

Beloved, I would like to invite you all to take a stroll down memory lane to the time when you were about 7 or 8 years old. I know, I know, for many of us that was just yesterday. Do you remember going to visit your grandparents, aunts and uncles or meeting your parents' friends who they have not seen in a while? The expression that denotes wonder and surprise, that seems to be universal among adults when they looked at you and exclaimed is this,

“Oh my you have grown up so fast. Wasn't it just the other day that you were born? My how time flies”.

Well, we as a community of faith, are about to collectively age more than 10 years. We just celebrated the birth of Jesus yesterday, but in our lesson this morning we will encounter Jesus after 12 years have passed.

Celebrating the birth of a baby can be a very exciting time for parents, and for their extended family and friends. December 25th is when we celebrate the birth of the Messiah. In my family of origin, it is also the birthday of my twin cousins and that of a dear friend of ours. It is interesting to listen to all three of them speak about having a birthday on Christmas. Robert did not enjoy the fact as he was growing up because his birthday gifts often doubled as Christmas gifts. His birthday parties were always overtaken by

Christmas, and he could hardly get friends to come over. On the other hand, my cousins were the doubly-feted princesses in the Bwanausi clan not only because they were twins, but they also shared a birthday with Jesus.

Over the next few years, the excitement of the birth of the twins was followed by the arrival of 8 more children in the extended family. The eighth child was a girl, and while her first and middle names are rather long, you are among many who know her as Cheni. Most children will gravitate toward one parent or the other, and I was a daddy's girl. I followed my father everywhere. When he was tending the garden, I was right there by his side. While he was correcting his college students' papers, I did the same for the homework "submitted" by my dolls and Sesame Street puppet Grover.

I was an extremely enthusiastic 4 year old and always wanted to help in some way. One day, I decided give my dad a hand in preparing the car for a return trip from vacation. He had washed the car and I needed to take care of other things. On the morning of our journey, daddy went out to start the car. The engine turned over once and then clicked to a stop. Dad turned the key again and got a few more clicks. My mum went out to see what the

trouble was and found me standing at a safe distance from the car as I looked on at the activity. The hood got popped open and my dad examined the engine. He poked and prodded, checking connections and shaking his head in puzzlement. I told my mother that the petrol tank was full, and so it could not be because we didn't have any petrol or gas in the car. Hearing that comment, my dad looked at the gas gauge and then at my mother with a defeated expression on his face. He and the uncle we were visiting siphoned some gas from the tank into a glass jar. Dad did not need to use his hydrometer, the instrument used to measure the specific gravity or relative density of liquids in comparison to that of water. His examination of the fluid in the tank told him the reason for the car's failure to start. He turned, looked at me and asked what I had done.

“Well”, I answered, “I only wanted to help, so I filled the tank using the hosepipe.”

Folks, let me just say that I am lucky to be alive today. Mum and dad did not punish me. Needless to say, the rest of the tainted gasoline had to be siphoned out of the car and return home was delayed a whole day.

My mother often says that she and my father knew that there was something different about me because, according to her, my thoughts about

church were much advanced for my age. By the time I was 8 years old, I stopped attending youth group and my dad found me leading Bible studies for college students.

Mum and dad were not typical “helicopter parents” in that they did not hover over me or interfere with everything that I did in school. We hear about, and have maybe experienced the phenomenon of “helicopter parents”. People who fit in this category want to know why their kid was not picked for the lead role in the school play, and they may even hound the drama teacher or principal about the issue. When their kids go to camp, they check the camp website for the daily posting of pictures to see their child engaged in several activities. Some may call the camp counselors and demand to know how junior got a scratch on his forearm. The children become the center of their parents’ lives. It is difficult for such parents to let their college aged sons and daughters grow into the people whom God intends them to be.

Hannah and Elkanah, in our first Scripture reading, modeled the sort of parents that Christians promise to be when they have their children baptized. Hannah had prayed long and hard for a child, promising God that she would raise him as a nazirite. She told God she would dedicate her

son to the Lord, and when he was weaned and old enough Hannah took Samuel to the Temple to be raised in God's service by the High Priest Eli. Each year Hannah made a new robe for Samuel. She and her husband would take the garment to him when they made their pilgrimage to the Temple. They loved their son, and may have had dreams about him in a different profession. However, they knew that God had special plans for Samuel's ministry. Can you imagine what it must have been like for them to see their boy in the Temple, and have him pronounce a blessing over them, that they would be granted children? Little did he know that God had already fulfilled that promise.

The privilege of being parents is that God entrusts couples or single parents with the lives of their wee babies. The task is then to help the children to develop into the men and women that God calls them to be. When one is out in public one certainly doesn't want to lose sight of the children. It is comforting to know that a trusted family member or friend is also keeping a watchful eye over the kiddies. The daunting job of parenting is brought to the fore as we have read it in Luke.

Joseph and Mary no doubt felt the same when they went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem so that they could worship at the Temple during Passover. Jesus

was 12, and they may have assumed that he probably ran ahead of the convoy with the boys from the other families that were travelling with them. Toward the end of the feast, Mary and Joseph began packing their belongings. When all was ready, and friends and relatives had gathered together, they all began on the long journey back to Nazareth. It was after they had travelled for a whole day that Mary began to ask her neighbors and friends if Jesus had spent the night in one of their tents because he was not with them. Everyone told Mary and Joseph that they had not seen Jesus. Imagine the panic and fear that those parents felt when nobody knew where their son was, and that he had not been seen for a day.

They raced back to Jerusalem, and after they had search for him for three days, they found him in the Temple. Jesus was astonishing the teachers of the Law and the priests, asking them questions and offering answers with a wisdom and maturity that was beyond his years. His parents ask him why he had caused them to worry. His response to them is to ask why they were looking for him, wondering why they did not immediately know that he would be in His Father's house.

The gospel account of Jesus speaking with the priests and Pharisees gives us glimpses into the future. Jesus grows up in a family that is observant of

God's Law. He and his parents travel to Jerusalem on annual pilgrimages to celebrate Passover. The young boy shows a mature understanding of the Scriptures when he is speaking to the Temple authorities. Mary and Joseph had to search for him for three days before they found him in God's house. We here sit in a privileged position in which we are able to read the whole Bible and see the future in this story: toward the end of his life, Jesus travels to Jerusalem and when he goes to the Temple, he drives the money changers out claiming that his Father's house shall be a House of Prayer (Luke 19:49). When he visited the Temple earlier on in his ministry, he interprets the Scripture in ways that both astound and infuriate the Temple leaders. Jesus told his disciples that the Temple would be destroyed, but that he would rebuild it in three days; he was speaking about his body being destroyed in death, but God's power would raise him up from the dead in three days. This parallels the portion of the story when the parents of 12 year old Jesus search for him for three days before he was found. The boy Jesus goes home with Mary and Joseph, and he obeys them and continues to grow in knowledge and wisdom. His attention remains focused on his Father's house, which also demands his care. We can see from this biblical passage that God is weaving the threads of our lives into a

beautiful tapestry, according to God's purpose. Eli's sons were disobedient to the Lord, and they did not serve well as priests after their father's example. Their misbehavior does not thwart God's purpose. God's judgment of the sons of Eli did not end the nurture that was planned for Israel. The Lord had blessed Hannah and Elkanah with a son, Samuel, who was then raised by Eli to become another of the great High Priests of Israel. Israel remains in God's favor, even when the people are judged for their sins.

We also remain in God's favor through our life as a community that worships together. In our baptism, promises are made by our parents to nurture us in the fear and knowledge of the Lord. This is so that we too might know Christ as our Lord and Savior. The church promises to nurture and encourage all children who are baptized into membership in God's family. It is always a joy to see our little one participating in the Advent readings, Christmas pageant or responding to questions posed during the Time with Children.

I love that this church continues to nurture our growth in God's favor through worship and music, mission, prayer ministry and Bible studies. All these things continue to strengthen our relationship with God even during

this time of renewed mask mandates and social distancing. May we always be open to the amazing ways in which God is revealed to us, even through our children who already teach us so much about trusting in Jesus. Who knows, we may yet see one of these wee ones in the pulpit, in the not-too-distant future.

Blessing and honor and glory and power be unto the One who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever. Amen.