

Meditation on Turning Twelve

June 11, 2017

Based on: Luke 2:41-52

Kendra Whitfield Ellis

We know that our stories do not begin at 12. Our stories begin much earlier. Each of our individual stories begin in the looks and laughter, the sharing of ideas and dreams of two people finding friendship, offering commitment and falling in love.

In the plans and hopes of our parents - and later in the realities of our own matchless make up that calls forth deep joy and the hard, endless work of love and learning from our caregivers.

There are other ways too - that new life begins on earth. It doesn't always begin happily or expectedly. Sometimes new life takes shape through difficulty - in trauma, in cold, anxious starts. A reminder to all of us that a person's life is far more than the page (or chapter) that we meet them in.

But twelve yearolds, in all of this, know that your stories - your lives - have been named 'good' from their beginning - in all of your parts: in your emotions, your thoughts, your spiritual awareness, and in all the many functions and abilities and frustrations of your growing bodies - all of what connects us to the mundane aspects of everyday life - and all of what makes each one of us utterly unique - all of our parts are named and blessed as 'very good' by our God, from the beginning of time.

There was a young boy who travelled with his family to Jereusalem at the time of the passover feast, as was the custom of his day. At age 12 to be presented at the temple - to mark a new beginning. A time when faith is no longer housed in the family, but becomes the work of the 12 year old to begin to understand the law; to crack it open; and to even argue with ist!

The Passover feast remembers a time when the Israelite people - the ancestors of the Jewish faith - lived in slavery in Egypt and were freed with God's help, You can read about this story in Exodus 12 ,in your new bibles.

Some stories from the bible can be violent and seem distant, harsh and foreign (to our modern lens). Other stories are more comfortable for us to read. It is good to challenge ourselves to read both kinds, this is how God's Spirit speaks to us.

What was Jesus like at 12, I wonder? Was he curious, playful, inquisitive, funny, nerdy, strong, quiet, cautious, sarcastic, gentle, warm, watchful? Maybe all of these things...

Twelve is an important age. An age where childhood - and child like things - is still very much a part of who we are - and yet, in a flash - in a moment's question, change of mood, or a comment - a twelve year old has the ability to become very adultlike too.

In the writing of Peter Pan, J.M. Barrie wrestles with this idea of how we live in this space between childhood and adulthood? And, as we bridge over to adulthood - must we leave all of our childlike ways behind us?

He offers Peter Pan's wonderland - a place to never grow up. And maybe especially at twelve or in other ages of transition, or routinized life - we ache for Neverland.

Through the story of Peter Pan, Wendy and the Lost Boys - we begin to pull away at the adult that our culture dictates for us to be - and maybe also find ways to integrate the beautiful qualities of being young into our adult selves.

So much of life is about holding opposites together.

The Bible teaches us to have strong cores & convictions

and it also teaches us about the process of faith & learning.

The Bible reveals stories about tradition & law and also freedom & grace.

The Bible is not uniform.

At twelve, I thought that it was as it appeared to me to be - all one thing - all the same.

My twelve-year-old self would have seen the Bible as a rule book or a guidebook...

And I do believe it to be the Inspired Word of God - but in many different kinds of words.

If we were involved in forming this book - a book that can look so ordinary & tame -

If we laid all the parts that formed our Bibles on the table...

We would see ancient scrolls, once enclosed in clay jars and housed in temples, only touched by priests.

We would see letters written along the roadside in the dust, and sweat & tears.

We would see fragments of poetry & prayers, from people moved by the Spirit, after times of war, famine, heart ache and also freedom, safety and joy.

We would notice different ancient languages and have to decipher many different types of handwriting.

We would find confessions from great Kings. Rules and health codes for a community; eye witness reports, family histories and dreams...

12-year-olds, open up those boring-looking books knowing that the writings found inside were collected from Spirit-inspired people, who witnessed amazing things; who heard the voice of God; and who walked & sat with Jesus.

But this very same Spirit that still inspires today - to continue this collection - with your own questions, your own wondering, your own dreams and creativity.

For the rest of us who are not 12 - if you are younger than twelve - 12 may seem like an age to aspire to.

For those of us no longer 12 - Can you remember what your 12 year old self was like? What did you treasure at 12? Have you kept some of the light/energy/ and playfulness of 12 alive in your life?

Life is all about understanding tensions & opposites & holding them together. I think that there is a gift in keeping some of what is twelve year old goodness with us - as we continue to grow and learn.

12 year olds may you continue to teach us in this church, by who you are and by who God is calling you to be.