

A Heart of Worship Begins with Submission

A sermon by Pr. David Johnson

Our Gospel text for today from Luke 2 shows an image of Jesus that few consider when they ponder the incarnation of Jesus. We frequently think of Him as a teacher, counselor, miracle-worker, or maybe even as the common carpenter he was before the start of His official earthly ministry. However, not many of us spend time thinking about Jesus, the child. Yet, it's in this brief glimpse of His youth, that we see a most valuable lesson, as fellow children of God.

Luke 2:41-43 Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴² And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; ⁴³ and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it,

Now most of us know the story relayed to us by Luke; how the lad Jesus missed the boat, so to speak, and didn't leave with his parents when they traveled north from Jerusalem. We sometimes give Mary and Joseph a bad rap in assuming they were negligent parents for not showing concern over Jesus' absence sooner. But the text itself comes to their defense.

Luke 2:44 but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances.

It wasn't just Joseph, Mary, and Jesus on this annual expedition to Jerusalem. It was an entire caravan of friends and family. Surely Jesus was just playing Xbox in a friend's minivan. He'll show up at the next rest area, right? But when he didn't, Dad & Mom jumped into action, spending the next three days investigating Jesus' whereabouts.

Luke 2:45-46 When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. ⁴⁶ Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions.

Now why Joseph and Mary didn't start in the temple is a question many have asked. You'd think, with His history, they'd start there. But they didn't. I guess even Jesus' parents didn't always see the wonder of God in their child. And what Jesus was doing when Joseph and Mary found him wasn't exactly a surprise either. As a 12 year-old boy, it would have been encouraging, if not a bit surprising, for their son to show this kind of spiritual hunger...and depth.

Luke 2:47-48 And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. ⁴⁸ When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You."

Now this is a great example for all of us. The best of children can come from flawed parents. Not every perfect child has perfect parents. And here we see the human side of Joseph and Mary. Instead of praising and encouraging their son, Jesus, they choose this moment to correct Him.

Which tells us something of Jesus' authentic childhood. He wasn't always sitting at the table, reading some prophetic scroll, being the holy Son of God He actually was. He was just a little boy who needed to grow as does each little boy and girl...and correction is part of the process.

So there were times when Joseph and Mary forgot themselves, and forgot about Jesus' true alter-ego; the Messiah of God. And it may even be tempting to get into a parent/child sermon at this point. But the aspect of this story that really caught my eye, was the little editorial that follows Jesus' response.

Luke 2:49-51 And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. ⁵¹ And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

"and he was subject unto them;" - ASV

"and was obedient to them." - NIV

"and was [habitually] obedient to them;" - AMP

What an amazing combination of phrases,

"Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?"

"He continued in subjection to them."

Jesus, well aware of who he was, His parentage, and the focus of His life, chooses submission. Jesus had just made his first blasphemous "I AM" declaration (*My Father's house*), which neither Joseph nor Mary caught. And yet, this young Jesus chooses surrender. But then again, wasn't this at the heart of His mission?

Phil 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, {and} being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

This is also where our Gospel and Epistle passages intersect. Our New Testament text from the twelfth chapter of Romans begins;

Rom 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, {which is} your spiritual service of worship.

Paul uses this terminology repeatedly throughout his epistles, "I urge (exhort, implore, beg) you..." He is not writing these instructions for the fun of it, or simply for the academic instruction of his readers. Paul wants a response. No, he pleads for a response.

He appeals to what should be the underlying motivation of every believer, "the mercies of God." ("tender pities" – *Lenski*) Paul pleads for action based not on his rank, influence, or coercion; but because of the "tender pities" these Roman believers have experienced from the hand of a merciful God – the very same motivation that drove Jesus to choose submission to Joseph and Mary. And what behavior is he begging to see from these believers? Nothing less than their "*spiritual service of worship.*"

"reasonable ... service and spiritual worship." - AMP

“this is your spiritual act of worship.” - NIV

Years ago, I shared a definition of worship written by William Temple, the late Archbishop of Canterbury. It went like this:

“To worship is –

to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God,
to feed the mind with the truth of God,
to purge the imagination by the beauty of God,
to open the heart to the love of God,
to devote the will to the purposes of God.”

But as the apostle Paul urges his readers in Rom. 12:1, he addresses what I’ve come to understand as the foundation, or cornerstone principle of worship...which is to:

Rom 12:1 ... to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God...

What is Paul asking of these Roman believers, and in turn, of us? To submit, surrender, to yield in willing compliance to the very God whose tender pities gave us new life to begin with. That is the very beginning of any Christian existence. Nothing more can follow in a person’s journey of faith *IF* they have not first surrendered their very being, willingly and gladly, to God.

And this submission is to be done as a “living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God.” God doesn’t want the leftovers, the dead scraps of a life we’ve already used up on personal gain. He wants our lives, set apart (holy) and acceptable to Him. Only a few weeks ago we discussed King David making this observation at the end of 2 Sam.; **2 Samuel 24:24b-25 for I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God which cost me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. ²⁵ David built there an altar to the LORD and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. Thus the LORD was moved by prayer for the land, and the plague was held back from Israel.**

Roman 12 goes on to challenge believers to live completely for Christ. The passage moves forward pleading for renewed minds, humble attitudes, sound judgment, and active participation. But it begins here, with the foundation of all that will follow; a living and holy (*set apart*) submission.

And isn’t it interesting that this step of self-sacrifice isn’t lauded as miraculous, amazing, or worthy of recognition. In fact, it is referred to as simply “your spiritual service of worship.” (Or as the KJV translates, “*your reasonable service*”)

For Jesus, this meant “continuing in subjection to them (His parents). What will this “reasonable service of worship” mean for you?