CAMP. PLEASE FORGIVE ME AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HUMAN FAMILY THAT CAUSED YOU THIS SUFFERING. THANK YOU FOR SURVIVING.

In the midst of this highly conflicted situation, I found that saying that prayer confessing my love for God and for people on all sides of this conflict, acknowledging my pain over their suffering, seeking forgiveness for what humanity has done to them and thanking them for surviving and giving their gifts to the world was a very helpful experience.

Rather than choosing sides and praying for one side to defeat the other, I found it to be more Christ-like to express my love for all people involved in this conflict, seek forgiveness from them and to thank them for their gifts to the world.

It occurred to me that it might be a good prayer for all of us to pray in all circumstances.

If you have conflict with someone at work or at home, you might pray a prayer for them telling God that you love them, you're sorry for your part of the conflict, ask their forgiveness, and thank them for being a part of your life.

Today on Mother's Day, we might think of our mothers and say: I LOVE YOU, MOM. I'M SORRY FOR THE WAYS I HAVE LET YOU DOWN. PLEASE FORGIVE ME. THANK YOU FOR BEING MY MOTHER.

Whenever I say that prayer in the midst of any circumstance I face, it helps me overcome division and gives me a sense of peace and love for people involved in all of life around me.

Jesus continued to grow in wisdom all the days of his life and to share that wisdom with others. My prayer is that all of us will continue to grow in wisdom all the days of our lives and never stop loving, confessing, forgiving and thanking God and others for the gifts they are to us.

Luke tells us that Mary, the mother of Jesus treasured all of these events in the life of Jesus in her heart.

Mary treasured her son Jesus in her heart. That means that she loved him deeply, she remembered the events of his life, and she surrendered him into the loving hands of God.

Today on Mother's Day we remember Mary who treasured her son Jesus in her heart.

Everybody needs to be treasured by somebody.

Every child needs to know that there is someone in this world who treasures them; who holds them close to their heart; who prays for them and who does all they can to bless that child. Every young person, every young adult, every middle aged adult, and every mature adult needs to know that they are treasured by someone.

When we know that someone treasures us, then we blossom and bloom into the kind of people God created us to be. For many of us we know that it was our mothers who have treasured us most and helped us to know God's love for us.

Today we gather to thank God for our mothers who have treasured us. Think of the ways in which your mother has loved and treasured you and offer a prayer of thanksgiving for your mother whether she is still alive in this world or has entered eternity. Then I want us to think about who we are treasuring around us. Who are the people in your family, your neighborhood, your congregation, your work who know that they are loved and treasured by you?

Mary treasured Jesus and reminds us that all of us need to be treasured and to treasure and cherish other people around us if we are to grow and develop as God intended.

Rob and Sandi French are key lay leaders at our Garden satellite services at Beef and Boards and Oak Hill Mansion and Rob is preaching today at the Garden since Linda McCoy has gone on a sabbatical leave for the summer.

Rob and Sandi were on the pilgrimage to the Holy Land with us. When we visited the Palestinian Refugee camp, many children came to greet us as we walked through the streets and visited the women and children's center for the camp.

Sandi is a mother and a professional therapist and Michelle Rohen, who was also on the trip with us, is a mother and a professional therapist. Sandi and Michelle have great mothering and loving instincts and wherever we went the refugee children followed them and wanted to hold their hands. I noticed that several little girls and boys started walking alongside Sandi and Michelle. I noticed that Sandi and Michelle would kneel down and touch them and say kind things to them and the children smiled and laughed at this loving attention. It was like they were starved for affection from some other adults.

Now, Sandi and Michelle don't speak Arabic and these little children didn't speak English but there was love and communication going on between them that transcended language. It was clear that these young children felt love and support from Sandi and Michelle and I noticed that Sandi and Michelle had tears in their eyes as they eventually had to say goodbye.

For the hour and a half we were at that refugee camp, there were some little children who felt loved and cherished and treasured by Sandi and Michelle and I pray it will be an experience with a couple of loving and compassionate American Christian mothers that they will never forget. And I suspect that Sandi and Michelle will never forget that holy moment as well.

We thank God that Mary cherished and treasured her son Jesus. We thank God for our mothers or for whoever has cherished and treasured us and we know God calls us to follow Mary's example as we continue to love and cherish people in need around us.

CLAY AIKEN once wrote a song about Mary's love for her son Jesus called MARY DID YOU KNOW? and I have asked LOREN WALAWENDER, a young mother in our congregation, and leader on our Governing Board to sing that song for us to conclude this message.

Prayer