

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Christmas C 29 December 2024

Luke 2:41-52

St Peter's Lutheran Church, Elizabeth

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Grace and peace to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*'Child, why have you treated us like this?'* Let's pray: ...

Whenever you're about to lose your cool because your kids have \_\_\_\_\_, take comfort from the thought that even God was stretched by his first children. After creating heaven and earth, God created Adam and Eve. And the first thing he said to them was, "Don't!"

"Don't what?" Adam asked.

"Don't eat the forbidden fruit," God replied.

"Forbidden fruit? We've got forbidden fruit? Hey, Eve. We've got forbidden fruit!"

"No way! Where?"

"Don't eat that fruit!" said God.

"Why?"

"Because I am your Creator and I said so!" said God, wondering why he hadn't stopped after making the elephants.

A few minutes later God saw the kids having a fruit break and he felt his blood pressure rise.

"Didn't I tell you not to eat that fruit?" the First Parent asked.

"Uh huh," Adam replied.

"Then why did you?"

"I dunno," retorted Eve.

"She started it!" Adam exclaimed.

"Did not!"

"DID so!"

"DID NOT!"

Having had it with the pair of them, God's punishment was that Adam and Eve should have children of their own... thus the pattern was set, and it has never changed.

“Child, why have you treated us like this?” Sound familiar? Is this an echo from your childhood? Do you remember hearing those words, or, maybe using them in your own parenting?

Mary’s question to Jesus in today’s gospel puzzles people who view it from the perspective of Mary’s indignation over her 12-year-old son’s disobedience. But what if Mary’s anxiety is an attempt to mask the fact that she’s struggling with her babe in swaddling cloths growing up?

I remember watching my children and thinking to myself how hard growing up is. The difficulties surrounding decisions, priorities, desires, opinions, expectations, hopes, dreams, struggles and changes. And that was just me!

They were hard times but I was the one who was struggling with them growing up. The kids were fine. The problem was that I was looking at my teenagers but still seeing my little toddlers. But that’s not who they were. They were growing up and I had to let them grow up – for their sake and for mine. The only relationship I could have was with the adolescents standing before me, not with the little children of my memories.

I wonder if that’s how Mary and Joseph felt when they found Jesus “in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.” I wonder if they looked at their 12-year-old son and saw their baby “wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12); I wonder if, during her anxious search for Jesus, Mary recalled Simeon’s prophecy about her child’s destiny and the sword that would pierce her side (Luke 2:34-35); I wonder if Mary and Joseph were struggling with letting Jesus grow up; I wonder if *we* sometimes struggle with letting Jesus grow up? “Child, why have you treated us like this?”

Children are always challenging us to see and relate to things in new ways. They test the boundaries of our hopes, needs, dreams, and expectations. They trigger our fears, doubts, and insecurities. The child’s growing up necessarily changes the parents’ lives. Both my children did that to me. I did it to my parents. You did it to yours. And in today’s gospel Jesus is doing that to Mary and Joseph.

Jesus is growing up. He’s no longer a baby in a manger. He’s in his Father’s house, doing his Father’s business and that means things are changing for him, for Mary and Joseph, and for us. Jesus says as much in his response to Mary, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

“Did you not know...?” How do you react to Jesus’ words? They have the familiar ring of adolescent confidence, incredulity, and sass. But I think there’s more to them than that. Jesus is saying way more than the words he speaks. Consider the following:

- Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house, doing my Father’s business? Did you not know that if you want find me then you must look in the places where my Father is doing his work? If you want to see me then look for me where I am. If you want to know me then get to know who I truly am. If you want to be with me then join in with my kingdom building mission.
- Did you not know that the bands of cloth would be removed and I would leave the manger? Don’t let your sentimentality keep me there. I’m more than your memories of me. Your feelings about me are real, but they’re not me.
- Did you not know that I can be with you but I don’t belong to you? You can give me your love but not your thoughts or your ways (Isaiah 55:8)? Don’t try to make me like you. Follow me instead.
- Did you not know that I came to do my Father’s will, not yours? I didn’t come to meet your expectations of who you think I am, who you think I should be, or what you think I should be doing. Your expectations aren’t my concern. You, however, are.

We might have a relationship with our memories, images, and expectations of who we think Jesus is, who we want or need him to be, or what we think he should be doing, but that’s not a relationship with Jesus himself.

It’s not that Jesus has cut us off. We’ve cut ourselves off. We’ve refused to let him grow up. We’ve kept him small and helpless. We’ve wrapped him in the bands of our sentimentality and laid him in the manger of our desires, needs, and expectations. We might be looking at the one the angel announced to be “a Saviour, the Messiah, the Lord” (Luke 2:11), but odds are, that’s not who we’re seeing. “Did you not know...?”

Jesus refuses to let himself be defined by our misunderstandings. He won’t get tangled up in our emotions. He doesn’t live by our standards or opinions. He doesn’t seek our approval. That doesn’t mean Jesus doesn’t care. It means, rather, that he’s free to care, free to love, free to be present, and free to be fully himself.

We can't impose our needs, expectations, or anxieties on who Jesus is or what he does. We must let Jesus grow up. He's no longer a baby in a manger and that's good news for us.

Images of sweetness, sentimentality, and sanitised manger scenes make us feel warm and cozy but they don't do much to transform our lives. They don't speak a new truth to the unsavoury parts of our lives and world. We need the One who will call us into his Father's house and teach us his Father's business. "Did you not know...?"

Perhaps Luke's remark about the 12-year-old Jesus being obedient to his earthly parents [Luke 2:51], is his way of foreshadowing the obedience that Jesus would demonstrate to the will of his heavenly Father, when he would suffer and die for us. It was God's plan that his Son would take our sin on himself and the curse that goes with it, be arrested, unfairly tried, mocked, beaten, tortured, and crucified in the most shameful way known. And yet, he was obedient to his heavenly Father to the point of sacrificing his own life to save us all.

At his birth, he was named Jesus which means "Saviour", and his obedience did exactly that – saved us from sin and death. Jesus was obedient unto death for our disobedience. When we think of:

- our disobedience to the call to be faithful disciples;
- our disobedience to the invitation to pray to our heavenly Father;
- our disobedience to the command to love one another and to work together as his people in the church;
- our disobedience to the leaders in government, our parents, and those in authority,

we are indeed glad that Jesus was obedient to the point of dying for us, God's rebellious children.

Even at the age of twelve, Jesus is the obedient Son of his heavenly Father, and of his parents. His obedience took him to death on a cross, so that we who are disobedient might also grow into his image and become God's perfect sons and daughters. And like Mary, God treasures all these things in his heart. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds safe to the end of the age, in Christ Jesus. Amen.