

December 30, 2018

Christmas 1

One 9:30AM service

Gospel: Luke 2:41-52

Jesus grew up in a family that went to the Passover festival each year. It was in this environment of faithful adherence to the law that Jesus grew into spiritual maturity and an understanding of his identity and mission.

⁴¹Now every year [Jesus'] parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴²And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. ⁴³When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. ⁴⁴Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. ⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." ⁴⁹He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰But they did not understand what he said to them. ⁵¹Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

⁵²And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

What a difference 5 days can make. Even though we are still in the Christmas season, the 6th day of Christmas, when six geese are a laying; Jesus in our Gospel text has already aged 12 years. How is that for growing up fast? Part of the reason is that when it comes to stories after his birth, there are not a lot of other remaining stories on his youth. We do not hear about when he started to walk, we do not hear about his first tooth, or the first words he uttered out loud. We do not know how the terrible twos were for Mary and Joseph, and then again, we might think Jesus wouldn't have been a terrible two would he? He is the Son of God; but he is also God incarnate God as one of us. And today we hear a little bit about him acting in a way that surprised his parents, perhaps a universal experience for any parent with their child. Jesus, today, if you will, sort of begins to exercise his independence. There are many stage from infant to youth to adult that involve the spreading of our wings and setting new boundaries.

I can do it myself... How many of us remember saying that when we were a kid... or have heard children tell us that? I remember when my mom tried to pick out clothes for me at certain ages, and I told her, "I can do it myself." And I ended up wearing some pretty interesting outfits. When she tried to teach me how to tie my shoes I said, "I can do it myself," which resulted in a knotted mess. My wife Karen says that when her dad went to pour her a glass of milk to go with her Oreos, she exclaimed, "I can do it myself," and just about the entire gallon ended up on the floor.

As children, we want to be independent. We want to prove that we can do things for ourselves. And this "I can do it myself attitude" follows us into adulthood. We move out of our parents' house... maybe we go to college... or begin to work. But we want to prove that we can make it on

our own because if we don't, if we can't "do it ourselves" then maybe we feel as though we've failed.

But what happens when we begin to let "I can do it myself" interfere with how we live our lives? Like taking on yet another big project at work despite already being so stressed that you're losing sleep and you won't ask for help because you think "I can do it myself." Or trying to fix that computer that keeps crashing... you know that there are highly trained professionals who could easily solve the problem. But you think, "I can do it myself," and now the computer won't even turn on.

And how about when it is something much bigger... when you're facing something really difficult in your life... the loss of a job, the loss of a loved one, accident or illness, addiction, abuse... the weight of it crushing down on you. All you want to do is talk to someone... to get some kind of outside help... but that would make you vulnerable... so you stay silent and think, "I can do it myself."

I think today's reading from Luke is almost a beginning glimpse of Jesus telling his parents "I can do it myself" attitude. But this boy, who is God incarnate is just a little bit different from the norm. Even the leaders in the temple who are there with their services day after day offering sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins, as leaders of the temple are in awe. For really the leaders of the temple believed that the approach to God was one of a formula – of doing it for themselves in a way. It seems as though they have gotten into a rut. They believe that their actions have the power to take away sin. They believe they have the power. They can do it themselves.

We recognize that they are the leaders of the religious and so they have responsibilities that put pressure on them, but I think there is also a

degree of arrogance involved. Why do WE always think WE have to do everything ourselves? Is it out of fear? Fear that handing over the reigns to someone else means that they might fail and disappoint or reflect poorly on us? Or even worse, fear that they might do a better job and show us up... and that's proof that we have failed. Is it plain human greed... or pride... or is it simply because we need to feel like we are in control of a situation even though it is so terribly obvious that we aren't?

But as much as we want to be in control, as much as we want to say "I can do it myself..." the truth of the matter is that there are things that we simply can't do for ourselves. The whole point of God in the Christmas event is to remind us that we haven't been able to do it for ourselves, we currently cannot do it for ourselves, and the future does not look to change things either. Often part of the root of our straying from God is when we develop the attitude that I/we can do it ourselves, alone and away from God.

However, the Good News of Christmas, the Good News of the Gospel reminds us that we do not have the power to save ourselves from sin and death. We cannot overcome evil and sin by ourselves. No amount of projects at work... no amount of accomplishments or awards... no amount of good deeds can overcome all the wrong that we do. It is only through the grace of Christ's death on the cross that our sins are overcome and we are made clean.

Christ on the cross reminds us that we can't do it ourselves. We can't save ourselves from sin, and in a world where evil and wrong-doing are a part of our everyday lives, we can't face everything alone. We simply can't do it by ourselves.

But letting someone else in... relying on someone else... whether that someone else is God... or a person in the community around us, can be especially scary. It can be scary because then we have to admit to ourselves that we aren't in control. We have to let someone else into the inner-workings of our world, and that makes us vulnerable. And we don't like feeling vulnerable. But I think the alternative is much worse.

If we let "I can do it myself" run our lives, we soon find ourselves isolated from the people around us. We find ourselves with more weight on our shoulders than a person can bear. We have to take our inward view... that "I can do it myself" mentality that isolates us from God and from one another... and we have to turn it outward. We have to open ourselves up to the strange and admittedly scary world of relying on someone else... relying on God... and relying on the community of faith that God has given us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

And as much as it may not seem like it... as much as it may be counter-cultural... relying on someone else is not about showing weakness... it is about having strength. Because when we come together, when we rely on God and on one another, we become a community of faith that encourages and supports one another... one that provokes love and charity... and we grow strong together.

So, on this 6th day of Christmas we are reminded of the Word who became flesh. We are reminded of the baby in the manger who became the Savior of the world. We are reminded that when we attempt to accomplish salvation for ourselves, we fall short, but also we have a God who goes to all lengths to accomplish for us. Thank God for the Messiah among us. Amen.