

“Early Recognizers of Jesus: Teachers at the Temple”

Mary Henderson Bowman

Date: January 28, 2024



Our New Testament reading¹ this morning gives us an unusual view of Jesus.

You see, we are used to stories about the baby Jesus.

And we are accustomed to narratives about the man Jesus.

But glimpses of Jesus' boyhood are rare.

So rare, in fact, that this is the only one the Bible has.

When we listen to this particular story, it is easy for us to get fixated on Jesus' being lost and left behind. And yet Luke assures us — and Jesus assures us — that Jesus is right where He is supposed to be . . . seeing about His Father's interests.

One of the things I want to us focus in this passage is the reaction of those at the Temple to Jesus. During Passover, it was common for Temple teachers to sit outside the Temple in order to teach and to converse with those attending the festival.

According to Luke, Jesus was “listening and asking questions” of the leaders and teachers. “Listening and asking questions” is the traditional Jewish method of learning.

Like others who had come for Passover, Jesus joined the conversation to learn.

But Luke tells us that something else happened. In addition to “listening and asking questions,” Jesus also provided “answers and understandings.”

And these answers and understandings caught everyone's attention — including the learned teachers. Luke tells us that they were, in fact amazed, by Jesus' wisdom and truth.

If you have come to this service before then you will know that I usually don't spend a lot of time on word studies but there are some important aspects to awe that I want to talk about and the Greek word that Luke uses includes those elements.

So I am hoping that you can hang with me as we unpack some of the aspects of awe through this word.

The particular Greek word that Luke uses is “ex-is-temi.”

Yes, it captures the idea of “amazement” and “astonishment” and “awe” but it also captures the ideas that something or someone is causing us to literally be thrown out of position, to be displaced, or to lose our minds.

Awe is a feeling.

But the word that Luke is using is bigger than that.

The word that Luke is using embodies a power that can change us — the ways we think and the ways that we act.

We would say that those at the temple that day were having their minds blown by a young boy of twelve.

¹ Luke 2:41-53

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This idea of having our minds blown suggests that once our mind is blown up or apart, it may have trouble fitting back together in the same way.

Those who were listening were being thrown off balance.

What Jesus said was moving people off their usual mode, off their old patterns of thinking or acting.

There are any number of things that can throw us off balance — grief, confusion, the unexpected.

But we don't always think of awe as being one of those things.

Awe has the power to transform us.

Awe has the ability to make us rethink our long held beliefs.

Awe has the ability to open us to something new.

Awe has the ability to invite a new patterns of thinking, new ways of acting.

There is one other aspect of this word study.

We want to look at how else Luke has used this word.

Luke only uses it two other times and both times it is associated with resurrection!

When Luke describes Jesus bringing back to life a young girl who had died, Luke describes the girl's parents as being **AMAZED** when their daughter comes back to life. Their minds have been blown by what they have seen. The third and final time that Luke uses this word is when he describes the journey of two disciples on the Road to Emmaus. As two disciples walk to Emmaus, the not-yet-recognized Jesus joins them. One of the disciples tells Jesus of the **AMAZEMENT** they felt when they were told of Jesus' empty tomb from the women who had seen it.

The power of awe - that the people sitting in the Temple were feeling - was akin to those who were witnessing or hearing about a resurrection!

WOW! That is power!

So

Luke gives us this word *ex-istemi* and then Luke gives us Jesus' surprising words to His parents. There is none of the expected remorse from Jesus after they have been looking for Him for three days. Instead, Jesus tries to explain to His parents — and, of course, to us — that He will always be about His Father's interests.

There is something that is happening at the Temple that is a part of the Father's interests.

When Jesus returns to the Temple in twenty years, His conversation with the Temple will continue. The Temple is an institution that has become comfortable. The Temple is no longer the House of Prayer that God invited it to be. Instead of serving God and others, the Temple serves itself.

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This is true of most people and institutions. We get comfortable. We forget our purpose. We lose our way. And suddenly, we are not aligned with the purposes of God.

When the adolescent Jesus spoke, the teachers were recognizing something significant, but did they let it take root? Did they let themselves be thrown off balance and find a new way?

We need transformation. We need to be moved, sometimes literally thrown off balance and out of position so we can see anew.

Jesus is always surprising us. One of the ways that God still surprises us is to awe us.

To grab our attention and get us thinking in new ways.

To remember again our purpose of walking with Jesus . . . like those pilgrims to Jerusalem for Passover, like those disciples along the Emmaus Road.

And Jesus will always be at work on His Father's interest.

And that is where He calls us.

Can we be willing to notice the awe and let it transform us and the institutions we are associated with?

Can we be willing to be displaced in our thinking and feelings and open to what new thing God might want us to see?

Is there a kind of resurrection that God wants to see in institutions and people?

Luke used this word to signal the power of awe.

Can we allow God to use awe to change us too?