

- **1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26**
- **Psalm 148**
- **Colossians 3:12-17**
- **Luke 2:41-52**

December 29, 2024

SERMON:

## **LEAVING HOME**

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Summary: A house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens

The demarcation line between youth and adulthood is a vague one, like the dividing line between day and night, and it's one that varies from culture to culture. In our own American culture, it's probably most commonly associated roughly with graduation from high school, which is also a graduation either into the adult working world or the world of so-called higher education. Not always, but often, this involves leaving home; but what it really involves is a change of perspective, a change of attitude, both towards the world and towards oneself.

Growing up means establishing our identity and figuring out our place in this world. It involves creating relationships, setting priorities, making decisions. We must choose values and beliefs that structure our lives. Along the way we make mistakes, get lost, backtrack, and sometimes just need to start over. Ultimately, growing up means moving out and finding a new home. This may be a

geographical move, but most certainly it involves psychological and spiritual relocation.

In the Christian life, there is also a line between youth and adulthood. It's what Saint Paul was referring to when he wrote to the Corinthians:

**11** When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I set aside childish ways. **12** Now we see but a dim reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known....

This movement from the condition of spiritual immaturity to Christian adulthood is beautifully modeled for us in the lectionary reading for this morning. So let's read it together now:

- **Luke 2:41-52**

In Jewish law of the time, males over 12 years old were considered adults, and were therefore required to travel to Jerusalem for the Passover festival as often as possible. Mary and Joseph, we are told, attended every year, but on this particular year, since he was now twelve years old, they took their son, Jesus, with them.

Since women travelled more slowly than the men, it would not have been unusual, at the end of the feast, for Mary to have departed back to Nazareth in a separate, earlier party of women that Joseph travelling with the men, with each thinking their son, Jesus, was with the other party.

But there came a time when the two parties merged again the journey, and we can imagine their shock and dismay when they discovered that Jesus was with neither party, had instead been left behind in Jerusalem. The account in Luke describes

very beautifully and realistically Mary's reaction of relief when they find Jesus sitting at the feet of rabbis teaching in the Temple courtyard.

She says: "Child, why have you treated us like this?" What I really hear is, "Where have you been young man? Your father and I did not survive angel visits, birth in a manger, and living like refugees in Egypt only to have you get lost in Jerusalem."

But Jesus very gently but also very definitely takes the name 'father' from Joseph and gives it to God. It is as if he is saying, "Remember, the angel told you I would be the Son of God. Remember that night in Bethlehem. Angels praising God, shepherds glorifying God. Remember the three men from the East, their gifts, and adoration. Remember Joseph's dreams that guided us to Egypt and back. Where else could I be but here, in my true father's house?"

Jesus has moved from Mary and Joseph's home to the Father's home. This is not a rejection of his earthly parents – as our account makes clear, by telling us that he returned to live with them as an obedient child for the next twenty or so years – but it is a re-prioritizing of relationships. It is what Jesus would ask of Simon and Andrew, James and John twenty or so years later. "Follow me" would be the invitation for them to leave their homes, their nets, their own families and move to a different place, to live a different life, to see with different eyes. It is the invitation to them and to all of us, the graduate from the ties that bind us to our spiritual childhood to the new spiritual adulthood that awaits us when we leave our own homes and enter into our true, eternal home, with God our Father in His heavenly kingdom.

And what we all learn from this is that growing up spiritually involves leaving our comfort zone, letting go of what is safe and familiar, and moving to a bigger place,

to the Father's place. This letting go is a necessary detachment if we are to grow in the love and likeness of Christ. It means we must leave our own little homes.

We all live in many different homes. Homes of fear, anger, and prejudice. Homes of grief and sorrow. Homes in which we have been told or convinced that we don't matter, that we are not enough, unacceptable, or unlovable. Homes in which we have been or continue to be hurt or wounded. Homes in which we have hurt or wounded another. Homes of indifference and apathy. Homes of sin and guilt. Homes of gossip, envy, pride.

Every one of us could name the different homes in which we live, homes that keep our life small, our visions narrow, and our world empty. The problem is that sometimes we have become too comfortable in these homes.

But they are not our true homes. They are not the home God offers us. We may have to pass through them but we do not have to stay there. Jesus says that there is not only another home for us but invites, guides, and grows us up into that home. It is a place he knows well. It is the Father's home in which we can know ourselves and each other to be his beloved children, created in his image and called to be like him, a home in which we live in rooms of mercy, forgiveness, joy, love, beauty, generosity, compassion.

Leaving home spiritually does not necessarily mean leaving our physical or geographical home though sometimes it might. It does mean examining and re-prioritizing the values, beliefs, and relationships that establish our identity and give our life meaning and significance. It means letting go of an identity that is limited to our biological family, job, community reputation, ethnic group, or political party

and trusting that who we truly are, who we are eternally meant to be, is who we are in God.

It means that we stop relating to one another by comparison, competition, and judgment and begin relating through love, self-surrender, and vulnerability. It means that we let go of fear about the future and discover that God is here in the present and that all shall be well. We stop ruminating on past guilt, regrets, and sins and accept the mercy and forgiveness of God and each other.

So I wonder what are the little homes in which you live, in which I live? How have they bound up our lives, stifled our growth, and kept us from the Father's home? What might we have to leave behind in order to grow up and move to a better place? Those can be hard questions, painful questions, all the harder the longer we have delayed the decision, the more comfortable we are, the more resigned we have become to the material rewards of our familiar, accustomed comforts and habits, to the allurements and temptations of spiritual immaturity.

“Jesus, why have you treated us like this?” is a question we might all ask of our Lord, and perhaps there is no better time than today, at the threshold of a new year, to reflect on this question. “Why have you asked us to pack our bags and leave our home, the home of our spiritual childhood, with all the loss that entails?”

And his answer, if we are prepared to receive it, will always be the same:

“Because I love you. I love you enough to grow you up, to find you when you are lost, and to bring you with me into the Father's home.”

*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11: 29)*

And so our prayer for today and for the coming year, heavenly Father, is that you strengthen us to step out of the world of our earthly home and into one of the many mansions in your heavenly Kingdom, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, prepared for each of us by your only begotten Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.