

Dress Up

The Rev. Geoff Parker to Foreside Community Church - Falmouth, ME

Sunday, December 30, 2018

Scripture: [Luke 2:41–52](#)

[Colossians 3:12–17](#)

Introduction to the Scriptures

I love the season of Christmas-tide... by which I mean the one to two Sundays between Christmas Eve and Epiphany on January 6th, or the “Twelve Days of Christmas” if you just love that song. At least in our traditions, there is so much focus of Christmas Eve, that the days afterwards feel so light and loose, still holy, but just... well, there’s a practice in music, you’ll sometimes see a notation that says, “sung freely.” These days in Christmas, are the incarnation, sung freely.

In our two scriptures today we will hear the boy Jesus and his family, still coming to grips with who he will become, and the followers of Jesus after his resurrection and ascension... when they no longer saw him, coming to grips with who *they* will become.

Sermon

Getting from Christmas to Epiphany is easy for us. It’s vacation time. We kick up our feet... live on the leftover cookies and maybe some roast beast from Christmas Day... The hard work is done: Christ is born!

Parents tell me that, actually, it doesn’t get a lot easier after the baby arrives, though.

So it is for Mary and Joseph on our wild, fast-forward ride from the baby in the manger to the boy in the temple, under his own steam. We never hear about tummy-time for Jesus, or learning to walk, or talk, first play-dates... though if you want to go digging, there are ancient manuscripts that try to describe some of those stages of his life. No, we leap straight to that great family equalizer: the first time a child just kind of *disappears*, and the snippy back and forth that so often comes at the end of that.

It is a loss for us, I think, that our gospels don’t lift up more of Jesus’s young life for us to spend more time with. I believe Jesus spent time as a young person, which meant that Jesus spent time trying to figure out exactly who he was, and who he would be: for himself, for his family, for his community, for God. And that is work that we all have to do in our lives, as we grow up—and grow into our identities.

To grow up, you just know Jesus had to try on a few different versions. You can admit it: at various points in your young life you tried on a version or two of yourself that, well, just didn't fit. Did you think you were a leather jacket kind of person? Which Breakfast Club character were you?

The temple story reminds us today that Jesus was, in fact, a real kid. There were real messes. The Holy Family truly had un-silent nights. And, sometimes, Jesus did not do what his parents expected or thought or asked him to do. Sometimes, he did these things as he discovered what the Spirit and imprint of God was asking him to do.

The followers of Jesus in Colossae had the same challenge. How shall we be, for each other, for a world around us that is hostile to the upside down faith of Jesus? Who shall we become? They live in a world where people get dressed up in authority and power in different ways... Roman centurions wore breast plates of armor, and fancy helmets. Senators and merchants draped themselves in cloth, often kinds that would advertise their wealth... pristine white, or rich, deep purples or reds.

How shall we dress up? We followers of Jesus, they ask? How shall we be known, inside and outside of our churches? How do we keep growing in Christ, now that he is not here, to show us?

One of my favorite sayings about how fraught, and how playful this putting on of identity can be, comes from the world's most famous drag queen, RuPaul, who says over and over: "We are all born naked, all the rest is drag." We are—ALL—born naked... and the rest we learn in all the complexity of our human lives and relationships, in the calling of the Spirit... for better or for worse.

What is the Christian drag we are called to? What is our antidote to armors of toxic masculinity, or sexism, or privilege? What should we wrap ourselves in, if not the signs of our comfort, or position, or power? Where do we look for this clothing?

Clothes yourselves in love, comes the reply. Woven into the lives of those who need it. Which is comforting, because it is not, actually, the same as "love everybody" because I am still working on that... but I can, maybe, fake it till I make it. AA folks have it right, or maybe Anne Lamott, "do the next right thing..." And I would say, listen deeply for the next right thing.

They could have been helped by the words of the Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, whose reflection for Christmas said:

'Into this world, this demented inn, in which there is absolutely no room for him at all, Christ comes uninvited. But because he cannot be at home in it, because he is out of place in it, and yet he must be in it, his place is with those others for whom there is no room. His place is with those who do not belong, who are rejected by power because they are regarded as weak, those who are discredited, who are denied the status of persons, tortured, exterminated. With those for whom there is no room, Christ is present in this world ...' ^[1]

Jesus, even in the midst of discovering his own identity, finds himself drawn to the temple, to the heart of where his people came... came to seek healing, seek forgiveness, seek life... it was also a place where the powerful liked to set up shop as well, but he went there not to be seen, for the fashion of the

time, but to hear and see those who had not been heard or seen for generations, to wrap himself in their lives until he could grow to speak their truth and their hope for justice.

So it is for us. We're about to enter into our first new season together, our first full year together as a church community and pastor. I know that I will be paying close attention to what is happening here, and what is happening around us. We will all want to "try some things on," as we discover who we are being called to be as a church. And we will need to sit ourselves down in the holy, busy, and meaningful places of our community to listen for the prayers, needs, and deepest joys of our neighbors.

We are called to be known in these ways... discovering new identity as individuals and as the church. As we do this, we are called to put on clothes of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. We are called to clothe ourselves in love. To bear with one another. To sing psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

Just as the church so long ago...Who are we? We are the people who in the face of oppression and injustice, poverty and power-madness, are always caught singing... wrapped in the love of God for us, and for all those who have no room

Did you not know? Jesus asks his parents... I want to be where God and our people meet... and so do we.

Do you know know? We are his people, wrapped in human form and love as he was, unafraid to sing God's justice... and so do we.

1. Merton, Thomas. Raids on the Unspeakable, pages 51–52 ↩