

“What Do You Want to Be When You Grow Up?”

Luke 4:1-13

February 25, 2007

What do you want to be when you grow up? How many times were you asked that when you were a child? How many times have you asked your children or your grandchildren the same question? I can remember wanting to be a ballerina, a nurse, a teacher, and Miss America. My son wanted to be a fireman, a professional basketball player and an airplane pilot and my daughter wanted to be a doctor or a nurse, own 4 houses, and live all over the world.

I wonder if Jesus was asked the same question when he was a child? What do you want to be when you grow up? Maybe he said a carpenter, or a craftsman; Luke is the only gospel writer that shows a 12 year old Jesus in the temple talking with the wise old rabbis; so maybe Jesus wanted to be a rabbi too. But, somehow I doubt he ever said he wanted to be the messiah.

We don't know anything about Jesus' growing up years; but somewhere around the age of 30, he came to the Jordan River to be baptized. Mark and Matthew say he was baptized by his cousin, John the Baptist. Luke doesn't say who baptized Jesus, but the all agree that his baptism inaugurated his ministry; and he was a different person after he was baptized. He didn't just go back home and resume life as usual.

Actually, the first thing he did after his baptism, was to go out into the desert – Luke says he was driven by the Holy Spirit – so there was definite intention behind his lonely retreat in the wilderness. In his baptism, God had claimed him as God's own. God had said “You are my Son, in you I am well pleased.” And so Jesus had to figure out what that meant for his life.

He was tempted by three different options during his time alone, first, material comfort – he could provide food for himself and for others, “Command this stone to become a loaf of bread,” the devil whispered in his ear. And probably if he'd done that, he could have provided a whole host of other material things – cars, vacations, big houses, great jobs, health, beauty, wealth; hefty 401K. But, Jesus recognized that the security offered by material things alone would not satisfy.

He was tempted by power – he could become like Caesar, rule nations, command armies; crush opponents; take the world by force; bend his enemies to his bidding. But there was a catch – to have this power, he'd have to sell his soul to the devil. But he understood that the power and control of meeting force with even greater force also would not satisfy him.

Finally, he was tempted by prestige and popularity – if he threw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple and God rescued him, then the curious and amazed would flock to him in droves – he could have his own TV show and book deals, go all over the country giving lectures and motivational speeches. Cameras would flash, groupies would ask for his autograph; he might even have a line of designer clothes or a cologne named for him.

But, he said “no” a third time to temptation because he knew that God's call on his life in baptism would not be fulfilled through material things, or power, or popularity. Instead, he went back home and preached a sermon in his home synagogue. He talked about what he thought God had called him to do, freeing the oppressed and imprisoned, lifting up the poor, giving sight to the blind. But the hometown folks didn't like it; in fact, they made no allowances for his inexperience; they just chased him out of town.

He healed a few folks after that, but it wasn't very long at all before Jesus, Luke says, called twelve disciples to be his companions, to listen, to talk, to share life together. Maybe he saw that the solitary life was too difficult and that there is strength in community. From that point on, his teaching, his healing, his sense of purpose and direction continued to grow, finally enabling him to set his face towards final confrontation in Jerusalem where he died as God's beloved, God's chosen, obedient to the call that God had placed on his life at his baptism. I

wonder sometimes if it is possible to claim that if Jesus hadn't been baptized—named and claimed by God—he wouldn't have been crucified?

I bring all this up because we baptized Charlie this morning. Just like Jesus, Charlie was named and claimed by God. What have we gotten this boy in to? Life as a Christian isn't guaranteed to be a bed of roses. There will be temptations to be met; choices to be made; priorities to be set, that without the church, without baptism, he wouldn't have to face. He can't do it alone. The vows that Meg and Steven, Charlie's parents, took; that his grandparents, relatives, and friends took, and that you as a congregation took promise to guide Charlie through these challenging times so that he can "live according to the example of Christ," and "walk in the way that leads to life."

We all know there are plenty of temptations out there that can divert him from the way that leads to life – the same ones Jesus faced. The age old favorites, Materialism, power, popularity. And we have vowed to be the counterbalance to these temptations. So, what will we tell Charlie and all of our children when they want more and more things? But more importantly than what we say, what is the message we send to them with our actions, when they see what it takes to make us happy. What do we teach them by how we spend our money? Are we saying that getting rather than giving is happiness; that having rather than sharing is success? That the person with the most toys wins?

I spoke last week with a candidate for ordained ministry about the papers he'd written for our District Committee. He had experienced a difficult time with the difference between "need" and "want" when he worked at the Decatur Cooperative Ministry as part of his contextual ministry experience at Candler. There he helped people make budgets, figure out how to live on very little, and determine whether or not to give them financial assistance with overdue bills. At the same time, he and his fiancée were planning their June wedding and looking for a place to live. They'd had several discussions about what they "needed" versus what they "wanted." His experience had taught him that they didn't need much in order to live comfortably; but her criteria for "need" was much higher.

We are the counterbalance also when Charlie has met a bully at school, who maybe won't let him play on the swings, or grabs away a favorite toy. Or maybe it's Charlie who's doing the pushing! We are the ones it's not good to fight fire with fire, that there is a more excellent way to settle our differences than to use force. When my son was in preschool, his best friend Toby, who was very small for his age, would offer a peace sign to the school bully who outweighed him by many pounds and was taller by several inches. "Peace, Michael," Toby would confidently say.

We are the counterbalance when our children worry about being popular and fitting in. We are the counterbalance when they want to dress a certain way, or hang out with certain people; take particular courses or avoid others because their friends are doing it; see R rated movies, listen to R rated music, stay out late, or not come to Sunday School or church because it conflicts with other events – or because "everyone else is doing it." Twenty years ago, with my children, it was Jordash jeans and Members Only jackets that they HAD to have or they couldn't go to school the next day! I can remember Meg crying her eyes out because someone who was a friend one day, was a bitter enemy the next, and her popularity was at stake. And try as we could, there was a time when we couldn't stop Sean from cutting school just to be with his friends who were doing the same thing.

Hillary Clinton is right – it takes a village to raise a child. Today we promised to be that village and to surround Charlie with a community of love and forgiveness, so that he may grow in service to others; we promised to be good examples to him so that he can see for himself what faithful living looks like. Moms and Dads can't do it all – no matter how great they are. It takes all of us. Baptism is a communal act for a reason! The communities of family and of church are

vitaly important – all these circles of relationships form a safety net that undergird and reinforce what parents are trying to accomplish at home. Jesus needed community to be who God wanted him to be; and so does Charlie. He needs every one of us.

And we need him, we need our family and faith community as much as he does. We never outgrow our need for community because temptations are always at hand; choices always have to be made; priorities never stop having to be set and adjusted, and the world clamors at us to do whatever will give us security, or make us popular, or increase our sense of power or feeling of control. Actually, for as long as we live, we are all always growing up into Christ as we attempt to live out our baptism.

Before we know it, we'll start asking Charlie what he wants to be when he grows up. And maybe he'll say "a doctor" like his dad, or "a teacher" like his mom. Maybe he'll want to be an astronaut, the President of the United States, a mountain climber, or the composer of great symphonies! There will be all kinds of wonderful ways for Charlie to earn a living when he grows up. But regardless of what he does, there's really only one thing I want him to **be** – we all want him to be – we want him to be a child of God, one in whom God is well pleased, one who will live out the vows of his baptism, and will love God with all his heart, mind, soul and strength, and his neighbor as himself.

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