

First Sunday of Christmas

December 30, 2018

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**Luke 2: 41-52**

**T'was the Month After Christmas, And All...**

T'was the month after Christmas,  
and all through the house,  
Not a person with cheer, not even a spouse;  
The stockings and tree all taken down with care,  
In hopes that glitter and tinsel not be seen anywhere;  
The children were gathering their books and notepads  
While visions of algebra and calculus  
danced in their heads,  
And Mama and Daddy shiver  
at the mass of presents they wrapped  
While the dog settles in for a long winter's nap  
I folded my hands and looked up to God  
Praying to heaven all glory and laud.  
I earnestly prayed with all of my might  
Goodnight to all and to all a goodnight.



*For everything there is a season, and a  
time for every purpose under heaven.  
Ecclesiastes 3:1*

Have you ever taken a minute after the presents have been opened, after all the decorations are put away, after all the family have driven away, to sit and exhale one long overdue breath?

The season of gift giving, of zealous cheer, of glitter and tinsel is finally coming to an end. And what do we do in this month after Christmas? We take all of that cheer and load it up into boxes and store them in the attic. We say, "This chapter is over and no need to drag it on." There are some chapters in life that end naturally, like Christmas being over. We don't dare sing Christmas carols after January 1<sup>st</sup>, or bring out our tacky sweaters, or leave the Christmas tree up. We simply accept it's over and pack it away. But with that packing goes the generous gift giving spirit and the longing to be near your loved ones you've been waiting for all year. So, should all boxes be put away after Christmas? Should all chapters come to a complete halt just because the season ended?

With the new year approaching this week, we typically create a list of New Year's resolutions. A list of things to improve our quality of health, improve our outlook on life, improve our spiritual relationship with God. And so we create a new chapter of life...trying to commit to a new habit that will bring us more satisfaction out of life. And then there are other chapters of life that we don't choose, ones that happen abruptly or slowly over time, completely out of our control. A moment when a loved one suddenly dies alters your world, and you begin to recognize, in the

midst of coping, a new season of life. Or when a child is born into your family, what was old has gone and new habits are formed, and you begin to recognize again a new season of life. Looking back on your life there are seasons you prefer, and seasons you don't, but we see them as chapters. Doors opening and doors closing. Childhood to young adulthood, to becoming a parent, to becoming successful in your career, to becoming a grandparent, and all the individual chapters in between. These stages of life break down the important moments so easily for us.

And if breaking down our lives into little chapters helps us find the most important moments of our lives, or understand who the most significant people are in our lives, then what do we do with the incomplete story of Jesus' life? How do we begin to understand the moments of his life that made him into the teacher he became? How do we know who the influential people of his adolescence were, the people who taught him right from wrong? We know that it's more than our parents who influence our choices in life. Who were Jesus' childhood friends? All of these pieces that are missing may have helped us better understand the Savior of the world.

Whether the creators of the lectionary meant to or not, they have set up a scene similar here in our sanctuary to the one sketched in Luke's Gospel. On this first Sunday after Christmas, the seats are not packed and the parking lot is not crammed with cars. The temple is no longer crowded. The annual festival has ended in Jerusalem. Passover is over. The visitors have packed their donkeys and headed home, trailing ribbons and wrapping paper behind them. In their wake, the peace in the temple is palpable. There are plenty of seats for those whose devotion is year-round, and plenty of time to talk together about things that matter. Among them is the boy Jesus, whose relationship with his parents undergoes considerable strain in today's story. His motives for staying in the temple after the family begins to head home is unclear. Maybe he loses track of time, like any boy caught up in something he loves. Maybe he has had enough of childish things and wishes to mark his maturation with an exclamation point. Maybe he does not think he is lost. Let's here the story of today's Gospel, Luke, chapter 2, verses 41 through 52:

*<sup>41</sup>Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. <sup>42</sup>And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. <sup>43</sup>When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. <sup>44</sup>Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. <sup>45</sup>When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. <sup>46</sup>After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup>And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup>When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." <sup>49</sup>He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" <sup>50</sup>But they did not understand what he said to them. <sup>51</sup>Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.*

*<sup>52</sup>And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.*

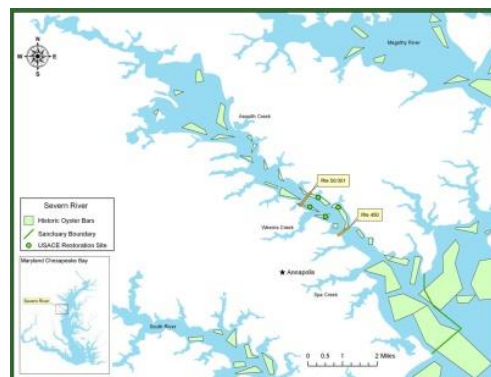
This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

“Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” Bold move Jesus. Bold move. I learned early on you do not talk back to your mother or give snarky comments, because that will reward you with a stern look and the loss of a week’s allowance. But Jesus isn’t being a snarky teenager, he is marking the transition between what others say about him (Gabriel, Simon, the angels) and his own words. He is taking ownership of his divine nature calling God his Father. Of course, Mary and Joseph knew from before his birth that they would be raising the Son of God. We heard the announcements this past month during Advent, but I can understand that that small little bit of information, well maybe not small, would ride shotgun when you are raising a newborn child, protecting the child from harm when falling near table corners, or teaching them how to start eating whole foods. So I can see the astonishment to Mary and Joseph when they see their 12 year old child teaching amongst the religious leaders.

But what holds importance to us in this story is the life event we get to experience with Mary and Joseph. For the first time Jesus is claiming God as his Father, claiming his divine nature. He is creating the beginning of his ministry in the temple where it will also end later in his life. This lesson also shows us the human nature of Jesus...the imperfect and growing qualities of humans we all have. John Wesley points out that Jesus, while perfect, continues to grow in perfection, and thus it “plainly follows” that even “pure Christians have room to increase in holiness and in the love of God” (*Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament, 1929*). Even though we may not have a complete picture of Jesus’ childhood or young adulthood to see the growing characteristics or his seasons of life, we do have this crucial story. A chapter of life that will become pivotal in Jesus’ life, the beginning of his ministry.

I would like to take this lesson a step farther. So far this morning we’ve examined life in segments, small or large moments that define our future lives. But what if we listened to Jesus’ response to his mother, “Did you not know I must be in my Father’s house?” as one continuous story line. For I don’t believe it is theologically sound to say our spiritual lives come in chapters. True there may be different depths of belief and unbelief, but the presence of God is continuous.

Did you not know I must be in my Father’s house?



Imagine God’s presence in our lives as a river. God created us, formed us, molded us to creation, and gave us the breath of life. Just as the river has a beginning place, there God begins a journey with us as we begin the journey of life. The river does not start from thin air, though there is a

cause and a reason for the river to begin. God took the time to create you before you were born, molding you into the life you would experience, placing all the pieces together so that your story could begin and flow freely.

And just as God created a beginning with you like the beginning of a river, God chooses to stay with you, just as the river continuously flows. The river may find spots of dryness or shallow creeks, then large rushing rapids, but the river flows with the intention of reaching an end. Flowing in the mountains or down to the valleys, the river flows. And so God flows through life with you. You may choose to walk away from God or find the belief of God to be too painful in a moment of your life, but God does not walk away from the created beauty of this world. You were intentionally created by a higher being who loves you through all the chapters of your life. The chapters we choose to forget and the ones we hold closest to our hearts, God was there through it all. And the chapters we cannot foresee, God is there too.

Because I find water to be the most effective image of faith, look at this image.



When a pebble drops into a still pool of water, an ripple begins from the center of the point of contact and expands to the farthest reaches of the water. God creates this effect in our lives, but more importantly, calls us to be this effective in the lives around us. God wants us to be the light of the world, the pebble that causes faith to spread around the world, touching everyone. So we don't just live one chapter of life at a time when we think about our connection to God, but rather God is a continuous flowing connection within us.

As the water flows, God flows through us. Jesus gives us the answer his mother and father needed to hear...he will be found in His Father's house. We will find the answer to peace, to love, to joy here in this place...in His Father's house...a place where there is a continuous story for us...a story without end.