

## **SERMON: Sunday – 15 January 2023 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

### **BEING ABOUT THE THINGS OF THE FATHER**

Isaiah 60:1-6

Luke 2:41-52

I wonder why Luke includes this story from Jesus' childhood, really the only story on the Gospels that does so?

Was it to teach us that Jesus was just like other 12 year olds? Wandering off on his own?

Or was it to show us that he wasn't like other 12 year olds? That he was different? Had amazing understanding and answers that others didn't?

Maybe it was both.

In their humanity, Mary and Joseph must've been at least a wee bit worried at their son's disappearance.

But they travelled on for a day. Maybe it was ok for the first 24 hours, though that seems quite a long time to be apart. But at least they were in a crowd most of whom likely knew each other.

Mary is quoted as saying,

'Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.'

Any parent who's lost a child even for a few moments will be able to relate to the mixture of emotions that such an event can cause.

Luke has Jesus responding that there shouldn't have been any need for his mum and dad to search for him because they should've known where he'd be or what he'd be doing.

It sounds a bit uncaring on both sides but I think Luke is trying to record from a story he's heard about and in a way so as to emphasise Jesus 100% commitment to his mission. Even at such a young age; an age nowadays associated in Jewish circles as the age of bar mitzvah or entry into adulthood.

Since the Middle Ages, this coming of age in Judaism has meant that the child is now responsible for their own actions and can decide for themselves

how they would like to practice Judaism; and it's most common for boys at age 13 and girls at age 12.

Although Jesus lived before these practises were introduced, there were likely similarities in thinking in Hebrew families. Think of the ancient Hebrew story of Hannah dedicating her son Samuel to the Lord and leaving him to grow up in the house of the Lord at Shiloh.

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The Hebrew Bible Book of Samuel tells us that,

... the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favour with the Lord and with people.

1 Samuel 2:26

A verse almost identical to what Luke went on to say about Jesus,

And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

Luke 2:52

Though he was wise enough to make the elders gawp in amazement, he wasn't beyond obediently returning home to Nazareth to live simply at home and grow quietly day by day.

Some translations of the Bible suggest a particular interpretation. And here, the NIV perhaps isn't best.

(SLIDE)

Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?

Perhaps puts too much emphasis on a particular sacred place - there in the Temple at Jerusalem.

But the Greek literally translates as

Did you not know that it is necessary for me to be in the things of my Father (en tois tou patros me dei einai me) or about the affairs of my father or concerned with my father's business.

His will be done.

I've no doubt that this is how Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature, through being focussed on the things of God, his father.

(SLIDE)

Even towards the end of his life, his cry was,

“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”

Luke 22:42

(SLIDE)

So what might this mean for us today?

Is it simply that what matters most in life is being about the things of God our father and to do so wherever we are, in whatever context we find ourselves?

Or might it be that we identify with Mary or Joseph as they search and search and then rejoice and then learn to let go and to treasure in their hearts the fleeting glimpses of Christ before us?

Luke writes about Mary that,

(She) treasured all these things in her heart.

Not understanding everything. Asking questions. Why? How come? When? What will he be?

Yet knowing that journey with God will be one of trial and blessing; of hurt and laughter; of tears and joy; of fragile times and confident times; of darkness and light;

And that in the end, all will be well. For it's all in good hands. The hands of a father who cares and whose business is for the good of all; whose business is love.

The good news is that, through the gift of the Spirit of God, we have that same mind of Christ so that our call to follow God is one we can truthfully respond to. We can, like Jesus, be about our father's business, concerned with the business of love in the world.

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As Richard Rohr put it recently,

“God is calling *every one and every thing, not just a few chosen ones*, to God's self (Genesis 8:15–17; Ephesians 1:9–10; Colossians 1:15–20). To get every one and every thing there, God first needs models and images who are willing to be “conformed to the body of his death” and transformed into the body of his resurrection (Philippians 3:10). These are the “new creation” (Galatians 6:15), and their transformed state is still seeping into history and ever so slowly transforming it into “life and life more abundantly” (John 10:10).”

By which I think he simply means that God is looking for people with the obedience of Jesus to pray Father your will be done. Hence why the Lord's Prayer contains those key words, your kingdom come, your will be done. That's the business of God the father and we know his way is love.

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Yes its right to stand amazed in awe and wonder at the wisdom of Jesus the boy teacher. But it's right too to seek to be like Jesus in every way by seeking to be obedient and to grow in wisdom and favour as he did.

Let's pray together,  
Heavenly Father  
We thank you for Jesus the Teacher  
For his example of obedience to your will  
And growth in the things of you.  
As we seek to follow him  
May we trust your Holy Spirit at work in us  
To do your will  
And see your kingdom come.  
In Jesus name.  
Amen.