

“Assumptions”  
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1 Samuel 16:10-13;  
1 Timothy 4:6-12; Luke 2:41-52

Technically today is not Ordinary Time. Today is actually the Baptism of Jesus, but we are starting into Ordinary Time. We will talk about the baptism next week. Because what I'd like to do is think about different aspects of who Jesus is. One way to do that is to follow something Godly Play does, called the Faces of Jesus. We already have done one of the Faces of Jesus on Christmas Eve when we looked at the Baby Jesus. We looked at the initial face of Jesus that we see and wonder at, and recognize there's this incredible moment when God is coming among us. We celebrate that.

Today we have the next face of Jesus. It is in some ways a bridge, but it also invites us to ask some questions. I was thinking about it in terms of when Samuel went to talk to Jesse about his sons. There was this moment where Jesse brought in all of the older sons, and as they went through them all—all those who were normally thought to be the ones who would be chosen for something special—because he didn't expect anything from the youngest son, especially when he was that young. And yet, it was not until the moment when Samuel asked if there was anyone else and they went and got David from the field where he was watching the sheep, that Samuel said he was the anointed one.

There's an assumption that was made there, and it, along with the passage from Luke, made me begin to think about the assumptions we have. The assumption here was that the youngest one would not be the one chosen.

Sometimes there are interesting things that happen in our lives. One time I was having a dinner with friends and a couple of friends started talking. One said, “Martin Luther really freed people. He freed all of us by getting us to see differently.” The other friend said, “Well, yeah, that's pretty true. It was really pretty religious, however. It was a religious change.” This exchange went on for a while and it was beginning to get heated because they weren't understanding each other. One was talking about Martin Luther—we were in seminary at the time. The other was talking about Martin Luther King. There's a difference. They didn't check their assumptions before they started getting into this heated conversation. It was simply because they were working from different assumptions, a different understanding of who they were talking about.

It's interesting to me as I've lived through this last year; I recognized that some of my own assumptions needed to be challenged. I thought we were making a lot of progress in the area of racism and change in our country. It felt like this last year said, “Not!” Checking assumptions.

There are a lot of ways that we deal with our assumptions. It's interesting that as we think about who Jesus is, as we think about the faces of Jesus in a way, which face do we think of? We tend to think of the face that's kind of like us, like who we are. And yet if we look at all the different ways people have drawn and described Jesus, we recognize there are a lot of different ways and a lot of different faces in that respect.

Even as Jesus comes with his parents to Jerusalem, we are given another face to think about. As he comes and enters into the Temple, there's this idea that a youth won't know anything. Timothy is getting at the same thing when he says, "Don't let people disregard you because of your youth." There's an assumption. The assumption about Jesus was that he wouldn't know anything, and yet he presses against that assumption.

His parents assumed that he would be in the caravan because they were working from a different set of assumptions. And by those assumptions, particular priorities are set. I can imagine his parents assuming that he was somewhere in the caravan as they said their last good-byes to people, maybe gave some gifts, said thank you, packed up all they had, tried to figure out where they were supposed to be in the caravan—all the particulars of life that you get caught up in. He was 12 years old. He knew what he was supposed to do. But a different set of priorities occurred.

Part of it was because they were just thinking about their relationship with Jesus. They weren't remembering his relationship with God. Which makes me wonder how many times in my own life I get so focused on just the relationship I have with someone else that I forget that God might be part of it.

There's a reason I think we might want to do that. In Physics, there's what's called a three body problem. If you're an astrophysicist and you're looking at how gravity affects things, if you have just two planets, things work out really well. But throw a third one in the mix and the mathematics become so difficult that they can't really get it done. It kind of messes things up.

Think about your own life in relationship to somebody else. The reason I picked this example is because it feels like the same thing happens in our own lives. With one other person, our gravity, the way we orbit around each other, works. But throw another person in the mix and sometimes it's a struggle. At least things get more unexpected. What if that other body is God? We're trying to rotate around each other and forget about God. It's my belief that we all rotate around God in some way or other, even if we forget about that. But it might make our lives even more uncertain in our particular time and place, in our particular society.

I went to a movie the other night called "Ladybird." In the movie, there's this moment where she's talking to a young guy at college, having just gotten there, and she asks, "Do you believe in God." He says, "No. That's ridiculous." I think it speaks to a particular way that our society makes an assumption. We don't really assume God the way we used to, the way we might. I think even I grew up in a time where I felt like we did assume God. I don't know if that was true, but now it feels a lot more like that assumption is less and less the norm. And if I live in that kind of society, how is it creeping into my life? Where is it affecting me? Am I beginning to live life as if God is not present, as if God has nothing to do with what I do, as if God is not part of my relationships, my decisions, my life?

It's fascinating to me to think about how noticing that Jesus comes as a boy creates this way of entering in and asking, "What assumptions did I bring?" In the passage it said his parents assumed. I begin to ask, "What do I assume?"

There was a ship going out, and the weather was clear. It was assumed that the weather would remain clear and that icebergs didn't come that far south. The assumption was different than the reality. In that case there was a disaster. I don't think our assumptions being different than reality always create a disaster, but they do cause troubles. They do cause problems.

I think, as I look again at Jesus coming to the Temple, it invites me to ask what my assumptions are. There's another way that Jesus asks us to think about our assumptions, because he asks us to think about who we are, to reflect on who we are as we come to the table. It's a time to think about our assumptions.

Sometimes when I think about coming to the table I have some assumptions about what it's about. I'm reminded in 1 Timothy that Jesus is savior of all, especially believers. As I come to the table, do I think about it being a table of all? What assumptions do I make? Do I assume God is present? Do I make it more than just a way of remembering and allow it to be a time when God is somehow taking what we do and making it a reality, making it a table that seats everybody, that we can come because of all God has done? We are some of those that are welcome because God has opened the doors.

Sometimes I think I get to the point where I'm beginning to think I get to let everybody in. I don't think it's that way. That's an assumption that I sometimes make. No, God lets people in. I don't make that decision. It's for all of us.

It's interesting how hearing this story of Jesus as a boy asks me, asks us, to check our assumptions and how, then, we create our priorities, and how we might come again with open hearts, open minds, to allow God to feed us, God to lead us, God to make us a family of faith. Amen.