

Sermon *I'm Too Old for That*
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 1.11.26

Isaiah 42:1-9
Acts 10:34-43
Matthew 3:13-17
Psalm 29

After Christmas, Christi and I boarded a Celebrity Cruise ship at Port Everglades and spent the next nine nights at sea. We went to five ports – Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, St. Martin (St. Maarten), Tortola British Virgin Island and St. Croix US Virgin Island – and celebrated the new year with two thousand other passengers somewhere in the Caribbean. It was a wonderful vacation; too short, but it was wonderful.

After we disembarked the ship, we got onto a shuttle van that took us to where our car was parked. Two other couples boarded the van. I think they have been retired for about twenty years (so I figured they were thirty years older than us). One of the women sat down and said, “That cruise was too long.” Christi and I looked at her with a surprised look on our faces. She smiled at us and said, “I’ve taken many cruises; some that took 30 days – like when we went through the Panama Canal – but now I’m too old for that.” That phrase stuck with me – I’m too old for that. We love cruising and it’s hard to imagine saying that I’m too old for it. But, theologically speaking, what if Jesus said, “I’m too old for that.”

Today is the day on the Church calendar that we celebrate Jesus’s baptism. In order for you to understand the rest of the sermon, I’m going to ask you to try to forget what you think about Jesus’s age and consider what it would be like if he was 50 years old. What would it be like if Jesus was the oldest person in the room? How would you relate to him differently?

I brought this idea up with my friend, and fellow co-host podcaster (of *A Bridge Between Alex and Dave*), Fr. Alex Andujar. He looked at quizzically and said, “Then what year do you think Jesus was born in?” I shot back, “Do you really think Jesus was born on the year 0000?! You know that’s a made up starting point made hundreds of years after his birth.” Alex was raised Roman Catholic and the images he is familiar with Jesus is someone who is in his early thirties. From what I have been able to find, there was perhaps some ageism happening when it came to determining Jesus’s age. Flash forward to today, movies depict Jesus as someone who is fit and in their thirties. My Christology – the way I see Jesus – is an older man, in his fifties, who is a little overweight, and looks like he’s from Palestine. There are a couple of New Testament references where Jesus could disappear into a crowd (or the crowd could not find him). If he looked like the actors who portray him in our western movie theaters, he’d be easy to spot back 2000 years ago near Jerusalem.

There are other reasons, of course, why I picture Jesus as being fifty years old. He walks slower than everyone else. He takes breaks. There was a time when the disciples, who I imagine are ten to twenty years younger than him, head off for supplies but Jesus says back and hangs out at the well. There was also a time when he needed a nap, in the back of a boat, during a storm. Anyway,

these, and the crucifixion narrative (which I'd prefer not to go into during the season of Epiphany), that indicate he is older than the disciples.

Back to the River Jordan. John the Baptizer is six months older, roughly, than Jesus. They're cousins and we have many reasons to believe they knew each other before he showed up at the river. The rest of the people standing in line to be baptized I picture as younger. And then we have the two older men, John and Jesus. The river is cold, the steps out to be baptized can be difficult. Jesus, looking at the whole scene, could have said to himself, *I'm too old for this*. No one would have blamed him if he did. John didn't even want to baptize him. But, Jesus didn't say, "I'm too old for this," instead, he got into the river, with John, and said it must be this way. Suddenly, the heavens opened, a dove came down from heaven and alighted upon Jesus and voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved, my son, with whom I am well pleased."

Dr. Seuss is quoted with saying the following: When something bad happens, you have three choices: you can let it define you, you can let it destroy you, you can let it teach you. There is ancient wisdom in this and, when I read the Hebrew Scriptures, I am reminded of this threefold approach – you can let a bad time define you, destroy you, or teach you. Abraham, the father of the faith, had many bad moments. He choose in each one to let the moment teach him. His grandson, Jacob, had a bad moment when someone started wrestling with him. It left his hip permanently damaged; but, it didn't define who he was, it didn't destroy him, it taught him. This is the wisdom that we are given and to let moments teach us.

The sky opened up, a dove alighted on Jesus, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved, my son, with whom I am well pleased." Jesus could have let that moment define him. It could have destroyed him. Instead it taught him. On Sunday, February 22nd, we are going to hear what happened to Jesus right after that moment. He was driven out into the wilderness for forty days where he was tempted by the evil one. He could have let that moment define, or destroy; he let it teach him. Jesus returned from the wilderness, and his baptism, and said, "The Kingdom of God is here, it is near you, it is inside of you." [Interesting note, I had a parishioner ask after service how Jesus could have let the voice from God destroy him. I suggested that with self-doubt he could have let that whole event drive him into a deep depression that could have torn him apart.] If Jesus said, "I'm too old for this," he would not have had the moment teach him. What it taught him is still teaching us to this day.

One more story to consider: before he sat down for his last meal, where he picked up the bread, blessed it, broke it, and shared it with the disciples and said to take, eat and continuing breaking the bread in his name; before all of that, he took off his outer robe, tied a towel around his waist, and started washing the feet of his disciples. If you consider Jesus to be the oldest person in the room, this scene strange just on the surface – the youngest person is always the one to wash the feet of others, certainly not the oldest! If you consider that this is God's son, the beloved, who is washing the feet, it becomes even stranger indeed. It's Peter's turn. He refuses. Jesus, in my mind's eye, looks at Peter, and says: You can use the moment to do three things: define you, destroy you or teach you. I am doing this to teach you that we are to serve one another I have served you. It is to show that I am washing away your sins like how I wash your feet. Peter enthusiastically replies: Rabbi, wash my head and hands too! Jesus said, Peter, Peter, let this moment teach you, I will simply wash the dirt off your feet to teach you how to serve.

Jesus didn't say, I'm too old to wash other people's feet. And, if he did, no one would blame him for saying it. But, he didn't and we all learn from it.

I would like to point out there is a time and place for saying *I'm too old for that*. Christi and I have right-sized from our home into our condo. We sold many things in order to do that including my ladder collection. I had three ladders. Yes, three; all for different jobs. A couple of years ago, my brother was fixing something outside of his home, the ladder slipped out from underneath him and he landed on it on his side. It put him into the hospital. He had a moment to define him, destroy him or teach him. He let it teach him – he has no more ladders. I've let it teach me too, I also have no more ladders. I'm too old for that.

There was a moment in a discussion group a while ago where one participant got really wrapped up about an upcoming Supreme Court decision. Another member, who normally would also get wrapped up about it, on the opposing side, said to himself, *I'm too old for this*. Instead of getting into it, he asked the person, "Why are you so concerned about this?" It led to a really interesting discussion. He let the moment teach him. Others have said they are too old for family bickering, or getting worried about meaningless things, or, realizing the Supreme Court is going to decide what the Court is going to decide regardless of our thoughts and opinions and feelings. There are times when getting too old for sweating the small stuff is a good thing.

Abraham could have said, "I'm too old for this," but instead, he decided to let the time teach him. When Sarah heard God say she would be pregnant within a year, she laughed. She was then told, again, that God can (and will) do it. She agreed and then had her first child, Issac. She didn't let that moment define her, she didn't let the fact that she had not yet had a child destroy her; she let that moment teach her and we are all blessed because of it. With Sarah's faith and with Abraham's willingness to head out in faith, we now know that God's imagination is bigger than anything we can imagine.

Jesus, at any moment in his recorded life in the Gospel, could have said, "I'm too old for this," and that would have been that. But, he didn't. He chose over and over again to let those moments teach. And, as our rabbi, he is teaching us to this day.

This is the tradition that we have been given. We get to pass the tradition to others. If you are at one of those times in life when you are looking at something that may define, or destroy you, we have been given the opportunity also to let the bad moment teach us. If you need help with that, imagine those who have gone on before us. Imagine St. Mary who said, "Let it be with me according to your word," and she later gave birth to Jesus. She watched as he died. She didn't say, "I'm too old for this." Instead, that moment continues to teach us. We have been given the courage to look at moments in life that can define or destroy and instead looking for the moment to teach us.

God's imagination surpasses all we can ask or imagine. With God's grace and strength may we look to such moments to not define or destroy but to teach. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.