

Text: Luke 2: 41- 52  
Title: the Transition Point

Date: December 27 2009

I had an associate pastor who referred to the Sunday after Christmas as “Cannonball Sunday.” That was a new term for me, so I asked her about it. She said that on the Sunday after Christmas (Easter too, for that matter) one could fire a cannon in the sanctuary and no one would ever know. Her point was that people tend to travel, to be with family for the holidays and are, more often than not, not in church those days. As far as travelling in concerned, we are no different. Our son Ben was not able to get out of Minneapolis due to the snow, so we after church today we are driving up there to bring Christmas to him. On the other hand, it strikes me that the Sunday after Christmas is one we often overlook. I mean, after 4 weeks of Advent, all the frenzy of Christmas, the blizzard warning that resulted in our (and everybody else) canceling our Candlelight Service, the Sunday after Christmas get lost in the shuffle, after all, next week is New Years- and a new decade.

In a way, being overlooked is the theme of our passage this morning. On the face of it, this is kind of a weird story. Jesus travels with his family and others to the Passover celebration in Jerusalem. Sure, this was commanded by Jewish Law- but to a kid from the hick town Nazareth, this annual trip would have been a big deal. Along the way, he gets lost in the shuffle, his folks seem to have no doubt that he is hanging out with friends when he fails to join them. They only hit the panic button when he doesn't show up after the first day's journey. So they beat feet back to Jerusalem to look for him. They find him back in the temple, discussing the finer points of theology with the temple elders.

I don't blame Jesus-after all this is not Home Alone when the whole family went off on vacation, leaving the kid home alone. This is more like taking everyone to Disneyworld and leaving Jesus there when it is time to go back to normal life.

The larger question is, “Why did Luke decide to put this particular episode in?” On one hand this serves as a the missing link between the stories of Jesus and John's births and the beginning of their public ministries. But Luke is also foreshadowing here, dropping hints of what is to come.

Luke makes it a point to tell us that Jesus is 12- one year before his Bar Mitzvah, one year before he becomes an active member of the Covenant, in the eyes of the Law no longer a child, and given the right to teach and debate the elders in intricacies of Jewish Law. Perhaps this explains why Jesus seems a bit irritated at his parents “Do you have any idea what you have put is through” demeanor? After all, it’s not like he ditched them- he was left! Jesus already has a foot outside of Joseph’s house and authority- he here on His Father’s business, learning all that he can so that he can get on with his Father’s business. Evidently this went right over the heads of the elders, for they were amazed at the questions he posed and the answers he came up with – much in the same way that we would be amazed at a child prodigy on the piano.

In the end though, he acquiesces to his parents and returns home, growing , in Luke’s words, in wisdom and in years- and it will be over 15 years before we run across Jesus again. Luke uses this episode to set us up for Jesus’ public ministry.

All in all, it’s a forgettable episode- not a whole lot of drama, virtually no public teaching- yet Jesus’ first words in the Gospel are “Why were you searching for me, did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” That’s the point- the reason they did not understand- Jesus was not in Joseph’s house, he is here in Jerusalem, in the Temple. Jesus is saying 2 things: no disrespect to Joseph, but God has different plans for his life then carpentry. The Temple was seen as God’s house and the business that God is calling him towards includes him being here, and not home. Even more striking is referring to God as Father. We do this automatically, we a Christians and God is revealed to us in terms of personal relationship- that of a loving Father. This is completely outside of the Jewish tradition of the time. God was seen as transcendent, the King of the Universe, the Creator, the God of the Covenant. To refer to God in terms of personal relationship was to diminish God, to displace him from the throne of our worship- and to engage in borderline idolatry. Thus from the get go, Jesus is preaching- not the Law, not the Tradition- but the Gospel, that the God who created heaven and earth loves us and wants a relationship with us based on what God is going to do for us and not our obedience.

See what I mean? It is easy to overlook, easy to focus in on Jesus’ relationship with Mary and Joseph. Jesus may have been without sin, but that doesn’t mean that he

wasn't a twerp now and then. It is easy to focus in on his wowing of the elders, and to let Luke get away with foreshadowing the rest of the story. God as Father get lost in the mix.

That is the tipping point, the transition point, the one we must all cross. We can choose to think of the Christmas card Jesus- the baby in the manger that makes no demands on us, the one who is cute and cuddly, yet the one we can ultimately dismiss as having nothing to do with our lives. We can choose to think of the heavenly Jesus, the one who sits at God's right hand, the one that will come to judge the living and the dead. But he is not here and as far as judgment is concerned, we will cross that bridge when we come to it. To make a long story short- we can choose to deal with the Jesus we think we know- just as Mary and Joseph did.

Or we can listen to the lad of 12 as he reminds his earthy parents that God is revealed as Father- one who calls and one who must be obeyed. As we prepare to end one year and begin another, this we can be sure. That no matter what challenges and opportunities 2010 may bring; we know that that the One that we call Father holds us and them in His hands.