

“Lost Years”  
Pastor Norman Fowler  
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

February 25, 2018  
Isaiah 47:8-11, 1 Timothy 4:6-12;  
Luke 2:41-52

As we walk into Lent, we continue this journey again through the faces of Jesus. My original thought was that as we went through them the first time we would think about how wonderful those particular ways we see Jesus were, and the second time we might think about how sometimes it's a little problematic.

For example, as we think about Jesus' youth, a lot of us would like to know what it was like. What kinds of things happened? Where was Jesus? We have this one story about Jesus coming to the Temple. In that story he gives his parents a heart attack, wondering where he is. They come back, searching with great anxiety.

It's one of those ways we think about youth. They are focused on what they want to have happen, not thinking about what may happen to others. So maybe Jesus is a typical youth. He focused on what he thinks he needs to be doing.

What was Jesus doing in these last years? Was he just out relaxing? Letting things go? Sometimes we think about youth as a time that's lost to us—lost years. I don't know why we do that, exactly. Perhaps it's a little bit because we think we should be accomplishing something. We should be getting something done, a task that we can point to and say, “This is what we did.” So we think of them perhaps a little bit as lost years.

It is in the middle of his lost years, that's the way we think about it anyway, that his mother and father came with great anxiety to find him. That searching for one you love with great anxiety. I can't help but think of some other people who were searching for their children with great anxiety last week. You know, we may think of youth as a time of lost years, but it shouldn't be lost lives. It's appropriate to go looking for people you love, looking for the things that are of greatest importance to you. We recognize the anxiety and the anguish when you can't find what you're looking for.

In some ways, I think Jesus was also looking with great anxiety for what he was looking for. What was he looking for? To find out more about his relationship with God. To understand better. To be in his father's house and to understand what that meant. To listen to the teachers. To ask them questions and to wonder about it. I think about how that is what he had anxiety about, what he wanted to be doing.

It makes me think about the anxiety I sometimes have about the things that are important in my life. You see, it sometimes feels like I've had moments in my life when I've been so anxious about success or about making money or about who likes me or all kinds of things. What I have found is that oftentimes when I get so caught up in being anxious about all those things, I end up feeling like I'm on a wild goose chase. I can never catch up. I can never catch them. I can never find my way. In fact, sometimes

when I begin to think that I've got a little bit of that, I begin to get worried that it might be taken away from me and I can become fearful and uncertain. When something we think is really important to us is missing or we think it's going to get taken away, we grow even more anxious and fearful.

I've spent a lot of my life searching for the things I think will make life better. In thinking about the idea of searching, I came across an image of Sherlock Holmes. What did Sherlock Holmes always say? "It's elementary, my dear Watson." He had deduced the truth. It made me think when I was growing up that I thought I could just deduce the truth. I could always figure out what was going on if I just knew the facts and I knew how to put them together and I could just think well. I'm not so convinced of that anymore. I'm not so sure that I can figure things out. I can't figure out school shootings. I can't figure out the violence in our world. There's a lot I can't figure out. But I can look again at Jesus.

The struggle I see with that is Jesus was anxious to be in his father's house. I got to thinking about why am I not more anxious to be in my father's house? Why am I not more anxious to be in worship? Why am I not more anxious? Because the world tells me it doesn't matter. Sometimes I can be with somebody and say, "I'm going to church on Sunday," and you can see the reaction. It's almost as if going to church is something they think is strange, odd, or even dangerous. *Do I even want to know you anymore?*

Think about it. If the central need of our lives is found somewhere and everybody says it's not real, it's easy to miss. That's what I'm feeling. When I see Jesus anxious in desiring to be in his father's house and thinking about my own desire, how much am I affected by that attitude in society around me? How much am I affected by the movie that says God doesn't exist? How easy it would be to just miss what I think is the very core of the grace we need.

When I begin to think not so much about coming into my father's house but instead doing all that stuff myself, that's when fear rises in me because I feel like there's no one to protect me. There's nothing to help me out. What am I going to do? How do I protect myself? (Maybe that's what guns are all about.) How am I going to protect myself, because I have no other? But when I think about God, when I open my heart to God, when I allow God to invite me and when I begin to be anxious to be there and to be present and to recognize God's effect on my life, when I recognize the grace I've been given and can open to it again and again, then I begin to be changed. I think the fear begins to change to love and care for one another.

When Jesus wanted to be in his father's house, he was doing something that was incredibly important. He was growing in wisdom and favor. We talk about them as the lost years because it was when he was growing up, as if growing up wasn't important. Sometimes I feel like I still need to grow up. It's that important piece, continuing to grow into that relationship with God.

Timothy says the same thing in a slightly different way. He says, "Godliness is what's important for this life and for the next." Now, Godliness is not a word that we throw around a lot anymore. It's not even a word that I understood for sure. When I looked at the meaning, it meant to have that inner response that comes out in devotion. Isn't that what Jesus was doing? Modeling for us an inner response, a need, an anxiety to be in his father's house that came out in a devotion, a desire, a change in who he was?

It is, I think, that as we allow ourselves to have that inner response, to respond to the very love of God in Jesus Christ in our lives and have a desire to be in God's house that our fear gets turned again to love, that our lost years get turned into years of growing in wisdom and favor, that our lives get turned into those who can care and show the grace of God.

Can we learn from a 12-year old who wanted to be in his father's house? I think so. Amen.