

In our house, we are big fans of pretty much all things Disney. Lauren and I grew up going to the same daycare and we watched countless Disney movies. We both have had family trips to Disney World. Before my daughter was born, we took a trip down the west coast and you better believe we made the trip to Disney Land. When Disney+ came out, we signed up the very first day. So it really should come as no surprise that our kids are also on board the train of Disney love. Blakely knows all sorts of famous characters from the Disney universe and certainly has her favorite movies and shows. And Declan is probably too young to know it, but deep down, we know he's a fan.

Well, one of Blakely's favorite movies is Frozen. Either the first or second, it doesn't seem to matter, she just loves Frozen. She loves Elsa and Anna and especially Olaf. And this isn't something that's new. This has been going on for a while now. Check out this video from when she was just 11 months old as she sings with the song "Into the Unknown" from Frozen 2. And try to convince me she doesn't absolutely love it with everything she has. [Slide 1]

What's incredible about this, is that even today as a 2.5-year-old, she doesn't understand that it's Disney. What I mean by that is, she's drawn to it without really knowing much about what IT is. She enjoys a lot of Disney things, even without knowledge or understanding as to why she enjoys it. Like the Frozen song, she's pulled into the unknown, not because she knows or understands, but because it speaks to her in a deeper way. She has a connection to Disney through the connection we as parents have to it

I imagine Mary and Joseph knew a lot about their son, Jesus. More than anyone else, probably. They've devoted themselves to raising Jesus in the Jewish faith, devoutly following and practicing their faith. There can be no doubt that Jesus feels largely at home in the Temple because of a concerted effort by his parents to make faith a prominent part of his life. Now 12 years after the angels first visited them, 12 years after that humble birth, 12 years of watching their son grow, 12 years of raising him in the faith, they probably knew a lot about their son. But today's Gospel reading reveals a lot of what they don't know. Today's Gospel reminds us that faith, so often grows and flourishes behind the scenes.

It all starts rather innocently. Having gone to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration (because they are committed to raising him in faith), they lose him on the way home. Which, hold on, really isn't as bad as it sounds. I know, losing the savior of the world, the Son of God, isn't ideal. But consider that they had a several days' journey home from Jerusalem and at the time, you never travelled alone. You travelled in big caravan-type groups, often with family and neighbors and friends, because it was safer that way. Which means that it was entirely possible that Jesus had run off with some other children as the caravan moved closer to Nazareth. It could have happened to anyone. It just happened to be the Son of God who had gone missing. No need to parent-shame Mary and Joseph.

When they discover that Jesus isn't with them, they turn back. They return, potentially on their own, potentially making a dangerous days' journey back to Jerusalem to find their son. And they search for 3 days, unable to find him. 3 days of stress and anxiety and worry. 3 days of assuming the worst. 3 whole days until they discover him in a place they didn't expect. 3 days of not realizing the impact he had on their son. That he would be in the temple. Because why wouldn't he be? Of course he would be in the temple, having been raised with faith so central in his life.

You see, faith does not depend on what you know or how much you understand. Too often in American Christianity, we turn this on its head. We place knowledge and understanding as prerequisites to faith. You have to know God, you have to understand Jesus and what God in Christ did and why and how and by the way, have you made a conscious decision about your relationship with God and BLAH! But knowledge and understanding are not the same as faith. Faith, not understanding, opens us continually to the mysterious parts of life in this universe. Faith, not knowledge, leads us deeper into experiencing the love of the Triune God. It is faith that inspires others in their journeys of faith.

Mary and Joseph didn't know what it would be like to raise their child. Any parent would say the same. Sure, you have hope and dreams for their lives, but none of us know for certain. Even with the prophetic words of angels, that Jesus would be the savior, Mary and Joseph didn't understand what it would look like or be like to raise the son of God. But they had faith. And so they raised Jesus in faith. They raised Jesus in an unknowable, indescribable sense of trust. It's because of their faith that Jesus is in the temple. Mary and Joseph just didn't realize the impact their faith had on their son. They didn't realize all the trip to the temple, all the ways they made faith central in their lives, that it was taking hold in their son's life. They didn't realize that when they practiced their faith, trust in God was growing in Jesus.

Because that's faith. Trust, even as we walk in the unknown. Trust, that we are being drawn deeper into the unending depths of God's love. Faith invites us to step out of what is comfortable, to search and seek for that something more in life, to have confidence and assurance that God is with us in and through all things, even when those things are unknown or things we simply cannot understand. Faith urges us to believe in things that knowledge and understanding would tell us are impossible. Faith inspires us to hope that promises like "The Word became flesh and lived among us," or "Unto us a savior is born," or that "God so loved the world," are true and real and mean something for our lives. It is faith that reminds us in the face of all doubt and uncertainty, that God looks upon us with love. Faith invites us to grow into such love and share it with others. Because it isn't about what you know or how much you understand. It's about the promise. It's about what God graciously does for us in Christ. It's about how we will live into and practice that grace each and every day. It's about trust. It's about faith. And you just never know how practicing your faith is sparking faith in another. Amen.