

Christmas 1: "WHAT THEY GET OUT OF YOU"

Luke 2:41-52 [MW18-43]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai & Wellsford, Sunday 30 December 2018

The children were lined up in the cafeteria of a Catholic elementary school for lunch. At the head of the table was a large pile of apples. A nun made a note, and attached it to the apple tray: "Take only ONE. God is watching." Moving further along the lunch line, at the other end of the table was a large pile of chocolate chip cookies. A child had written a note, "Take all you want. God is watching the apples."

After explaining about latitude, longitude, degrees and minutes the teacher asked, "Suppose I asked you to meet me for lunch at 23 degrees, 4 minutes north latitude and 45 degrees, 15 minutes east longitude...?" After a confused silence, a voice volunteered, "I guess you'd be eating alone."

A child came home from her first day at school and her mother asked, "What did you learn today?" She replied, "Not enough. I have to go back tomorrow."

"Education is not what they put into you, it's what they get out of you"

- that was the sign in large letters across the top of the blackboard in Mr de Trend's classroom, where I went for spelling in standard 3
- it was the beginning of my understanding that education is more than what happens in the classroom
- it was also where I learnt how to spell foreign and receive, but that's another story

At university I learnt a lot from the classes I took – pretty obvious

- naturally I learnt something from reading and writing assignments and I learned a whole lot more from the other students

At primary school, intermediate and high school

- we spent so much time cooped up in class that lunch time was for letting off steam
- playing soccer and handball and cricket
- the last thing we wanted to do was talk or even think about class

But at university we spent lunchtimes mulling over things like

- philosophical and ethical dilemmas
for example:
if a tree falls in a forest and there's no one to hear it, does it make a sound and, are there really any truly selfless actions
- plus heaps more
it was fun, letting your mind soar and roam and explore
- and it wasn't just lunch and dinner time either
sometimes it was into the wee small hours sustained by coffee, tea and port

In my third year at university I made an astounding discovery

- I found that you could talk to your lecturers and they would listen with respect to your ideas
- having a discussion with a lecturer
this was heady stuff!

Then in my fourth year, doing history honours

- I was even more surprised to find that lecturers were human they didn't know everything or have even most of the answers they were in fact still learning
- sometimes they had questions, big burning questions and sometimes they would share them
- they knew enough to know they didn't know it all and were also humble enough to admit the possibility that their students might teach them something

Imagine that: teachers learning from students

“Education is not what they put into you, it's what they get out of you”

Someone else, a lecturer at my theological college, but probably someone famous as well said:

- “You never know what you know, until you try and tell someone else”

I see all of this in that brief glimpse

- our one and only biblical record of Jesus' childhood that Maria read for us from Luke's gospel
- and what does this one childhood incident describe:
Jesus diligently studying the scriptures?
Jesus playing with his mates?
Jesus learning his trade from his earthly father, Joseph?
- no, nothing like that
we are told about Jesus in the Temple with the teachers and lecturers
Jesus sitting with the people who had devoted the whole of their lives to sacred learning

And what was Jesus doing ...

- sitting quietly at the back?
wandering around bored?
making copious notes?
asking childish questions?
- just was what was this boy, Jesus, twelve years old, doing?
listen to how Luke describes it:
sitting among the religious teachers, discussing deep questions with them

Can you picture it?

- these learned men, spell bound
as they discussed the deep and meaningful question of life, the universe and everything with a twelve year old
- it held all their attention
three whole days by the time Jesus' parents found him

And consider something else

- these religious teachers, these lecturers and professors, doctors and lawyers engaged with Jesus, a twelve year old boy, as an equal

They didn't worry about what he was doing there

- they didn't apply the 'children should be seen and not heard' rule
they gave Jesus the right to be there
- and they were humble enough to listen and learn
... from a twelve year old
- this what Luke says:
all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers

Education is a journey

- a lifelong journey
and this journey is a God-given gift
- it is not a solitary journey
although there are some parts we seem to have to do on our own
education is a journey to shared and enjoyed in good company

My hope is that each of us may have the opportunity to be in such company

- like Mr de Trend's standard three, sorry, year five classroom
or maybe even teach in such a classroom
- to have an experience, as my history honours class did
of discovering lecturers are real people
- to be like Jesus, in the midst of a gripping discussion
on the real things of life

My prayer is that in the coming year, all of us as teachers or students or life-long learners

- would have at least one experience like the twelve year old Jesus in the Temple
and that we might be able to amaze someone
with our understanding and our answers
- not to pass an exam, or to show off
but because it is part of a wonderful God-given gift
- a wonderful God-given gift to discover that:
education is not what is put into us
but what comes out of us

Dr Madison Sarratt, who taught mathematics at Vanderbilt University for many years, before giving a test would admonish his class something like this: "Today I am giving two examinations; one in trigonometry and the other in honesty. I hope you will pass them both. If you must fail one, fail trigonometry. There are many good people in the world who can't pass trig, but there are no good people in the world who cannot pass the examination of honesty.

And to add a perhaps more theological overtone to this life-long journey of education:

- what you learn is God's gift to you
what you do with that learning is your gift to God