

The First Sunday after Christmas

December 31, 2017

Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

Luke 2:41-52 Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. 42 When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. 43 After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. 44 Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. 45 When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48 When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

49 "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" 50 But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

51 Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. (NIV2011)

"Redeeming the Time"

How did you spend your Christmas? Hopefully you had some time to do something fun. Spend some time with family. Do a little traveling. Maybe just take a break from your normal routine and just do nothing. That would be a welcome change. No stress. No deadlines. Nothing you have to get done immediately. That's pretty rare, isn't it? Typically we pinball from one activity to another. Isn't not just that we have lots of activities occupying our time. It's that we barely have time to pause and catch our breathe between all these demands.

But then we have times like today. It's somewhat artificial, but December 31st gives us a chance to pause and look back on the past year. The flip of the calendar allows us to put some effort into expressing our hopes for the coming year. And for Christians, it's an opportunity to press pause on our lives and consider how we spend our time. When we take a look at this account from the end of Luke chapter 2, we get a focus on Jesus. This episode in the life of Jesus gives us a different view on time. Jesus is redeeming the time.

We get precious little from the Scriptures about the early years of Jesus. After the angels and shepherds and manger, we learn Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day. Just week later Mary and Joseph make a trek to Jerusalem. They are there to follow God's laws for mothers and children after childbirth. They bump into active Anna and focused Simeon, waiting for the Lord to reveal their Savior to them. After that we just get a summary. Jesus goes to Nazareth. He grows and develops.

We only get one episode from the entire childhood of Jesus. All the years between 40 day old Jesus at the temple and 30 year old Jesus beginning his ministry. His parents were practicing their faith, going to Jerusalem for the major religious celebrations each year. And once, when Jesus was 12 years old, something unusual happened.

Going to Jerusalem for the Passover was a big deal. Especially for a 12 year old boy. Think Disneyland plus Christmas Eve. Ancient biblical traditions were recounted and reenacted. Family and friends were there. The big city was alive. The capital of Jerusalem with its history and meaning for every citizen, everyone tracing their heritage back to the glory of David and Solomon. Pilgrims made a joyous journey across the country with cousins and uncles and aunts and nephews and nieces and neighbors from back home in Nazareth. The festive atmosphere still replaying in their minds as they made the memorable trip back home.

And then panic. An entire day down the road back toward home. When they settled in for the night and made camp, they couldn't find their boy. Not with any uncles or aunts. No neighbors or cousins had seen him. No sign of him anywhere in the entire caravan. Frantic, they searched and searched. Retracing their steps, they finally ended up back in Jerusalem. Back at the heart of all the action, Jesus was still there. He had remained. All that time.

You can't help feeling a little bad for Mary and Joseph. I mean, you know what it's like to get in your car, drive to the grocery store, gather up all the supplies you need to buy and then realize you forgot your wallet when you get to the checkout. It's frustrating. You've wasted so much time. So for Mary and Joseph to take time out of their normal routine to go to Jerusalem for this festival, to travel back home for an entire day, and then scour the holy city looking for their son, well, irritating would be a mild way of putting it.

Most of the time we don't even really have much of a say in how we spend our time. So much of what we do is what we have to do. You have to go to work. You have to pay your bills. You have to get ready for work and drive to work and make sure you've covered your duties so you can go home at the end of the day without having to go back to work. And then the time that is technically your time, is something you actually have a say in. You have to dedicate a bare minimum amount of time to sleep. You have to make sure you are putting nutrients into your body. You have to pick the kids up from school. I suppose you could choose not to take them to practice, but then you'd be a bad parent. You could avoid going to the grocery store and post office and paying your bills, but that would all catch up to you eventually.

So there is really only a small sliver of each day and each week that is really, truly yours. And even that somewhat flexible segment of your day gets gobbled up pretty quickly by things we should be doing.

And then we get to days like today. We look back on the past year and how spent that small segment of time we have for ourselves. We get the chance to evaluate what we did with that time. Now we can look at the year ahead and figure out some adjustments we would like to

make. If we want to improve our lives and make things better for the people who are important to us, we will have to make some positive adjustments.

And it's interesting the kinds of things that are topping the list of New Year's resolutions for 2018. You have a lot of the typically, usual desires to start or improve on healthy habits. Diets and exercise. Watching less TV and reading more. But one of those that keeps popping up on a lot of lists is spending less time on our devices. People recognize the need to be present and be attentive toward the people they are around. We understand there is a difference between being physically present and being there for people.

That's what makes this episode from Luke chapter 2 stand out for me. Mary and Joseph must feel frustrated. They must be agitated that their time traveling and searching for Jesus was a waste of their time. You can imagine their emotional state when their searching finally comes to an end: **"After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions."** (Luke 2:46) But when they found him in the temple courts with religious teachers and experts, that's when they were really thrown into confusion. It's hard to criticize Jesus for being in that spot. He is doing something important. He's doing something good, something that is good for him. But why? Why was Jesus there? Why did he decide to spend his time there now, at this moment, on this occasion? And the question I can't help wondering about. Did he even really need to be there?

See, in my mind, spending time is transactional. We even use the word "spend" for what we do with time. We give it away expecting something in return. Basketball players go to practice. They run sprints and do drills. They push themselves to do something things they would rather not do. But in return they expect to become better players and get time on the court during games and help their team win. The same goes for students in their academic lives. They study and do homework and get ready for exams. There are tons of things they would rather being doing with friends. But they want to get good grades and graduate and position themselves for a better shot at success in life.

That's why we consider coming up with resolutions for eating healthier and getting more exercise and watching less TV and spending less time on our phones. We plan to give up something. In return for that negative thing we enjoy, we expect to get something in return. And that's probably true about God's people in God's house today. Just like Jesus we are in a good place when we come to God's house. We know it is beneficial to be hearing and learning God's word. It's good for us. We even serve God and donate time to ministry. We give up time for ourselves to serve others and dedicate effort for the good of God's kingdom. And yet, we can't help but think of our time with God, the things we are giving up to be here, all the things we could be doing instead of serving, as transactions. We give to get.

And then we see Jesus. He's in the temple when Mary and Joseph locate him. They are confused and irritated. Yet Jesus responds: **"Why were you searching for me?...Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"** (Luke 2:49) Jesus says it is necessary for him to be there doing what he's doing. Isn't Jesus God? But yet we see the Word Incarnate studying God's Word. The all-knowing and all-powerful Creator of the universe sat at the feet of

religious leaders and engaged with other students. The same Jesus who depended on Mary and Joseph for food and shelter went to Scripture to be filled with wisdom. The same Jesus who needed rest acquired knowledge from the Bible. Jesus depended on the Holy Spirit to fill him with knowledge and understanding. That happened for him the same way it happens for us: through the Holy Scriptures.

But for Jesus this was a necessity. In the rest of the Gospel according to Luke this word is packed with meaning. Luke uses this word to signal the necessity of God's plan of salvation. Jesus is working the plan. Jesus is carrying it out and carrying it to completion. Jesus will necessarily return to Jerusalem. Instead of offering an animal as a sacrifice at the temple, Jesus will be the sacrifice. Instead of gaining the admiration and approval of religious scholars, he will be rejected and cast away by the spiritual authorities. But until then, everything Jesus does is part of the plan. Everywhere Jesus goes is working the plan.

It is necessary for him to redeem the time. Jesus stands in for all the childish things you did in your childhood. Jesus conforms to God's plan for all the times you look back on your days and years with shame and guilt. Jesus puts himself where he needs to be for your failures to be what God expects you to be. Jesus does what we would expect him not to be forced to do for all the ways we look at time with God as a burden, service to God as an obligation, time in God's word as something imposed on us. Jesus made the ultimate transaction with his life to give you all of God's riches of grace and forgiveness.

Jesus redeems the time. Jesus gives it back to you. Jesus gives it to you as a gift.

Time off on Christmas and New Year's are so important. I always cringe when I see Albertson's or Starbucks are open on Christmas Day. Stay home for one day. Plan ahead. Let those poor people spend the day with their families. There is a real benefit to taking that time off. Sometimes we even invest time planning for our time off. We need to plan a trip and spend time in a car or airplane to get where we are going to spend time relaxing. But that time away can be refreshing. It can give us new energy and new strength when we get back to our regular lives.

That's what God does when he gives you time with him. When you spend time with God's word, you are getting from God. When you are in God's house, you are receiving God's gifts. When you are about your Father's business, God is refreshing you.

Mary is a great example of this. As this rare episode gets capped off from Jesus' boyhood, this is the reaction from Mary: **"Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart."** (Luke 2:49) Some profound truths from God are beyond immediate comprehension. Yet we can treasure them. We can store them up inside. We can draw God's blessings from them and let God work in us.

That's a great goal for 2018. Let God serve you. Let God come to you in his Word. Let God give you his gifts as you come to God's house. Let him make that profound change in your heart. Let God spend time with you. Amen.