

Come Together: "I thought I said -- No"

Luke 4:1-13 April 3, 2011

- I. "Come together." "So what is it about No! that you don't understand."
 - A. If you think that a toddler learning to say "no" was scary – just wait for it when they're a teenager.
 - B. So far in this Lenten series on Coming Together, we have seen the innocence of the experience in the womb of God, the first move towards self identity found in a toddlers "No," and the establishment of God as Parent in the eyes of a young child.
Today we move to adolescence and the task of self definition and our ongoing development of our understanding of God.
- II. So on to adolescence – a time when in the midst of chaos we try to create order.
 - A. Let's just say that it's a good thing that Jesus started his ministry in his late 20s and not as a teenager or that scene in the desert with those temptations may have turned out quite differently.

III. Being a teenager is a perfect storm for trouble.

A. Let's start with the physical and mental items

1. First there's hormones – whoa – raging hormones and the body is changing and as you enter adolescence you're faced with things that you didn't even imagine existed a few years earlier. As John Cloud points out in his article in Time Magazine on Sex Addiction, based on the American Psychiatric Association's proposed changes, every high school male will be a diagnosable Sex Addict.
2. Second - mobility & freedom – as a teenager you're just able to get away – leave your family and live with friends. It's your first real taste of freedom.
3. Third - size – they're getting bigger and we parents don't really have the physical edge over them anymore. It's clear they are no longer kids and they don't want to be treated like kids anymore.
4. Fourth – intelligence – they're starting to learn some things.
In fact, they pretty much think they know everything and they've gotten a lot better at

formulating arguments in opposition to your position.

5. Fifth – they do not have fully matured brains – so they have a real inability to see long term consequences or even some short term consequences or to see the value in delayed gratification – and they think they're immortal.

B. Let's add some social items to this.

1. Peer pressure that is so much more authoritative than parents or teachers or preachers.
2. Bullies – male and female, who make life miserable for those not at the top of the food chain.
They were around back in grade school too, but now the bullies have really honed their skills. But even for the bullies there is the paranoia that a better gunslinger may come into town.
3. Cliques – adolescents have to learn and create new social orders and rules of behavior which don't always correspond with what we parents might find appropriate.
4. Drugs – anywhere anytime
5. Sex – anywhere anytime – not to mention the ease of computer porn and pay per view.
6. Music – that pushes drugs and sex anywhere anytime.

7. In the midst of all this, they are trying to answer the question – “Who am I?”

C. Let's throw in some socio-political items that they are becoming aware of.

1. Politicians who lie, cheat, sex crimes, stealing.
2. Clergy who molest children or talk about love while they're preaching about who should be condemned to hell.
3. It's the age they learn about Kent State, Vietnam, illusory weapons of mass destruction.
4. Police brutality in the news to go along with the paranoia of police who pick on teenagers – especially young drivers.
5. Basically authority seems corrupt.
6. And then we tell them that it's time to get a job and learn the value of money – begin to worship the almighty dollar.
7. And to add to all this, they are starting to learn that their parents aren't “all knowing”, but instead they're just as messed up and fallible and confused as they are.
No authority there – which makes it all look very hypocritical.

- D. Now take all that and throw into the mix some theological issues that they are now beginning to deal with.
1. Theodicy – how can a good loving God let so much evil happen?
If God is a loving Father, why's he letting so many of his children suffer and die?
 2. God of the Gaps – Lots of gaps. God use to do all these cool things, but then they learn about Darwin and Freud and Einstein and so tell me, “What does God do exactly?”
 3. And they start to learn about diverse religions and religious relativity vs. religious absolutism.
 4. So it's no surprise when their childhood images of God just don't cut it and they start wondering if it all real.
 5. While at the same time they learn about all the Christian atrocities that have been done in the name of God.
- E. And this is the age when they are starting to figure out or learn in school that the world's pretty messed up.
1. Nuclear threats, biological threats.
 2. Global warming

3. Economic collapses.
4. Turns out the world's a pretty scary place.

IV. This all makes for one heck of a Faith Crisis.

- A. It's not just that they have to deal with all this.
I mean, as adults we all have to deal with most of this stuff.
- B. It's that they are **just starting** to see it and deal with it – it's all new to them and it's coming at them at the speed of light.
- C. It's a time when we want them to learn to "just say No."
Well they learn the lesson all right; the problem is that it is to their parents and teachers and to rational thought as we see it to which they say "No."
- D. The adolescent years, maybe more than any other time in a person's life, is when they are trying to figure out who they are and what they believe and at the same time there are so many different, conflicting and competing voices telling them who they **should** be.

E. It is one of the miracles of life that so many people make it through adolescence; and even a bigger miracle that some of them actually stay in the church and continue to develop a relationship with God.

V. So what happens to God in all this?

- A. Well up until now, God is pretty much a parental figure.
Just this big Parent in the sky handing out more and more rules that keep them from doing what their friends want them to do and just about anything else that seems like fun; just like ---
their earthly parents.
- B. But guess what, **as a teenager**, I've figured out I can tell my parents "no" or at least I can fool them and they'll never know the difference and just like that I can also tell the big Parent in the sky "no."
What's God gonna do?
For the best of me, I don't see God doing anything for me.
I really don't see God doing much of anything; assuming there even is a God.
- C. In fact, you know what?
Church is boring.

It's just a bunch of more rules and I'd really rather be doing something else.
Even just sleeping in is better than going to church.

- D. In fact, I'm not really sure there even really is a God.
"I just think I'll stay home if you don't mind."

VI. So let me 'fess up here.

This has all been semi-autobiographical. Naturally, some of the stuff was not around when I was growing up and some of it then wasn't as extreme as it is now for kids – like the sex and drugs. But for the most part – this all was pretty much what I remember of my own adolescence.

VII. So far this has all pretty much been about my adolescent move away from God; which I see happening to a lot of youth.

- A. I'm afraid that in my adolescence had I been faced with the temptations Jesus faced in the desert – I would have failed horribly.

B. I pretty much had decided that there wasn't a God and if there was a God, well God was pretty irrelevant and was of no interest to me.

I said "No" to God.

As far as I was concerned, Nietzsche and Time Magazine were right (do you remember that cover) -- "God is Dead."

VIII. But it wasn't long before I began to notice that I was still experiencing the presence of something in my life.

A. I wasn't sure what it was, because it really didn't resemble any image of God I had ever been given or taught.

B. It didn't really resemble anything.

C. But I was experiencing something and as I tried to make sense of that experience I began to understand that what I was experiencing was this sense of unconditional love.

Maybe it was a memory of the sensation of still swimming in the Womb of God.

Whatever it was, when I thought the whole world was against me and I sincerely believed my parents hated me and I could care less about being good or how my

actions might hurt others.

When there were just a couple of friends I cared about and the rest of the world could go to Well you know where.

- D. In the midst of that, I was experiencing this sense of unconditional love, this sense that I was loved and for the lack of any better label to hang on it, I called that new sensation God.
- E. From there on I began trying to make sense of this experience I called God.
- F. Maybe others will take a different path to God;
but it wasn't until I said "No" to God that I was able to really know God.
It wasn't until I had smashed the idol of God that people told me I had to worship that I finally was able to start having a relationship with a living God.
- G. My adolescence was really when I met God.
- H. Since then I have spent years and years, decades and decades trying obsessively to understand and get a grasp of God; smashing more idols as I built them and found them inadequate.

- I. Now, I have quit that quest, I've quit trying to learn God's name, I have quit trying to get a hold of God and now I'm just happy to be with God.
- J. I think for a lot of people our real faith starts in that profound hell we call adolescence when that perfect storm makes us question the reality we have been handed by those in authority.

IX. I want to end with a story that is only found in the gospel of Luke.

One day Jesus got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake."

So they put out, and while they were sailing he fell asleep.

A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger.

They went to him and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we are perishing!"

And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm.

He said to them,

"Where is your faith?"

They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another,

"Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?" [Luke 8:22-25]

Getting through adolescence is like getting to the other side of the lake in midst of the perfect storm.

And for those of you have been there and done that – maybe you've come to realize that when the perfect storm enters your life it's ok to just cuddle up with Jesus and go

back to sleep.
You are gonna reach the other side.
AMEN.