

Sermon 12-27-09

Colossians 3:12-17

Luke 2:41-52

The importance of Place: The Temple

We continue this Christmas season in the theme set by our Advent season, looking at the importance of place. While in Advent we looked at cities and villages – Jerusalem, Nazareth, and Bethlehem – we turn our focus onto a different sort of place: the Temple.

The Sunday immediately following Christmas is always an odd one. First, it's odd because of its proximity. I don't know about all of you, but so much of my energy goes into planning and preparing for Christmas Eve that the thought of a Sunday morning makes me want to hide under the covers until the new year arrives; pretending as if there wasn't another Sunday in between. Second, this Sunday is always odd because of the shift in worship attendance. On Christmas Eve, the house is full; yet on the Sunday following, there's plenty of room to spare. It's almost as if folks are worshipped-out in the midst of a season filled with joy and the wonders of God's love. Nevertheless, here *we* are, gathered together to worship the Lord God Almighty, to rejoice in his love and glory by joining in with Jesus as he leads us in worship; leading us away from a hurried and frenetic pace to a place of calm and serenity.

When our Gospel reading opens, we're told by Luke that Mary and Joseph traveled to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover each and every year. Reading between the lines we're able to learn that this is a devout family, for whom worship takes a central place. Sure, they had their foibles, like leaving their son behind in the temple that one year when he was twelve, but other than that, you know, things were fine. To tell you the truth, that's my favorite part of the story. Mary and Joseph were traveling with a caravan of people, probably relatives and others living in Nazareth. Little did they know that Jesus had stuck

around to hang out in the temple. Now I'm sure some of you are wondering, how do parents misplace their child? Wouldn't they be watching him every moment like a hawk?

What we have to remember is that family structures and customs were very different from our own within the ancient world. The family unit/household was much larger than our own. The family unit was extended beyond parents and children. It's kind of like the beginning of *Home Alone* when the McCalisters are getting ready to go to Paris. They had 19 people in the house the evening before they were leaving. For those of you who remember the movie, Kevin, one of the youngest of the bunch was punished for fighting with his brother. Everyone assumed that Kevin woke up in the morning and was down at the van waiting to leave for the airport. But when the parents were counting, they didn't realize that one of the neighbor kids had his head stuck in the van rather than Kevin. For Joseph and Mary, they were traveling with a large group of people. Assuming that Jesus was with them, the couple went along for about a day when they suddenly realized that something was amiss. Where was Jesus? He never showed up for dinner? Joseph looks at Mary, "Wasn't he playing with Moredecai?" Mary turns to Joseph, "It was your turn to keep track of him." Realizing that he was nowhere to be found, they turned around and returned to Jerusalem.

In all, it took them about three days to find Jesus; and they had to have been shocked to see where he was. After all, most twelve year olds would either be frightened, scared, or playing soccer with some other boys; but how many boys go to the temple? Yet there he was, sitting peaceably among the rabbis listening to them and asking them questions. When his parents realized what was going on they were astonished. I'm willing to bet Mary ran up to him, threw her arms around him almost to the point of smothering him, and then

frantically said to Jesus, “Boy, do you know how worried we were about you, why would you treat us like this? We’ve been looking for you everywhere.” And Jesus turned to his mother and said, “Why were you searching for me? Didn’t you know that I would be in my Father’s house?”

Now, I don’t know about you, but if I said that to my mother she would have cracked me upside the head and then my dad would have grabbed a hold of my sideburn leading me to the closest mule. But in Luke’s telling of this scene, he shows us how everything really revolves around Jesus. He starts off with Mary and Joseph, and yet with Jesus’ first words, the scene shifts and our focus rests on him and his authority. His words are arresting; grabbing our attention. Seeing him, the Word made flesh full of grace and truth, resting within one of the holiest places in Jerusalem, we see our savior in worship; gathered with the teachers and the rabbis. He not only listens to them but asks them questions. We might think it an odd thing for the one who is the Lord God enfleshed to sit at the feet of rabbis and learn, yet in this scene we are reminded that the Lord of the cosmos comes to us, and condescends himself to our nature so that he might go through the stages of growth. Yet even in this scene, we discover the awesome power of our Lord and the presence he brings.

In turning to Luke, we see this vision of Jesus in worship. It isn’t merely a scene whereby we are called to imitate or emulate Jesus in the ways he acts. That’s not our job. Rather, we’re called to take note of the importance worship plays in the life of Jesus and how we are called, even now, to continue to be guided by Jesus himself within worship. As Jesus’ whole life is shaped by his mission and ministry so too is his life shaped by the presence of God. No matter the busyness of the day or the hectic schedules that needed to be kept, Jesus knew that God the Father was involved in the smallest details of his life; he

knew life was more than eating and working and sleeping. And so from an early age, Jesus made worship a central part of his life.

As I mentioned on Christmas Eve, in the midst of our day-to-day ordinary lives we have the luxury of fitting faith into our busy schedules; yet for Jesus, this was not the case. The life of faith, the life of worship is a passionate lifestyle that drove Jesus in all that he did. Nowhere is this more prevalent than in his presence in the temple. It stands as a reminder to each one of us who spend so much time running from task to task that we do not need to fit God into our lives. Better yet that we shouldn't even try. Rather, we should recall how God deals with us and take time to reflect upon this God who doesn't stand far off from us but comes to dwell as God with us; who comes to shuffle the deck, setting our priorities right, and shaking up the very foundations of this created order. This is the God who not only rules the cosmos but tenderly and affectionately cares for us. How are we assured of this, you might ask? We know because of the coming of Jesus Christ. He is our pledge, our confidence, and the fulfillment of God's promise.

While we've been looking at the importance of place throughout this Advent Season, it's always important to take a break – to enter into an interlude period. We don't always have to rush from place to place and in the process attempt to see how God fits in there. Quite simply, it's the other way around. Discipleship isn't about fitting God into our lives when we find an open space within our schedule; it's about living within a passionate lifestyle, all the while knowing that God himself has laid hold of us through the power of the Holy Spirit; and it all begins with worship. Jesus himself is with us, here and now, calling us to repentance, to turn 180 degrees when we try to run away from him, leading us in our worship through the power of the Holy Spirit; reminding us that he is our light and life – he

is the one who goes before us, inviting us to get in on what he is already doing in our midst. And this shapes how we live our lives.

What if we spent more time together in prayer - both as individuals and as a church; following Jesus' lead in daily worship - sitting and listening to his word for us? What if we spent less time being busy and more time allowing God to take the wheel? Imagine a life where we lived as passionate disciples, proclaiming the Gospel through all we say and do - even when we don't use all the technical words and phrases? What would it mean to carry an attitude of worship with us into all the places we go? I invite you to enter into an interlude period in your own lives; to discern what mischief God is up to, to discern how Jesus is working and moving in your life through the power of the Holy Spirit. Praise, glory, and honor be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; now and unto ages of ages. Amen.