

Our Life is about Priorities - Luke 2:41-52

Dear Members of Grace Lutheran Church,

The sermon text for this day is from the Gospel of Luke 2:41-52. Let us hear this text: **41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. 43 And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, 44 but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, 45 and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48 And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." 49 And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" 50 And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. 51 And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature[c] and in favor with God and man."**

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Here we are, at the beginning of the year 2016. Do you remember all the things you told yourself you were going to do in the year 2015? Well, the clock has come to its end. We are in a new year. At this time of year, people often think of closure on their past mistakes, and the wonder of new beginnings. It is also that time of year when we reevaluate our lives and our priorities, thinking of the things we feel will truly make our lives better in the New Year.

We think of the things we have done wrong, or the time we have wasted, and we resolve to make better use of our time. We resolve to set new priorities for our lives. We resolve to focus on the things that matter, the things that are important, and to set aside those things that really do not mean much to our whole lives.

As we consider our priorities, and the things we would like to do differently in this New Year, it is good to have this lesson from the life of Christ before us. Jesus knew where His priorities were. He knew the things that were important, and those which were secondary. What mattered most was being in God's presence, doing His Father's will. When that is our chief priority, we will see how God blesses all the rest of our lives with His grace and presence, too.

Our text today is the only biblical account of the early life of Jesus between His birth and His baptism at the Jordan river. While there are apocryphal stories of the early life of Christ, they cannot—and should not—be counted as genuine. But this story from Luke is the inspired word of God. It is true and historical. It shows us the holy family for what they are: devout, faithful followers of God's will and commandments. It also shows us the obedience of Christ: both to His heavenly Father, and to His earthly parents. And it teaches us about priorities. Priorities that should be in our lives, too.

It was required in the law that all Jewish men attend three annual feasts in Jerusalem: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. While distance may have kept many from attending all three, most Jews tried to be at Passover. The Passover was special. It was the remembrance and celebration of God's great deliverance for His people, when the angel of death killed the firstborn of all Egypt, but 'passed over' His people, because of the blood of the lamb that they had put on their doors in obedience to God's command.

To those feasts only Jewish men were required to attend. Women were exempt. After all, travel was not a matter of getting in the car or on the train. It normally meant long days of walking—or, if you had money, you might have had a wagon drawn by animals. In either case, without the advantage of roadways like we have, and without the modern means of travel, the journey could be difficult for women and children—especially pregnant women or the very young. And yet, Luke tells us

that Joseph and Mary made the journey to Jerusalem every year. This was a priority for this family. The spiritual education of the children and the focus on worship was very important to Mary and Joseph. We do not know if they always took the family along, but Luke is clear that when Jesus was 12 years old, he definitely was included in this pilgrimage.

Now, it might have been just another Passover journey if it were not for the events that happened as they were on the way home. It was common for families or friends to travel together in a caravan. In this way, family, friends and neighbors were able to help one another on the journey and offered a greater sense of protection from robbers. Often the women and children led the group, with the men following behind.

Jesus could have been with either Mary or with Joseph—or even with other friends. None of it would have created a problem for Mary and Joseph, for they would expect that they would all be together when they stopped for the night. But when that evening came, it was clear Jesus was not with them. Anxious and concerned, they came back to Jerusalem to search for their son. After three days they found Him, sitting among the teachers at the temple. The people around Him were amazed at Jesus' understanding and insight. But Mary was more concerned, as any mother would be. She is relieved to have found her Son, but also frustrated because of the worry that had been in her heart.

She asks Jesus: **“Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.”** It must have been all the more surprising to Mary and Joseph, for they had never had any difficulty at all with Jesus. He was the ultimate example of a ‘good boy’. So what could possess Him to act in this way now?

In a gentle, but very clear manner, Jesus reminds Mary of the priorities of God. First, He removes the title of ‘father’ from Joseph and gives it to God. Jesus knew He was the eternal Son of God. It was important that Mary and Joseph remember that as well. But Jesus also had to remind them that He had come to accomplish a very important role in God's plan. **“Why were you looking for me?”** He asked. **“Did not you know I had to be in my Father's house?”** What Jesus is saying is this: This is my chief priority. I must be in My Father's house. It is absolutely essential and necessary that I put God's plans first. I know what you want. I know how much you love me as your child. But I have another calling, another mission, another Father. I must do what He desires.

Friends, in declaring that He has come to do what the Father desires, Jesus points to His death and resurrection. Jesus' top priority was never Himself. It was to do that which God planned. God's purpose for His Son was the work of redeeming lost and condemned sinners like you and me. He came to fulfil all righteousness for us. He came to be the perfect Passover for us. He came to die and to rise, so that we could enjoy eternity in the Father's house, celebrating the unending feast of God's eternal victory. Mary and Joseph did not understand it, but Jesus had his priorities in the right place.

Luke reminds us that Jesus was obedient to Mary and Joseph. He gave them the honor and respect that was due them. But even in the day to day course of life, He first sought the will of His heavenly father.

Do we do as well in our lives? We need to remember the place that God deserves in our lives; we need to put more priority on our being in the Father's house! Those yearly pilgrimages may have been an inconvenience, but they served to remind the people of the place that God rightly deserves in the hearts and lives of His people. The presence of Jesus in the temple reminds us that God's will for us should be more important than any other influence or priority in our lives.

We come to His house, because God comes to us, to feed us on His holy word. He comes to us to strengthen us for the life we must live in the midst of the pain, fear and uncertainty of this world. He comes to us so that we may live in Him both now and forever. But how often do we let the things of the world outweigh our need to be in the presence of God? How often do the activities and pastimes of this earthly existence keep us from the things that are going to matter for all eternity?

We have our priorities confused: we think that the daily activities are more important than God. We allow our social activities, our sports, even our sleep to keep us from being in the Father's house. We let the things of this world keep us from God. And without realizing it, we have forgotten the place that God not only deserves, but demands in our hearts and lives.

We are now in the beginning of a new year, and it is a good time for us to evaluate our priorities. It is a good time to ask ourselves: **“Where does my heavenly Father fit into my life?”** I hope and pray that you will make it a priority to come and bring your children to God's house, so that we all may hear and learn His Word and grow in His grace. I urge that you

look at God as the chief and highest priority of your life. It does not mean that we have to spend our entire lives in the church—but we should be living each and every moment of our lives as the people we are through faith in Christ.

As we start this New Year, as we look at those things we want to change in our lives, may we start with the response of Jesus to Mary and Joseph, when He was 12 years old: **“Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?”** Friends, if that is our priority, I can assure you that we will learn that putting God first and being in His presence will bring us the assurance of His presence in all the needs, cares and concerns of our lives. And we will find joy and peace in the New Year in Him. Amen“