

Pastor T.C. Arnold
1st Sunday after Epiphany
Luke 2:41-52
January 13th, 2019

Fourteen years ago, noted author Ann Rice, best known for her darkly themed books – especially her best seller, *Interview with a Vampire* – harkened back to her childhood faith of Catholicism and published a book called *Christ the Lord, Out of Egypt*. This book tells the story of a seven-year-old Jesus and his family leaving Egypt for the dangerous road home to Jerusalem. As they travel, the boy tries to unlock the secret of his birth and comprehend his terrifying power to work miracles. Anne Rice's novel is loosely based on the gospels and it describes a Jesus who is trying to figure out his own story as he struggles to grasp his holy purpose in life.

Even in the early centuries of the church there was great curiosity about the activities of the young Jesus. One author with a wild imagination wrote a work called the *Gospel of Thomas* which had nothing to do with the gospels as we know it. He shares a story where Jesus molds 12 little mud sparrows, and, when He is scolded for profaning the Sabbath, He claps His hands, and they fly away. In another instance He causes a child who has run against Him to drop dead. Another time He leaps down from the roof of a house and restores life to another child who has fallen off. All of the stories from this *Gospel of Thomas* show an arrogant little wonder boy, a little “super-Jesus,” if you will, who has a high opinion of himself, uses miraculous powers against all who oppose him, and has the power to escape the consequences of His deeds.

These stories are an interesting contrast to what we know about Jesus in the Scriptures. And that is what they are... just stories of a time in the life of Jesus that we don't really know what is going on. Yet, in the Gospel text for today, no one seems to know what's going on, even though we do. The religious leaders are astonished at the wisdom of the boy Jesus. Mary and Joseph are clueless. But what a difference when we look at the boy Jesus. What He said was correct and contrasts with what the others thought. He was right where He was supposed to be – In His Father's house.

In this text we have contrasts. Jesus is the child of Mary and Joseph. But he is the Servant of God, His Father. He is called a boy – but actually at age 12 He was considered a man – the age of His Bar mitzvah. The teachers stand in contrast to the wisdom of the boy Jesus. Jesus did things which seemed in contrast to the wishes of Mary and Joseph – but in reality – He was right where He was supposed to be. There are many strange contrasts – but it all happens to be right on target. Jesus knows what is going on and what needs to happen.

Look at the text again. Jesus asks Mary and Joseph, “*Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?*” Now granted – Mary and Joseph knew that their boy was special. They knew that Jesus was no ordinary boy. But what they expected from Jesus is not what Jesus would actually do. Mary and Joseph expected Jesus to be in their house – that is – with their family on the way back home. But Jesus was in His Father's house – His heavenly house and not His earthly house. This is where He was supposed to be even though Mary and Joseph really didn't understand how all that worked. But Jesus knows. He knows what is going on and what needs to happen – even though his earthly parents really didn't.

Not only did Jesus know what needed to happen at age 12, He knew what needed to happen at age 30. This is about when Jesus started His public ministry at His baptism – which also is celebrated on the Sunday after the Epiphany. The time was right – though the people weren't ready – nor would they ever be. Jesus knew what needed to be done. He was born to do this job. He preached, gathered a small following, and then would be accused of the most detestable crime – heresy. The charge of claiming to be God Himself. This all needed to be done – it all had to happen. Jesus would give Himself up on that

cross so that our redemption could be won. And it is. We are the winners because Jesus knew exactly what needed to happen – as a boy – as a man. He knew what was going on.

You see, Jesus was not disobeying His parents or creating mud sparrows and making them live. He was in the place that He was supposed to be – His Father’s house. This is your Savior. He is aware and willing and able to do the Father’s will, on your behalf and for your blessing. He is the one who desires to stand in your place so the Father’s wrath rests upon the shoulders of His Son rather than on you. We never need to look at all that Jesus might have done... as a boy or as an adult. All we need is what He has shown us He has done – that wonderful and blessed work on the cross.

So, we look to the cross alone for God’s mercy and grace. It came in God’s greatest moment of weakness in order to demonstrate that in our weaknesses, our God is present. He knows them. He understands them. And He suffered it all and comes through misery into our misery and, as a result, shows us what kind of God we really have. Our God comes in power through humility. Our God redeems through death and not is some glorious demonstration that leaves the world in awe because of sovereignty. Our God demonstrates His command over death, not by making mud sparrows to live... but by tasting death Himself so that you never have to.

Remember – there is no other way, beloved in the Lord. Everything depends on Christ’s death on the cross. In our lives lived under the cross we often times don’t act like Christ IS the only one who matters. Why is that? Well, because, we often times think that there is so much more that matters.

A vacation to plan, a school outing to attend, a business trip to go to... These are the kind of things that consume us in our daily lives. The big things, to us, are the most important. Sometimes these are very necessary things. But I will tell you this – sometimes these very necessary things consume us to the point that we tend to then forget about who gives us all our blessings to support our families, to go on these vacations and have these school outings in the first place. They take priority in our lives. And we think – “well, they have to.” Wrong! These things are never priority in our lives. Where you are at today is priority number one. To put this second is dangerous. The reason: every blessing flows from the Lord – if you cut off the source – disregard the provider – the end result will be carelessness toward our God in what we do, say, and share. That’s dangerous. And that is never to be our life.

The contrast is this: with all these things that our Lord has blessed us with, all that consumes us – He provides what we need through them so that we can see what God has given more clearly. The contrast of a boy being lost – that is – Jesus being in His Father’s House – didn’t seem right to Mary and Joseph but makes perfect sense to Jesus. Jesus winning our souls through death and humility is a stumbling block to the world. Not to us. Beloved in the Lord – all that we have been given shows us all the more what Christ gives to us all. What we have that sometimes seems “less than a blessing” and that consumes us – can actually be a blessing to us and our family. Sometimes it’s just a little harder to find.

Jesus back in His Father’s House was a blessing in contrast to Mary and Joseph’s worries. Jesus living out the perfect life for us is a blessing in contrast to our imperfect lives. Jesus loved us to death, that is, His death on the cross for our lives in contrast to us not loving Him in the same way. Beloved, at Christmas we celebrated how God became man for us. Now it’s Epiphany. Today we celebrate how this man Jesus was made known as God to the world. That’s an interesting contrast. But that’s our loving God. Epiphany means appearing. He appears to us as the light of the world – a loving God who died for you. You are loved children of God. You are saved children of God. What a contrast to what we deserve. But that’s our Gospel God. Loving us so much – more than we can understand. Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus until life everlasting. Amen.