

## Who Do You Want To Be When You Grow Up?

It's a delight to welcome Pack 153 to St. Luke's on this Scout Sunday. Thanks for bringing your leaders and parents, Scouts; we're glad you're here. If the adults will forgive me, I'd like to spend a few minutes talking with the Scouts. You're welcome to listen in.

In addition to Scout Sunday, we're celebrating the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord today. That's a churchy way of saying we're remembering an important event in Jesus's life, the day his parents first presented him to God at the Temple in Jerusalem. In one sense, Jesus's presentation was no big deal. All of the parents in his community were required by sacred law to present their eldest sons at the Temple just as Mary and Joseph presented Jesus. Kids and their parents must have gone in and out of the Temple every day. And it's not like Mary and Joseph were rich or powerful people. Parents were supposed to sacrifice a lamb for the presentation; only the poorest were allowed to make such small sacrifices, and even those two little birds might have cost more than Jesus's parents could really afford. The priests in the Temple were used to dealing with royalty. They probably thought Jesus was just one more ragged child of impoverished parents, nothing special at all, at least until Simeon and Anna showed up.

To understand what happened next, you need to know a little history. The Roman Empire had conquered Israel, and the Emperor was not nice *at all*. Jesus's people suffered terribly under the Romans. Just like with King Arthur or Percy Jackson, though, there was an ancient prophecy that someday a great hero, the Messiah, would rise up and set the people free. Simeon and Anna each took one look at Jesus and decided that he was the one destined to rescue the people from the evil Roman Empire. Simeon started prattling about heavenly signs, and Anna began telling everyone that the Chosen One had finally come. Jesus's parents must have been scared half to

death, especially when Simeon mentioned swords piercing hearts. They probably couldn't wait to get Jesus out of there and take him safely back to Nazareth.

Jesus wasn't a powerful, full-grown warrior when his parents presented him at the Temple, or even a promising teenager like Luke Skywalker. He was just a tiny baby, less than six weeks old, when Simeon and Anna got so excited about him. That's pretty early to start predicting what any little kid is going to grow up to do. But grownups are funny. They don't always know how to talk with children. Some adults go to great lengths to avoid conversations with kids and, when they're forced into it and don't know what else to say, they fall back on one old, shopworn question: "what do you want to be when you grow up?"

To let you in on a little secret, most of the time, adults who ask that question really don't care very much about the answer. You can tell them you want to be a veterinarian, or an Olympic athlete, or an astronaut, or the President of the United States, and they'll just nod and say, "that's nice, dear." You might surprise them if you said you wanted to be the supreme dictator of the world, an expert assassin, or a mad scientist with an army of zombies, but even that isn't likely to hold their attention for long because they won't take your answer seriously. You're "just a kid," and they figure you'll change your mind about what you want to be when you grow up a million times before your eighteenth birthday. "What do you want to be when you grow up?" usually isn't a serious question, so don't worry too much about how you reply so long as your answer is respectable enough that the grownup doesn't feel obliged to say something to your parents.

This morning, though, I want to ask each of you Scouts a very, very serious question. *Who* do you want to be when you grow up? Not what, who. It's not that I'm not interested in your dreams, just that "what do you want to be" is a really about what kind of work you want to do when you're old enough to have a job. Work is important – you can do a lot of good in the

world while you're working – but the job you do is nowhere near as important as the kind of person that you are while you're doing it. You could be a brain surgeon who saves hundreds of lives every year, a diplomat who negotiates an international treaty to end all wars, or a Nobel prize-winning scientist who figures out how to give the world limitless clean energy, and it would all be wonderful. But if you did those things while being a liar, a hater, a cheat, a thief, or a bully, it would take a lot of the shine off of your work. I believe that your character is more important than your accomplishments, and I think Jesus thinks so, too.

When Simeon and Anna saw Jesus, they got totally caught up in what they expected him to *do*. They weren't alone – everyone in Israel thought they knew what the Messiah would do when he came. He was supposed to save the people from the evil Empire by waging war against the Roman army. Jesus did save people once he grew up, but he didn't do it with a sword, a gun, or a light saber. Jesus saved people by transforming our relationship with God, making us part of his family despite our imperfections. And Jesus taught us who he and God the Father want us to be. Many years after his presentation in the Temple, somebody asked Jesus which of the commandments was the greatest. He had lots of choices because sacred law contained more than seven hundred rules. He could have chosen any of them, particularly any of the rules we know as the Ten Commandments. Those are good rules, and you're likely to live a good life if you follow them. But Jesus chose a new commandment, and it has two parts: love God with all your heart, and all your mind, and all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. According to Jesus, greatness is not about what you do. It's about how loving you are, and how much your love for God and other people shapes the choices that you make throughout your life.

Jesus grew up to be a terrific person. He was smart, funny, kind, a great healer, a wonderful teacher, and an incredible storyteller. He loved to hang out with people, and he wasn't

snobby about it. Jesus didn't have a lot of patience with fancy people who wanted to be better than everybody else. He made friends with people who weren't so fancy. If he went to school with you, Jesus would invite all the unpopular kids to sit at his lunch table. You might not like that if you're one of the cool kids, but most of us aren't. So, if you're not somebody who always gets invited to hang out with the cool kids, don't let it bother you. Jesus will be your friend if you let him, and he's the best friend there is.

As Scouts, you get a little extra help growing up to be a good person. Every time you recite the Scout Law, it reminds you to be trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent. Those are all qualities of a good person, so obey the Scout Law as you grow up and, if you mess up, don't give up. Just try again until you succeed. Some people may tell you that being good isn't cool, but they're wrong. Goodness has power, and goodness always wins in the end because, no matter what happens, good people can take comfort in knowing they did the right thing. You'll also notice that the Scout Law doesn't say anything about being rich or famous. You don't need to be either of those things to be a good person. Luckily, though, being a good person helps you do well in life, no matter what job you choose when you grow up. And you're going to have lots of choices, because the world is always changing and there will be all kinds of new jobs that we can't even imagine by the time you're old enough for a career. Remember this, though: any job worth having should be something a good person can do. If anybody asks you to do something mean, or greedy, or destructive, or dishonest, walk away. Protect your goodness, okay? What job you do doesn't matter so much – it's who you are that counts. So, whenever some grownup asks you what you want to be when you grow up, tell them whatever job you like. Just be sure to add, "I'm a Scout, so I want to be a good person when I grow up." Jesus will love that, I promise. Amen.