

Family Ties and Apron Strings

Luke 2:41-52

Well friends it's that time of year again isn't it...its September, and in our culture that is synonymous with the time that all the yearly programs, activities and regular routines start up again.

Any maybe this September is particularly memorable for you because your children are encountering one of these programs and activities for the very first time, or have reached one of the milestones of growing up.

Their first day of pre-school, first day of kindergarten, first day of grade-school, first time playing hockey or going to karate, first day of high-school or the first day of college or university or first day on the new job.

But these milestones are somewhat bittersweet aren't they?

Because while we are proud of our children for reaching them they also mean that our kids are growing up and are one step closer to eventually leaving us and setting out on their own.

And while they might be ready to spread their wings and fly, maybe we're not ready to have them leave the nest just yet.

There is a loss when our children leave us, in fact they don't even have to leave us – they just have to get older and turn into teenagers, and we're experiencing some sense of loss

You may be asking yourself – what happened to that little girl who saw me as her whole world, who ran down the hall to hug me when I got home from work, who listened with wide eyes and eager ears when I would tell her stories at bedtime...

Little children can make you feel like a million bucks and when they grow up – or turn into teenagers... that's gone.

And we need to deal that sense of loss; we need to recognize there is an emotional separation that occurs as our children grow up. They don't want to tell us everything anymore, they want privacy, they want freedom... and that will eventually lead to their leaving home.

Leaving home is separation between parent and child which may or may not involve physical or geographical separation of moving out of the house to a different location in another city, province or even country – but at the very least it means that a child is no longer under the legal supervision and authority of their parents anymore.

And while you may be able to require certain behaviors from them if they chose to live under your roof – when your child grows up and leaves, you can't enforce your authority over them the way you used to anymore and they may be what we're most scared of...

Not because we're authoritarian parents who need to control our kids (at least I hope not) but because we're aware of all the dangers out there in the world and we're not sure, or maybe we are sure, that our kids are ready to face it on their own.

We'd still like to use our authority to protect them and keep them from making bad decisions.

But friends, we need to hear what God's word has to say to us on this subject – because as Presbyterians are famous for saying – scripture is the only rule for faith and *life*, and that means there is truth and wisdom for us in the scriptures on dealing with this subject for each of us – whether we are a parent who will be letting go, is letting go or has let go... a you are a child who is leaving, will be leaving, or has left already.

So if you've ever read the bible starting at the beginning – you'll have noticed that leaving home is something that God had always intended for children to do – even when the world was perfect.

In Gen 2:24 we read this morning that because God had created woman and man for a special relationship with each other “This is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”

Friends, it was God's design that a child would mature into an adult and leave the authority of his parents behind – even in a perfect world.

And even if you had a perfect child, in an imperfect world – I can assure you that this process would still have some ups and downs to it that you need to deal with.

Even Mary and Joseph struggled with Jesus –who the perfect child - growing up and the inevitability that one day he would leave home, (Show teenage Jesus cartoon) – well maybe not in this way...

But in Luke 2:41-52, we see year old Jesus at twelve years old – he’s only a year away from being considered a man in regards to his responsibility to keep the law of Moses – deciding that his focus will be on hanging out at the temple with the teachers, and not on paying attention to when his parents and the rest of the Nazareth Passover Tour Group are leaving for home.

So, he misses the bus - or the camel or donkey whatever it was they were driving in those days – and his parents don’t notice he’s not with them until a day later.

Now if you’ve ever had your child, or even your dog, go missing then you know what this feels like...horrible panic!

But it’s worse than that for Mary – because it’s not just her son who is missing. She’s just lost the promised Messiah! The hope and future of Israel – the very son of God had been entrusted to her, and she’s lost him!

When they finally do find him, after three days of searching – Jesus is so engrossed in discussing God’s law with the teachers at the temple it appears he hasn’t even noticed that his parents had left.

He’s not anxious, he doesn’t run to them crying because he couldn’t find them and was worried that they had abandoned him – no... in fact we get the sense that Mary and Joseph interrupted his discussion with the teachers.

Mary and Joseph are flabbergasted at this and so Mary proceeds to tear a strip off of him right then and there – emphasizing the family relationships...

Son – she says, not Jesus, not boy – but **Son**, a designation of his relationship to them as parents, as one who is their responsibility, under their authority.

Why have you treated us like this? In other words why did you decide not to pay attention and give mind to your family, why did you not notice we were gone, why did we not meet you rushing to catch up to us while we were coming back to Jerusalem, we are your family, we are most important to you – but you’ve focused on staying in the temple talking with the teachers instead!

She continues - *Your Father and I...* another reference to their position of authority over him, *have been anxiously searching for you.*

In other words... we’ve been pulling our hair out, frantically looking everywhere in Jerusalem – you’ve no idea what sort of things we’ve imagined might have befallen you... and now we find you just sitting here...relaxed and enjoying yourself talking with the rabbis!!!! What do you have to say for yourself young man!

Jesus is lucky she caught him in front the Rabbis and she’s probably showing some restraint in public – what would she have said to him in private?

And Jesus is surprised at his parent’s concern, after all he’s growing up, he’s a year away from being spiritually responsible for himself – he’s surprised they’ve forgotten that he’s going to be “stretching his messianic legs” a bit.

After all what would you expect to happen if you brought the child who’s been told about the amazing circumstances of his birth and that he has a special destiny, that he is God’s son, into close proximity of the temple – the place where God’s presence dwelt.

He’s going to want to do what he’s been born to do right?
Jesus is surprised his parents had forgot this.

And friends we too often forget who our children really are and who we are.

Our children are gifts from God, and they are under our authority only as we submit ourselves to God's authority. Authority trickles down friends – you only have it when you are under someone else's.

Jesus wasn't rebelling against his parents' authority over him as they supposed, this event signaled the fact that he was growing towards the day when he would answer directly to his heavenly Father instead of an earthly one.

But it wasn't time for this yet, and so the text says that Jesus went home with them and was obedient to them – and he was able to do this because his parents were good examples...not perfect ones – but good examples of obedience to God.

In fact they lived out the spirit of the law – not just its letter, and we know this because Mosaic Law exempted women from having to make the trip to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration – but here we see Mary participating in it.

So even though, Mary and Joseph don't quite understand what Jesus actions were foreshadowing here, their obedience and

love for God exhibited in their heartfelt living out of the Law of Moses was an example for Jesus. And it made easier for Jesus to obey them even when they didn't quite understand them – because it was his obedience to God.

Friends, here's the lesson in the story for us as it relates to letting go of our kids.

Letting go can be made easier by remembering that we're not releasing our kids to go out into the world to do willy-nilly as they please, but that they are leaving our authority to live in a more direct relationship with the authority of God their heavenly Father so they can fully become who their creator intended them to be...

And this is possible because Jesus matured, left his earthly father, was obedient to his heavenly father in his calling as the messiah and defeated sin and evil on the cross and achieved new life for all humanity in his resurrection.

So, when our children see our example of submission and obedience to God in our actions, especially in the amount of

time and energy we devote to growing our faith and trust in Christ through things like admitting our sins, reading the bible, leading our families in prayer, serving others and making worship a weekly priority... it prepares them to submit to God directly when it is no longer appropriate for us to look over their shoulder and tell them to do what is right.

When the time comes to release them out from under our authority, they will have seen a good example of what it means to live in a direct relationship to the authority of God in their lives, and the transition will be much easier for them.

So that's how its *supposed* to work out...but that's not how it always happens is it?

What you want to leave, but what will I do? I'll be here by myself all alone...

Oh my poor baby – you ran out of rent money because you spent it all on beer and pretzels, sure I can pay your rent for you...

Go on and leave then if that's what you want, you'll never amount to anything!

You think you're so grown up – fine go live on your own and learn the hard way, get out!

Friends, leaving home doesn't always happen in ways that help us or our children does it?

But the bible has wisdom that can help us prepare so that leaving can occur the way God intended it, and it can also minister to us if leaving has occurred in a way that has left us with some baggage that needs to be resolved.

So friends, God's word says "*The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down.*" (Proverbs 14:1)

If you haven't realized by now that our actions as parents play a large part in how successful our families and eventually the families of our children will be – well here it is in black and white.

We can parent for success or we can set ourselves and our kids up for failure. Friends if your kids have left home and it didn't go so well, this realization should prompt us to go and make amends.

You don't want to tear your own home, your own family apart, do you? – obviously not... so go to your kids and let them know you regret the way leaving took place and ask for their forgiveness, and then give them what you didn't the first time around – your blessing. Tell them you're proud of what they've done, how they've handled themselves.

If you're a child who left and it didn't go well because of something you did – then remember the story Jesus told about the prodigal son returning. Go back to your parents and confess your mistake and ask their forgiveness and pray that God would soften their hearts to receive you.

These actions can resolve some of that baggage that we don't need to carry around with us anymore.

And parents if you are waiting for that day when your children will leave home listen to Proverbs 27:8 *“Like a bird that flees its nest is anyone who flees from home.”*

Friends timing is everything here. As parents you create a home environment which can either help or hinder your children from leaving at the right time.

If the environment is too harsh and demanding they will flee, they will leave too early like a bird that's not ready to be out of the nest yet they will perish, it needs to go back to the nest.

But if the environment is too comfortable, if they are pampered and spoiled – why would they want to leave? The nurturing womb past its due date can become toxic for the child and kill their ability to take initiative and responsibility – they need to be forced out.

And friends if you've struggled in life because your departure from home was not timed right – one way or the other then hear these truths from scripture and allow them to minister to you and bring some guidance and healing and encouragement.

For those who left too late...

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? (Heb 12:7)

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Heb 12:11)

For those who left too early...

Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me. (Psalm 27:10)

I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty. (2 Cor 6:18)

For all of us as we pursue this task, or support others who are pursuing this task

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. (James 1:5)

Friends, this is the wisdom that the scriptures offer to us as parents, as children, as those who want to live in obedience to God's authority.

God never intended for us to remain as children living under the authority of our parents. God's plan is for us to grow and mature – both physically and spiritually so that we come into the fullness of all things – that we become like Jesus Christ – to him be all glory and honor.

We have a responsibility and a role to play in being obedient to God, so that when our children leave our authority they will live obediently under His.

May the Holy Spirit empower us to be faithful Christian parents, and give our children – nothing... but the best. Amen.