

Sermon 30.12.18 1Sam2.18-20,26; Ps 148;Colossians 3.12-17; Luke2.41-52.

Today is the first Sunday after Christmas and in today's gospel reading we hear a story about the young Jesus and his presence in the temple.

This passage is unique to the gospel of Luke and the only one that provides insight into the time of Jesus boyhood.

On one level today's gospel narrative deals with practical realities in family relationships and many of us, I'm sure, can identify with these from our own life experience.

At first glance we might be shocked at the thought that Mary and Joseph left Jerusalem after celebrating the Passover without Jesus tucked up and secure within the family fold – and that it took them a whole day to miss him. But things were very different in those times in Middle Eastern culture. There was always security within extended family relationships and one could trust that the children would be looked after by other family members at all times- that they would be safe and that no harm would come to them.

No doubt Jesus parents would have assumed that he was safe with cousins or other relatives on the journey - yet when they realised this wasn't so, they went looking for him. As the story tells us - they returned to Jerusalem and searched for him for three days finally finding him in the temple.

The agony of Mary and Joseph, searching for three days is something that we can relate to.

Jesus response to them when they eventually find him may not be as easy to relate to. "Why are you searching for me? Did you not know that that I must be in my Father's house?"

In theological scholarship there are different understandings of this passage and the message it delivers.

One commentary writes that the entire story leads up to the punch line when Jesus proclaims who he is. He is in his father's house where he should be. He is his Father's son. No longer does Gabriel or Mary or Zechariah, or angels or Simeon, pronounce who he is, Jesus himself does. What he is doing in the Temple is in obedience to his Father – his sonship is who he is - before all else.

Another commentary takes the view that the story is a metaphor for the young Christian community of the time. When Jesus was found in the temple by his parents he was on the cusp of adulthood. He then left the Jewish temple and, as Luke describes it, subsequently matured in age and spiritual understanding. The commentary suggests that the early Christian followers, who also began in Judaism, should honour their early foundation, but should realise that their genuine strength and maturity is found in the present – after having left their home faith.

Whichever way we look at this passage it speaks about much more than the angst of his parents who left him behind and then searched for 3 days for his whereabouts.

My own understanding is that a message lies in the temple, and the freshness, the newness that begins there with the 12 year old Jesus.

There is a connectedness, I believe, between the first and the last time that Jesus enters the temple.

As a young boy Jesus' audience is amazed at his understanding and his answers. They are not threatened at all by someone so young. But when we roll forward 20 years of Jesus life into

his adulthood we find that things are different, the threat that he is to temple organisation, politics and worship has come into its fullness for Jesus has grown in wisdom and divine and human favour.

And we see a detailed view of this when Jesus enters the temple for the final time before the crucifixion. He turns things upside down.

All that is thought to be about success and security, and all that is thought to be about 'religion' - he overturns and in so doing, not only calls the wrath of the religious leaders down upon him - but calls all who would follow him away from corruptness and into faith; enmeshed not in their own construction of a religious life but enmeshed in their own self-worth in him – their own confidence in their ability to be who they are called to be.

Jesus calls us to follow him into the new temple that is made in us by his suffering, dying and rising. It is the temple within -no longer made of bricks and mortar but of flesh and blood.

No longer has rigid and cold, but compassionated, forgiving, loving and understanding.

The temple of our being in him.

This is a calling that is unbreakable, in the undefeatable love of God who is born into the world as one of us. A calling that is able to motivate the follower day after day to go in service of the poorest and the most unsuccessful and the most forgotten people.

This is the calling for those who have followed Jesus into the temple from his youth to the fulfilment of all things in his resurrection. This is the calling also for those who have just met him. It is always the same – it never varies.

Sometimes I think in this life we can lose sight of Jesus and perhaps for more than 3 or 4 days as did Mary and Joseph.

This can happen especially when things in life overtake us and our focus is consumed by our situation. Or sometimes we lose sight of him because it is just how it is at the time.

It is therefore helpful to remember, I believe, that Jesus never loses sight of us.

He is and has always been present in the temple within, busy with his father's work so that we may continue on in obedience, participating in our church community, increasing in wisdom through bible studies and further reading and in divine and human favour through prayer and home community groups.

May we all, as we approach the New Year, look forward to growth in our spirituality and in our participation in ministry here in our parish.

Let us pray

Dear Lord, you have come among us to show us that we can be obedient to the Fathers will and be a channel of you blessing to others. We do not know how you will use us, but we trust you absolutely, that we may play our part in your healing and redeeming work in our parish community, the wider community and in the world. Amen

The Lord be with you.

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