

Written Copy: Luke 2:45-50 "When We Don't Understand God's Plan"

2nd Sunday @ Christmas

Sunday, January 3rd, 2021

Text: Luke 2:45-50

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.

Exegetical Statement

We don't have a lot of information from Jesus' childhood, but the Holy Spirit saw fit to bless us with this section of His life as a 12-year-old boy. Mary and Joseph, being God-fearing Jews make an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover there. Their dedication to observing the Laws and Regulations of Moses is seen in Mary accompanying Joseph, as only men were required to go. They travel the 80 miles from Nazareth to Jerusalem in the company of friends and relatives for safety's sake. When the Feast is over, they pack up to head back to Nazareth. It seems it was standard operating procedure for Jesus not to travel by Mary and Joseph's side, but perhaps to walk with other boys His age who were a part of the caravan. So it is that at the end of the first day journey back, when they stop for the night, Mary and Joseph can't find Jesus among the group. With increasing alarm, they head back to Jerusalem, searching along the way, as well as searching the city when they arrive, first checking all the places a normal 12-year-old boy might be. Finally, they come to the temple and to their shock and amazement there sits Jesus among the teachers of Scripture. He has been amazing them with His grasp of what they have been teaching Him, and His ability to apply Scriptural truths to everyday life. Mary and Joseph are stressed out from the search, but perhaps also flabbergasted at the dialog Jesus is having with these learned men, that He could hold their interest and deserve three days' worth of one on one with them. Mary expresses her feelings of anguish, not knowing where He was, and her perceived disobedience on His part by not leaving with them. But Jesus corrects her by asking "Why were you searching all over town for me? Have you not yet figured out that I must be involved in the things concerning the will and worship of my Heavenly Father? Mary and Joseph cannot comprehend what Jesus is telling them. His wisdom and knowledge of what is required of Him by the Father, as well as the true relationship of He with the Heavenly Father is beyond their grasp. But this time He leaves with them and returns to Nazareth. There He submits to their authority as those placed over Him by the Father to care for Him. There in His humanity He continues to mature as any normal young boy would. But spiritually, He continues to grow in wisdom and understanding of who He is in relation to the Father, why He has come, and the what and the why of His mission as Savior of the world. Mary does not forget what Jesus has told her, nor does she forget what the angels mentioned at His birth, or what Gabriel told her prior to her conception. She continues to ponder and treasure up these things in her heart.

Focus Statement:

According to the wisdom and will of the Father, it was necessary for Jesus to remain behind in the Temple courts. According to the wisdom of God, it was necessary for God to become man and give His life on the cross to save us not from trouble now, but from eternal condemnation and give us everlasting salvation

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

Mary and Joseph did not understand why it was necessary for Jesus to remain behind in the temple courts. Upon finding Him there, stressed out from looking, Mary accuses Jesus of disobedience. Although they'd been told their human child was the divine Son of God, they couldn't understand the practical aspects of the incarnation. We likewise cannot understand why things in our life must be as they are

What the hearer should do as a result:

Look to the wisdom of God given to us in His Word, understanding that not all will be explained to us, but trusting by faith that what happens is necessary according to God's wisdom, will, and plan in Christ Jesus.

Subject Sentence: Trust by faith what God deems as necessary

Introduction: 2021 The Change that Hasn't Happened

Welcome to a New Year: 2021! The ball has dropped, we've had our celebrations. Now everything is going to be different right? We've put the anomaly that was 2020 behind us, and now we can all get back to life as normal, right? Well, maybe not so much. But in the backs of our minds, we kind of feel that way at times, don't we? We naturally wish, and to some extent believe, that with the coming of the New Year there will be big changes, changes for the better. And in keeping with these changes, we make resolutions about changing our lives. But how much lasting change do those resolutions bring? And the changes that do come, how many of them are really for the better?

We have elected new officials to important government positions. Some have made promises of great changes that are going to come during their term in office, changes that will make life better for you. They promise that they will gain control of the COVID-19 pandemic, they will get the economy roiling again, and help us recover from the damage done by the lockdowns, along with people's fear of going out in public and contracting the virus. And I hope and pray that these things happen. But I'm a cynical guy when I hear leaders making big promises. And it doesn't matter which party they belong to.

There is change coming, but it may not be the change that our newly elected leaders, or that we ourselves envision. The New Year has come, and just as when we flip a light switch on and the once darkened room fills with light, we expect that flipping the switch to 2021 will bring new light and life into the COVID-19/political and racial unrest/natural disaster filled year that was 2020. Well, the light switch has been flipped, and while there is a vaccine beginning to make its rounds, the change that 2021 brings may not be what we expect it to be.

One thing is for certain: God is still at work in the world and in our lives. The thing is, the way that He works is not always what we expect, or what we see as being for the best. Most of the time, His will that is being played out even now is beyond our understanding. True wisdom and understanding comes from Him, as our Old Testament Lesson shows us with King Solomon receiving wisdom from the LORD as a gift of grace. Perhaps we are looking for wisdom and answers to our problems in the wrong place? Just as Mary and Joseph were.

Mary and Joseph Do Not Understanding God's Work

Our Gospel Lesson begins with a unique look into the life of Jesus as a boy. The other Gospel may have His birth, and the story of Him escaping Herod's grasp as an infant. But then it skips forward to the beginning of His official ministry as an adult. But Luke gives us this little snippet into the life of Jesus as a 12-year-old boy growing up with Mary and Joseph.

The account begins with the family leaving their hometown of Nazareth for the 80-mile journey to Jerusalem. They are making their yearly trek there to celebrate the Passover and The Feast of Unleavened Bread that directly follows it. It's a 7-day celebration all told. Everything goes according to plan until the feast is over and its time to head back home. Perhaps they left directly from the Temple Courts, or from some place in Jerusalem where they had celebrated the final dinner of the 7-day festival. Or perhaps they departed from where they had been spending their nights during the festival. Either way, when they departed for the 3-to-4-day journey home Mary and Joseph assumed Jesus was coming with them. And why not? He was always the perfectly obedient boy.

They traveled there and back in a caravan made up of friends and relatives from Galilee. This caravan provided the comfort and companionship for the long journey as well as protection from bandits that otherwise may have attacked them on the way. Since they traveled in a group of people they knew, that meant that Jesus need not walk by His parents side the whole way back. Jesus was in many respects your average 12-year-old boy. While He loved His parents it's natural that He would travel in the company of other boys His age and do and talk about what other boys His age would do, except for the sinful things of course. Feeling safe and secure in this group, Mary and Joseph, enjoying the company of friends and relatives, had no reason to worry about where Jesus was and what He was doing. After all He was a good boy. So, it was only when they had stopped for the night and called Jesus to come bed down with them that they discovered something was wrong. Jesus was nowhere to be found among the group. No one had seen Him, not since they left Jerusalem.

With mounting panic, they traced their steps back up to Jerusalem, keeping an eye out for Jesus on the road. When Mary and Joseph arrive in Jerusalem they search long and hard for their boy. They would've searched first all the places in the city that would draw and captivate a young boy's attention. Perhaps they also searched those places where those with ill intentions might snatch and keep a young boy separated from his parents. But everywhere they search, they find no sign of Jesus. With each day that goes by without them seeing Him or hearing about Him the worry and panic keep building. As a last resort the head into the temple courtyard. And it is there that they find Him.

He is sitting with teachers of the Scriptures engaged theological discussions with them. It seems He has been there this whole time. This is not the kind of thing a normal 12-year-old boy would remain behind to do. Staying behind to play with some new friends in Jerusalem would be understandable. But for a boy not yet old enough to be held accountable to read the Torah in the Synagogues and observe all the traditions that those 13 years and older were held to, for Joseph and Mary this was a very strange place for Jesus to be hanging out, and a very strange activity for Him to be engaged in for 3 days.

But they are not the only ones who find this to be extraordinary. The teachers there in the temple are amazed at the wisdom and understanding this boy Jesus is showing in regard to the Scriptures. Now Jesus is not lecturing them, not as He would do many years later when He came to Jerusalem to teach, correct, and attempt to set straight the wrong understanding of the Scribes, the Pharisees, The Priests, and the Elders. He is doing what is respectful for His age, He is listening to them teach. But the questions He is asking regarding what they are teaching, and the practical applications He is making concerning what is taught are far beyond what a 12-year-old boy should normally be making. Perhaps His questions are stretching the boundaries of understanding for these much older teachers of Scripture. We are told that they are amazed at His understanding. How many other 12-year-old boys could move these teachers and captivate their attention so as to spend three days in private discussion with them?

Luke 2:48 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." This is the amazing scene that Mary and Joseph stumble upon. This is the scene that causes them to be astonished, to be standing there in shock. Surely contributing to this is the stress of three fruitless days of searching for their child and worrying that foul play may have befallen Him. Their boy who has always been obedient to their instructions has seemingly disobeyed them, not to play with other boys His age but to hang out in the Temple courtyard having theological discussions with teachers of Scripture. Moved by the stress and panic, as well as the weirdness of the whole situation Mary scolds her son saying, "You disobeyed and remained here in the temple this whole time? We told you we were leaving, and we expected you to leave with us! Your father and I had no idea where you were, and we have been scouring the countryside and the rest of the city looking for you! How could you put us through all this?"

Mary and Joseph speak from the heart but lack understanding. They look at this in the same manner that any mother and father would. But what is going on here is beyond their understanding. It is the working out of the wisdom and will of God. **Luke 2:49-50 ⁴⁹ And he (Jesus) 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.** Jesus is saying to His parents, 'Why did you bother looking all those other places? Have you not known that it is necessary to be in my Heavenly Father's house, involved in things that concern His Word and His will? It is this necessity that overruled your wish and desire that I leave with you three days ago with you. Mary and Joseph can't comprehend what is really going on here and neither can these teachers in the Temple. And that is because it is part of the working out of the Heavenly Father's will and plan that is often beyond our understanding.

What is beyond Mary and Joseph's Understanding

Now Mary and Joseph had each been enlightened by angelic messengers that their baby boy was no ordinary child. Both of them knew that while Jesus had an earthly mother, He had no earthly father. His father was God the Holy Spirit Himself in a manner that is beyond human understanding. They had the testimony that the shepherds told to them, revealed by the Lord's angels on the night Jesus was born, that this child was the fulfillment of the Messianic promise made to David, the one born to save people from their sins. And yet the testimony declared Him to be even more than the human Messiah, He is the Savior who is Christ the Lord. As the angel Gabriel revealed to Mary in **Luke 1:32, 35** ³² **He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,** ³⁵ **And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy---the Son of God.** While Mary and Joseph had these things revealed to them, the practical application of them going forward was not clear to them. In the Temple that day they were seeing what it truly meant that their child, while in many respects was just like any other 12-year-old boy, was something more. They were seeing a demonstration of knowledge and understanding that is exclusive to God alone. They were reminded that this child had a Heavenly Father, whose plan, purpose, and will must be obeyed over and above what they might desire. This child was in reality the Son of Man and at the same time the Son of God, both human and divine. And this was not something they could fully grasp. Neither was the reason that He must be both.

Jesus disciples would struggle with the same thing. Right after Peter proclaims through the wisdom and knowledge given to him by God of who Jesus is, that He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, Jesus tries to explain the practical application of the knowledge. It means that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer at the hands of the religious leaders, and be put to death, only to rise again three days later. This is beyond Peter's ability to comprehend, and he refuses to accept it, as all the disciples will until it actually happens. That's because this is the working out of the will, the wisdom, and the plan of God which is beyond our comprehension. We can only understand what is revealed to us in God's Word, and even then, struggle with the practical implications for our everyday life

Unlike Mary and Joseph and the teachers in the Temple, we understand who Jesus really is and why He needed to be God and Man. We understand that Jesus' suffering and death, although it looked at the time to be the defeat of God's will and plan for Jesus, was actually the victory of all victories. You confess and believe that since Jesus was truly a human being, with a human heart, mind, and will, that He was able to suffer for your sins and redeem you body and soul from the eternal death your sins earned for you. You believe that because He is at the same time the divine God, His death is not only the redemption price for all your sins but the sins of the whole world. You believe, even though it's beyond human understanding, that the suffering and dying of the man who is at the same time God on the cross took your place and fulfilled the sentence of eternal suffering in hell that was

to be yours. You believe and confess that because of all Jesus has done for you, that you need not fear judgment on the Last day.

This is what Paul is describing in our Epistle Lesson: **(Ephesians 1:7-11) ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.**” The plan of salvation that the Lord had put into action since before creation was beyond human understanding. It had to be revealed to us and graciously has been by the Holy Spirit working through the Scriptures, which are the only source we have of true wisdom. And with the gift of faith, you need not understand it all. You just need to believe is that God is at work, in ways and means that are beyond your understanding.

Conclusion: Carrying on Trusting By Faith

This was true for Mary and Joseph then. They didn't understand why it was Jesus had to do this. But they took Him home and He lived out the rest of His childhood in obedience to them.

We look around at what is going on in our world today and we struggle to see how God could be at work for our good. We see not only the pandemic still a source of worry and fear in our lives, we see other problems, perhaps other health related issues. For me I see this foot that is slow to heal, that I'm dealing with another round of cellulites in my leg, and continued problems with the hearing in my left ear, not to mention being down to one working car that has its own problems. I'm sure each of you has those issues that you hoped would be resolved with the coming of the New Year but are not. Some of them require our continued prayer and patience, as God does not work according to our timetable. But in many other ways it's because God doesn't work in the ways we can understand or expect. His goals are not the same as ours. We want things in this life to be the best that they can be. But His goal is that our faith becomes as strong as it can be so He can lead us through all the problems of this life so that we stand with Him in the life to come. We may not see and understand how, but God is still at work even in 2021. He began a miraculous work in you on the day He called you to faith in your baptism. And He is not done yet. He will be at work in you and around you throughout this New Year. And all the blessings that come, be they economic recovery, the eradication of COVID-19, or even the lessening or removal of other health problems, all these will be the direct result of His will being played out in your life and my life. No matter what happens in 2021, hold fast to your faith that He is at work in you and walking with you until you and I reach eternal life to come. Amen.