

Sermon Text for February 22, 2015

by

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Genesis 27:5-10, Luke 2:39-40

“On raising a parent”

So while the rest of you were snuggled away in your houses safely and cozily tucked away with a blanket during the driving snow, I was at St. Mark's Presbyterian Church in Rockville, MD yesterday listening to David Lohse the president of Luther Seminary in Philadelphia who was speaking on digital pluralism in the church. At 11:30 when I looked out of the beautiful glass lined sanctuary and saw that the snow was falling sideways I told my friend, we have to leave. We left and what should have taken 2 hours took close to 7, I got home at 6pm last night. 95 was crazy with cars all over the road, trucks stuck on hills and people outside of their cars pushing cars out of snowbanks.

But, David Lohse told of how when he gets on a plane he hopes and prays no one asks him what he does for a living because he just wants for a little while to leave the church 40,000 feet below, just for a little while. I've flown hundreds of times and I know that feeling, especially the myriad of times that we had to leave Russia to get our visas and the stress and the worry of wondering if we were going to make it through since some of our colleagues didn't always make it through.

But he had a member of his church that every time he flew he would get to his seat, reach out his hand and shake the hand of the person next to him, introduce himself and then say: do you go to church? Nothing like being subtle. Well, on this last flight he was heading to Australia and so you know you are in for a long ride and as he sat down, offered his hand and looked at this young thirty something man and said: do you go to church, he got an answer he had never heard. The response from this young father was, funny you should ask, we are going to start not to go soon. Quite the opposite of what you would think. The man explained.

This past year the family sat down for their yearly pow-wow to divvy out chores, talk about an increase in allowance, plan the family vacation, and this year, they were all feeling like they were just stretched a bit too thin and involved in too much and so had to figure out what they needed to cut out. So after church and their Sunday lunch they all sat down for an hour and a half they planned out what they were involved in and what was of benefit to the family, and

they saw how much time they spent in church and how little benefit they were getting from it, so church did not make the cut. Girl Scouts made it, T-ball made it, but church, was not providing enough tangible benefit. It is a choice that more and more families are making.

You see in past generations church was not an option, which church was an option, but whether you went to church or not, that was a given. Today, church is one of many options which seems viable in a world of choices to young families as they try to keep up with the choices that are presented to them. Rachel's academic advisor in college is Barry Schwartz who wrote the Paradox of Choice and it describes this crippling society in which we live in where you can go to Starbucks and have 78,000 different ways you can order a drink.

So in this age of digital pluralism what role does the church play? And from our Scriptures I will argue that one of its primary roles is to raise parents who will then raise their children in the way of the Lord no only for their eternal security, but also, and we miss this sometimes, but also for their earthly benefit as well. If a parent is raised in the church, then their child will follow. Both of our Scriptures today depict parents who do everything they can to ensure their child is raised well, given all they need to succeed. Let's read.

READ

In my line of work I have run across parents who will do anything to make sure their child is not only safe but will have every advantage possible as they live in this world. Our Naomi is taking a class at F and M and before we let her drive there by herself we said she had to practice getting there with one of us in the car. She then asked to drive to her friends house, again not before she practices with us, she then asked to go to the mall, not before she practices with us. Finally after months of doing this she had had enough, I can do it on my own.

My grandmother graduated from college, from Brown, nearly 80 years ago and she basically had two options once she graduated, she could be a nurse or a teacher. She became a teacher. Today, when my daughters go to college they will have an unlimited number of choices on what they can do. They choose to be a teacher because they want to be, not because society requires them to be. Our desire and our ability to protect and keep our kids under our wings has diminished, or certainly will diminish over time.

Rebekkah, though, takes the cake as being the most overbearing and protective parent on record. The story goes in our Scripture today that she overhears her husband tell her other son that if he goes out and hunts down wild game and prepares his favorite stew then he will give

him the blessing of the Lord. Mom overhears that, Rebekkah, and quickly rushes to tell her favorite son and in vs. 8 it states that she commands him to do as she says. He is a by now a man, but she commands him to do as she says so that he will receive the blessing of the Lord. Let me be clear, she is not in the running for mother of the year, and she is not a model parent that I am proposing to you, but rather I do want you to note that she does everything in her power to put her son in a position where he will receive the blessing of the Lord. Is that not what we are called as parents to make sure our kids are in a position to receive the blessing of the Lord.

The responsibility of the church today is to put parents in a place where they do not need to feel that their kids are missing out on life if they choose church, but rather that they are choosing life and giving their kids the best opportunity to receive God's blessing by what they are able to expose the kids to in church.

This takes us to Joseph and Mary in our Luke Scripture. I was going to choose the next Scripture in Luke 2 which is the story of Jesus in the temple when he is 12 years old and his parents loose track of him. It is a really cute story, but I realize these verse before have much more to do with the parents than they do about the baby Jesus.

Joseph and Mary are in the temple with Jesus presenting him and as vs. 39 states doing all that was required under the law. Jesus is 8 days old and he would not remember this time in the temple, but for Joseph and Mary, it was crucial for them as the literal Greek states to finish all of their duties before the Lord. It was their choice to do this. They chose to present Jesus in the temple and so begin a life where he would be exposed to the presence and the power of his Father.

What ultimately shaped Jesus as he was growing up if not his family and equally his church or the temple and the synagogue? I think we can safely say that there is a direct correlation between what Jesus' parents did raise him and what he was exposed to as he grew up, in fact, we read in vs. 40 that it worked, Jesus grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him.

I know what you're thinking. I'm thinking the same thing. It's Jesus, of course he's going to grow up as he did. Most of us raise kids that are closer to John the Baptist with his dress, his eating habits, his awkward social skills, then Jesus who was perfect in every way. It's not a fair comparison, is it? We know that not all church kids turn out perfect. We know that Proverbs 22:6 which states "Train up a child and he shall not depart from it", has not always

come true. Just this past week the churches of Strasburg came together on the heels of the Day of Appreciation and we were able to send a local kid to Teen Challenge and help pay for that.

Even Jesus' mom, though is told in Luke 2:35, that a sword will pierce her soul as this child grows up. Part of our responsibility as a church is to stand by you as your child pierces your soul. A sword will pierce our soul each time they say they hate us. A sword will pierce our soul as they move from holding your hand all the time to not wanting to even be in the same room as you. A sword will pierce your soul each time they tell you to go away. A sword will pierce your soul when they are sick and you can't fix it.

The church must find its relevance by standing with parents as they go on this journey. Jesus' most direct and clear words were when he said let the children come to me, those words which were emblazoned on the orphanage where Stacy and I worked called Casa Materna in Naples, where the kids worshipped this summer. Jesus wanted parents to bring their children to him, but he also wanted the parents to come to him as well. They were both present. Jesus made people feel that he understood what they ought to be, and more important, what they could be. When he stood by them, they felt that anything was possible.

In church on Friday we heard the Elijah story where God reveals himself to him in a still small voice. God doesn't just appear to us or our kids in epiphanies that rock our world. More often than not, God appears in the steady, constant presence of someone who walks alongside you on the journey. Allow yourselves the opportunity to do the impossible, and give parents, give yourself and your kids, the opportunity to have Jesus impact your life, for life. Amen.