

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26

^{2:18} Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy wearing a linen ephod. ¹⁹ His mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. ²⁰ Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the LORD repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the LORD"; and then they would return to their home. ²⁶ Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and with the people.

Commentary

Today's verses focus on aspects of the story that are picked up in Luke's narrative of Jesus' youth. The similarity between verse 26 and Luke 2:52 is striking. Just as Samuel developed physically (in stature), spiritually (in favor with the Lord), and socially (with the people), so did Jesus develop in these dimensions—with the addition of the intellectual aspect (wisdom). Both men of God were outstanding, well-rounded, well-thought-of religious leaders, and showed early signs of special future potential.

Reflection

Both Samuel and Jesus showed signs of special potential. Are there young people in your congregation who show signs of future leadership? What are you doing to cultivate their spiritual growth and to nurture and guide them towards their vocations?

Colossians 3:12-17

^{3:12} As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one

body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Commentary

The clothing metaphor compliments the image of dying to (leaving) one lifestyle and rising to (taking on) a new dimension of living. Baptismal rites in the early church dramatized this transition, not only by means of death/life imagery of immersion in water but also as initiates took off their clothes at the edge of the pool, were baptized naked, and were clothed in new, white garments. Both metaphors were powerfully present in this dramatic rite, making clear that a radical change was taking place from one way of life to another.

Reflection

What attitudes and behaviors do we need to discard or take on in order to become better reflections of Christ?

Luke 2:41-52

^{2:41} Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. ⁴³ When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. ⁴⁴ Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ 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." ⁴⁹ He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he said to them. ⁵¹ Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

Commentary

Where one might expect to find a twelve-year-old playing with his friends in the caravan of pilgrims, Jesus showed an unusual seriousness about his vocation and the way he would take part in adult society. Thus, he remained in Jerusalem, staying for days in the Temple engaged with rabbinic study groups. Asking penetrating questions could reveal insight into the Torah. The paintings of Jesus sitting with the rabbis "teaching" them are an exaggeration. It was

enough for him to be an advanced student, whose attention to Scripture and meditation on its meaning was already bearing fruit in a growing understanding.

Reflection

What were your defining moments as you came to discover your identity and calling?

Responsive Reading

Psalm 148

^{148:1} Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!

² **Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his host!**

³ Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars!

⁴ **Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!**

⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for he commanded and they were created.

⁶ **He established them forever and ever;
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.**

⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,

⁸ **fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling his command!**

⁹ Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!

¹⁰ **Wild animals and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds!**

¹¹ Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!

¹² **Young men and women alike,
old and young together!**

¹³ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.

¹⁴ **He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his faithful,
for the people of Israel who are close to him.
Praise the LORD!**

Closing Prayer

Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.