

Sermon Text for December 30, 2018

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

I Samuel 2:18-20, Luke 2:41-52

“When it becomes real”

I guess it was about a year ago, or was it two years when a committee was formed from our retreat to see how we could worship together as a single congregation with one worship service. We did it once in the summer and have brought it back this Sunday morning since it is the 5th Sunday of the month and we have a blended service anyway. We are in that week of limbo between Christmas and New Year where people don't always work the full week, the festivities have been cranked up and we may be a bit weary of them.

Family gatherings can have varying degrees of success and it is this time of year that they are in full swing. We all have the same traditions just about every year. Our family on Christmas Day goes hiking. We have always done it, it is something that we just do. Now that we face the New Year we have a tradition to celebrate it at my brothers house and we always go bowling in Newtown Square, or some years they come here and we ring the church bell at midnight.

But the turning of a year on the calendar does not necessitate the changing of a life to follow Jesus more closely. Hannah and her husband Elkenah had a tradition to go to Shiloh to see their son Samuel every year. He was just a little boy who wore little robes so they would bring him one every year. Jesus and his family had a tradition every year to go to the temple for Passover. But this year for Jesus and his family things got a bit different, it all of a sudden became real for everyone in the family. Mary and Joseph now are faced with a reality this year that was very different from years past.

You see our radical devotion to the work of our heavenly Father can create anxiety and awkwardness to those that we love the most around us. Our need to follow the desires of our creator can sometimes create misunderstanding. When it becomes real, when we realize all of this really happened, then things can get different, it did for Jesus and his family. Let's read.

READ SCRIPTURE

There are some very interesting parallels between these stories of Jesus and Samuel if we look at them closely. Look at I Samuel 2:26 and Luke 2:52. Both of their families are going to the primary place of worship in their time. Jesus and his family went to the Temple and Hannah and her family went to Shiloh where the chief priest and his sons, and now little Samuel was. Remember Samuel had been consecrated to live and work for the Lord in the church. I want you

to realize the sacrifice that Hannah has made in her life. At this point this is her only son who is promised to the tabernacle in Shiloh.

She is able to see him maybe once or twice a year. Can you imagine? This reality has by now set in and the sacrifice is clear for this family. The glamour of having a son working for the high priest had faded and worn off by now, probably had worn off when he turned 5 or earlier. Growing up as a missionary kid and then being a missionary with kids overseas we were acutely aware of the sacrifices that some families had to make. My mom and her 3 siblings were home schooled when she grew up in the Congo, but many missionaries in Africa sent their children to Rift Valley Academy in Kenya for boarding. Once a year, besides the summer, kids would be reunited with their families.

Serving the Lord becomes real when your kids are in the middle of it all. When we told the church in Florida about our plans to go back to the mission field in Russia the most questions we got were about our kids. People could not imagine that we would subject them to a life in a foreign country. Hannah and her husband made an extreme sacrifice by giving their son to the service of the Lord, like for keeps.

In Luke we could have chosen a Scripture of when Jesus was dedicated 8 days after his birth. But that would have still been an infancy narrative and the lines between that event and Christmas could have been blurred. So I chose the only story in the Bible that we have of Jesus as an adolescent. Jesus' family was definitely a religious family. Every year they would go, as all Jewish families were commanded to go, to Jerusalem for the 7 day celebration of Passover. So this year, Jesus' 12th year, was no different.

But it could have been different because this was the year that Jesus had to understand the law because at 13, some say 12, he had to obey it. Joseph, his father, was still around so they would have gone into the temple together with his brothers, Mary and his sisters would have gone into a different section since the temple was divided in this way.

We think there could have been some celebration since this signified his last year of childhood and his impending manhood. The term Bar Mitzvah and the celebration associated with it is a modern construct, but this may have been what it looked like. Trumpets blaring, people clapping, a celebration. It would have been a year to remember, which is why it is mentioned. It is a year like our confirmation when your faith is supposed to be real, it is supposed to be your faith and you are now held responsible for your actions.

The Passover week is over and the family piles into their Dodge Caravan to head back home. Well, it was a caravan, but it was potentially hundreds of people in a long line as they

walked home from where they were, it would take a few days to get there. All the cousins are playing together as they make their way out of the valley of Jerusalem and along rugged roads. All the adults are exhausted from these past seven days and just can't wait to get home, they have their eyes set on Nazareth. At night it is time for the families to come together to sleep and Uncle Jim hasn't seen Jesus all trip when Mary asks if he is with him. Joseph and Mary realize that he is not with the group. They go back a day's journey alone, it is dangerous doing that alone. But they were used to it, they had done this trip every year. Plus, it couldn't be nearly as bad as their first long trip together when Mary was pregnant and they had to go from Nazareth to Bethlehem, all alone, 12 years ago when Jesus was born, they could do this.

They spend a day going back a day from where they came for the sole purpose of finding their son. It is now the third day since they saw him last. Let us go to the temple and pray. Probably should have done that first. Things are real now. Their firstborn son is lost, probably forever. Probably picked up by someone travelling through Jerusalem amidst the hoards of pilgrims and maybe he was sold off into slavery and on the road toward his new home now. Those things happened back then.

They make their way to the temple, and they see him there. We don't read of a glad reunion, of Mary hugging him and being overjoyed with finding him. We read that he had a good head on his shoulders. There were no questions of where were you staying these last three nights? Mary's frustration and bewilderment comes out as she says: how could you do this to us? Your father and I have been worried sick. We may never have found you. But you see for Jesus the circle of his own awareness and the sense of a larger duty begins to widen and deepen beyond the home in Nazareth. This growth would, of course, lead to tension in the family, as it does in this Scripture.

Mary's question of how could you treat us like this, verse 48, and your father and I have been so anxious to find you, again vs. 48, then in vs. 50 and the express literalism: they did not understand. There are statements that reflect tension in the family, a tension that would not dissipate. We read elsewhere that his brothers and sisters think he lost his mind so they go to get him out of the crowds in which he finds himself. He responds by saying who is my mother or my father or my siblings, those who do my will are my family.

Here, Jesus responds to Mary with a double meaning: I know you and my father are anxious, but you should have known where to find me, I am here to do my father's wishes. We know who doesn't mean Joseph, but his biological father with whom he was one, God the Father.

But Jesus in vs.51 still subjected himself to their authority. It seems like every Christmas there is a pro athlete who pays off their parents mortgage and debts, it was a baseball player this year. Every young adult comes to recognize their parents sacrifice at some time in their life. My parents dropped me off at college at 18 and left the country. We would communicate to each other by sending cassette tapes back and forth. The news was never timely, the cold I had was better by the time they got my tape in Honduras 3 weeks later.

But I'll never forget recording and sending the message where it all became real for me. When I started off apologizing for my teenage years and then thanked them for their sacrifices and for their love over the years. I was 19 then and I realized that my parents actually had a lot to offer, and had offered me a lot.

This scene in the Bible depicts a time where it became real for Mary and Joseph but we read they did not understand it. What if Christmas was real? I mean, what if God did actually choose to become one of us and God the father was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, not by sending his kids to Russian schools, but to allow his son, his only son to die, so that all of humanity, so that you and me, could live.

Mary pondered all these things in her heart as she did when Gabriel came to her, and as when the shepherds came in, and when that ancient Simeon and Hannah spoke to them in the temple. She did not understand, but she was the only one who stayed by his side every step of the way.

It becomes real to us, all of this, at some point in our lives and we may not understand all of it, but enough that we want to be a part of it. We don't always understand the sacrifice that our God made on our behalf. We may still be young teenagers in our faith but when it does become real, don't expect there to be a party from those around us. They may like the old you who wasn't as serious and let small sins slide.

When all this becomes real for us, it can be something that is transformative for us and those around us. Amen.