

Worship for December 26, 2021

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

*Call to Worship

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

**We have beheld his glory and join our voices with the angel chorus singing,
“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth, peace.”**

*Hymn 113 Angels We Have Heard On High

*Affirmation of Faith The Apostles' Creed p. 35

*Hymn 581 Gloria Patri

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, as we enter this new Christmas season and approach a new year, help us set aside our old ways of sin- indifference, apathy, anger, resentment, hostility, envy- and any other attitude or behavior that separates us from you, our community, and our global family. Help us to let go of the year now almost behind us and embrace each new opportunity Christ presents with hope.

*Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

God loves us so much that God separates us from our sins as far as the east is from the west. God has forgiven us and set us free to live holy and joyful lives. Alleluia! Amen.

Scripture Reading Psalm 148

Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading Luke 2:41-52

Twelve year olds can be curious and energetic and smart and a little bit smart aleck. Rude. They object a lot. Their feelings get hurt easily. They often have self-esteem issues.

We are about to gain a newborn granddaughter and a twelve year old grandson. We are learning that we will have to treat both of them gently when we visit.

For instance, the house my daughter and her partner have purchased is one to accommodate a growing family. It is three full floors and a ranch-sized yard. There's lots of room for Benny, their goldendoodle, to romp. And the coolest thing about the house is a mother in law apartment.

Ed and I are thrilled over that. We usually stay at the Holiday Inn Express a few blocks from Katy's house. It's nice and kind of our home away from home, but, staying at the house will be much more convenient and much less expensive.

There's only one problem: the twelve-year-old had planned on taking up residence in the apartment. The news didn't go over well when he was told that wasn't going to happen.

Imagine the outcome of that conversation. Then add the sound of a slamming door.

The problem was not that he believed he is a privileged character and deserves the apartment.

The problem is he has gained a certain level of competency and independence. Why shouldn't he assume that he qualified to live on his own?

And that's what comes to mind as I read this scripture text. Jesus is in the Temple? Where else would he be, he asks his parents. They could list a dozen places and how thoughtless he was to disappear without telling them his plans, or would it have been too much to ask for him to seek permission?

That's probably how it would go at our house.

Thankfully, Mary and Joseph handle this issue better.

They listen as Jesus expresses an awareness of the call God has placed on his life. He describes four things that he must do. Four priorities. This is how Luke tells us the story of Jesus.

Listen for the word, "must," in the conversation. In this text, when Mary and Joseph find Jesus in the temple, he says, "I must be in my Father's house." Later, in chapter four, when the people of Capernaum want him to stay awhile with them, he will say something similar: "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God in other cities also...for I was sent for this purpose."

The second must-do Jesus takes up is that he must engage in healing. He gets in trouble over his methods on this. He heals a woman on the Sabbath. The leader of the synagogue chastises the woman for seeking healing on the Sabbath and Jesus defends her and himself by pointing out exceptions to the rule if it's done to relieve suffering.

And the third must-do is this: Jesus must eat with sinners. The most famous dinner companion in this gospel is Zacchaeus, the tax collector. The followers of Jesus would not expect Jesus to eat with Zacchaeus or folks of his type, because tax collectors were collaborating with the Romans and the Romans were oppressing the Jews.

In all of these instances, Jesus is doing the unexpected. He reaches out to people he might not ordinarily have direct contact with. He encounters need and acts to relieve it. He runs into criticism. He holds his own. He defends himself and the even more vulnerable one who has received his attention his help.

But, perhaps the most important must-do Jesus takes care of is this:

Jesus has a close relationship with his mother. In that relationship we witness love and respect.

And, Jesus has reached the moment in his life when he acknowledges that there are others with whom he will have relationships. And in all of these, Jesus is for us, but he does not belong to us. Jesus belongs to God.

The work Jesus must be about is not based on his mother's priorities, or the synagogue leader's, or anyone else's. Jesus must do what God calls him to do. And what God calls him to do is bring

release to the captives, healing for the suffering, and mercy and grace for those whose lives are broken by sin.

What happens that day with the twelve-year-old Jesus happens to anyone who is either a child or a parent. Psychologically, we would call this differentiating. Jesus is differentiating himself from his parents. He is living into his own identity. This is what healthy people do. But, oh, it can be painful.

Our youngest daughter attended a retreat with her Baptist friend. When we picked her up when the retreat ended, she bounced into the car and declared, "When I'm 21, I'm going to become a Baptist!"

To which her big sister said, "That's funny. When I turned 21, I bought cigarettes." Both of them were differentiating. They weren't going to be replicas of Mom or Dad. And that's how it should be.

So, instead of being outraged that adolescent Jesus worries his parents then seems to show them disrespect, think about it. One of the most profound truths of Advent and Christmas is that Jesus, fully human, fully God, has come to live among us. He grows and matures and reaches developmental benchmarks just like our children. Like us, he is presented challenges, as are his parents. And, like us, his parents worry over his safety and well-being. I'm even betting they made a mistake or two like I have.

To me, this makes Jesus, Mary and Joseph more approachable, more like you and me. And that's good news.

So, our soon-to-be grandson isn't moving into his own place yet, but he's growing up. He will find some way to differentiate, a way to forge his own identity. And his choices are not limited to becoming a Baptist or buying cigarettes.

It doesn't really matter. He can be whoever he wants to be. But he can't change who his parents are their love. And he will always be their son.

*Hymn 145 What Child Is This?

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

including our contributions to support those in need in our community

*Hymn 607 Doxology

*Prayer of Dedication

May these gifts offer healing and hope. May our lives reflect the generosity of your love, and may our actions serve your will. In Jesus' name and for his realm. Amen.

*Hymn 147 The First Nowell verses 1-3

*Blessing

Go now, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved.

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly;

clothe yourselves with love;
forgive one another;
and do everything you do in the name of Christ,
giving thanks to God.
We go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

*Postlude