

**26 Dec 2021 - Luke 2:41-52 - First Sunday after Christmas -
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One of the things that you've no doubt noticed
Is that in the church's proclamation of the Gospel
The cradle and the cross and are kept together.
That is, we, on the basis of Scripture
See Jesus' life as a unity: that from his birth
He was on the way to the cross,
And, in fact, that he was on his way through death to life
To bring us back into unity with God, each other, and all creation.

Well, here we are on the day after Christmas,
And we're about to mediate on an account of Jesus' early life.
But I'd like to start with a quote from later in Luke's Gospel,
Listen to this: **Now large crowds were travelling with [Jesus]; and he
turned and said to them, 'Whoever comes to me and does not hate
father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and
even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the
cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:25-27**
This sort of teaching by Jesus is repeated in the Gospels,
And it is, to say the least, confronting teaching.
Jesus is saying to those who would chose to follow him
That God cannot be used as means to attain some other goal:
That we cannot think to ourselves, for example, that
If we follow Jesus, then we'll have a better family life.
That is because God is more important even than family,
And if we must choose between God and the family,
Then God must come first.

Now as it happens Jesus' teaching is not opposed to family life.
In fact we could rightly say that Jesus' teaching, and following Jesus,
Puts family loyalties, obligations, and loves in their right place.
It gives these bonds their God-given due,
So that family life may both be received and lived out joyfully

And with thanks to God.
But our Lord went on his way to the cross,
And we, his disciples, are not above him.

But why am I starting my sermon this way?
Because in today's reading from Luke's Gospel
We hear both of Jesus love for his family,
But also of his primary love for God his Father.
And from this reading I'll be proclaiming the Good News
That Jesus' love for the Father
Is also his love for you:
And that just as Jesus' love for the Father
Led to a well-ordered family life,
So, as we receive Jesus' sacrificial love for us,
We are freed by God to love our families in a well-ordered way,
And glorify God by showing genuine love for each other.

Listen to how today's reading begins: **Now every year [Jesus'] parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival.**

The first thing to note here is that Jesus' parents were devout people.
And by devout I don't mean sanctimonious or self-righteous,
I mean that they were people
Who were reverent toward the things of God,
And who listened to God's word with attention.

Every year, the text says, Jesus' parents went on this pilgrimage
To Jerusalem for the Passover festival.
This was just what they did,
Perhaps a bit like going to church every Sunday,
Even if the day before was Christmas day...
Now we know that Jesus inherited, you could say,
These sorts of rightly pious customs from his parents:
He listened to God's word and knew the Scriptures well.
He had the custom, as we read later in Luke's Gospel,

Of going to the synagogue every Sabbath.
And as an adult he went to Jerusalem at Passover.
In fact his life ended at Jerusalem at the Passover
In that final Holy Week of his life.

So Jesus' parents actions are presented positively,
And Jesus' relationship to them of obedience is presented positively:
He goes with them,
And more than that, he fulfills what is at the heart of pilgrimage:
The encounter of God through his word.

Listen to how the narrative goes on: **When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it.**

At this stage we don't know why he has stayed behind.
We do know, however, that he is 12 years old.
Now why might, generally speaking, a 12 year old stay in a big city
Rather than go home to the small town with his parents?
Where would parents normally go looking for a 12 year old boy
Who had stayed in the city while everyone else had gone?
Supposing you accidently left your 12 year old boy in Adelaide,
Is the first place you'd look be the church?

It seems evident, by the way, that Jesus' parents travelled in pilgrimage
With a large group of family and friends,
And that, as is not uncommon with large and connected families,
Especially in what we could call holiday time, child care was dispersed
Among the friends and relatives,
Because listen to how the reading goes on: **Assuming that [Jesus] was in the group of travellers, [his parents] went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him.**
Now I have, for short periods of time,
Lost my children in crowds.
It has been very unsettling both for me and for them,

Especially when they were little.

But if found that I had left my 12 year old boy

A day's journey away, I would be very anxious.

Indeed, Mary and Joseph leave their path home

And go back to Jerusalem to find their son.

But it's not straightforward:

Evidently they first look in the places they *expected* to find him,

Rather than in the place he was.

Listen to how the reading goes on: **After three days they found him *in the temple*, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.**

Jesus is in the temple.

He is not only in the temple,

He is in the temple sitting with the teachers,

Listening to God's word, and asking questions.

And asking perceptive, intelligent, insightful questions,

That showed the depth of his understanding

In a way that amazed all the people who heard him.

Perhaps to get a feel for this imagine modern day parents

Who lose their son only to find him

At the physics department of the university

Sitting with the professors and engaging in lively debate with them.

On the one hand there's be relief at finding the last child,

On the other hand there'd be the feeling

'Who is my son? What capabilities does he have?'

This is in fact how the reading goes on: **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.'**

There's the astonishment,

But there's also what you could call the exasperation and even anger:

'Why, Jesus, did you put us through all this great anxiety?'

But Jesus' words have a sort of obedient rebuke about them.
Listen to what he says: **He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'**

It's like he is saying:

You should know who I am,
You should know my priorities,
You should know that I am not and was not lost,
That I was and am right where I should be:
In my Father's house.

But the text goes on to say they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

Jesus' parents are the ones presented who need to mature
Who need to grow in their understanding of who Jesus is.
Jesus himself is presented as one who is rightly obedient to his parents
And the rightly-ordered authority they have over him:

That is, an authority that is exercised under God's word.

Mary is again presented as a model of discipleship,
As she treasures the things she learns about her son in her heart.
And Jesus,

In phrasing that echoes our Old Testament reading for today,
Is said to increase in wisdom, in years,
And in favour with God and people.

He lived in a well-ordered way with his family, with his community,
Because he lived with his heavenly Father at the centre of his life.

As we know from the way the Gospel unfolds,
Jesus' increase in years, wisdom, and favour,
Finds its mature expression in the path he took to the cross,
Where he set aside all things for the love of his Father:
And, in love for us, won for us the gift of forgiveness

And life in God's kingdom.

It's what Jesus has done for us,

And the power of God's word to us,

That frees us to love our families well,

By not loving them first.

We are free to give thanks *to God* for our fathers and mothers

Our brothers and sisters, our uncles and aunts, our cousins,

And all those with who we share the bonds of blood.

We are also free to forgive them when they hurt us,

Because we ourselves have been forgiven by God,

And have plenty of God's peace to share with those around us.

And we are free to look out for family members when they are in need,

Because our Lord,

Who left his Father's home to come to us in our need,

And who took the path to the cross for our sake,

And who now stands at God's right hand interceding for us,

Because he is merciful so that we may be merciful,

And so that his mercy in our lives will shine to the glory of God,

In Jesus' name.

Amen.