

# IN THE FATHER'S HOUSE!

January 10, 2010

Rev. Mark F. Bartels

Old Testament Lesson; Ecclesiastes 12:1-7

Epistle Lesson; Romans 12:1-5

Gospel Lesson;

Sermon Text; Luke 2:41-52

The text that we will look at today, which is the first Sunday after Epiphany, is recorded in the holy Gospel, according to St. Luke, the second chapter, beginning with verse 41. Here we see Jesus, at age 12. It takes all of us to our youth.

Every year His parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When He was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while His parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking He was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for Him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find Him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for Him. After three days they found Him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard Him was amazed at His understanding and His answers. When His parents saw Him, they were astonished. His mother said to Him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

"Why were you searching for me?" He asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

But they did not understand what He was saying to them.

Then He went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

These are Your Words, Heavenly Father. Lead us in the way of truth. Your Word is truth.

Amen

I want to tell you about 285 years ago, yesterday, which would have been January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1724. I want to tell you what fifty-five young, adolescent boys did in a church. They were between the ages of 8 and 17. These boys went to an all-boys' school, called St. Thomas Lutheran School. It was part of a church called St. Thomas Lutheran Church. This church, (pretty much like Holy Cross), ran a school. This school included middle school and high school age students. In this school, there was a man who was supposed to be the music director for these boys. There were several hundred boys in this school. Imagine being music director for several hundred adolescent boys! He was to be their choir director, as well. (Tough job!) In addition to that, this music director was given an almost daunting task by the church, by the congregation. His job was to, every Sunday, look at the Historic Lectionary, which are the Bible verses we are following this year. During the course of one week, he was to look at the Gospel reading for the coming Sunday. The congregation told him, *“We want you to write music that is like a little sermon put to music, about the lectionary for the coming Sunday. We want you to write music to it and we want you to teach that to the boys' choir. You have one week to teach it to them. And then, on Sunday morning, every Sunday morning we want that boys' choir to sing in St. Thomas Church. And then, we want them to go across town to St. Nicholas Church, every single Sunday. We want them to sing that song you have taught them.”*

Do you know what his name was? Johann Sebastian Bach was this choir director. And for over five years, every single week, he wrote what was called a “cantata.” It is considered a superhuman work of art he had done. In addition to that, the text, the words he wrote for the boys' choir to sing are considered very deep theology.

And so, every Sunday, these fifty-five boys would sing this deep theology of Bach's cantatas. It happened to be January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1724 when those fifty-five boys had this very same text before them that we have before ourselves, today. It was the text of the young 12 year old Jesus, who was lost, and His parents were looking for Him. Bach did this masterful job! He wrote it as if the boys, themselves, were the ones who had lost the Savior and they were looking for Him.

Just imagine sitting there, as you hear these fifty-five, young, adolescent boys begin by singing how the Lord Jesus is lost and how they are longing to find Him. Then they join in this choral, and it is put to the music of, “Like The Golden Sun Ascending.” I don't know if you recognize that melody, but they sing this plaintive song,

*“Jesus you are our deliverer.*

*You are our dragon slayer.*

*And, we have lost You.*

*Our heart aches for you,*

*oh, little Jesus.”*

They are longing to hear His voice. They are longing to find Him. As this cantata goes on, all of a sudden, they hear His voice! Their hearts pick up, as they follow the voice. They find Jesus in the temple. There He is, gathered around the Word.

As the cantata goes on, these boys recognize that Jesus is found wherever the Word is. Wherever the sacraments are, that is where our Lord Jesus is found.

Then, he ends this cantata with this beautiful chorus again, where all of these voices come in and the boys sing,

*“Now that I have found you, Jesus.  
Now that I have you  
I will never forsake you.  
I will always stay by your side.”*

I love the fact that Bach, besides being a great musician, was an excellent youth leader. He had high expectations for the youth of his congregation of which he was a teacher, a Christian Day School teacher. He understood that the youth were fully capable of doing great things for the Lord. He held them to very high standards and enabled them to produce some great things for the Lord. In addition to that, Bach wanted the youth to see how intricately the Word of the Lord applied to them, just as much as it does for the adults who are in the congregation.

You know, there are some churches that teach an age of accountability. They teach that until you reach a certain age, as a young person, you are really not accountable to God. But, that is not what scripture teaches. Scripture teaches that our accountability to the Lord begins at the moment of our conception. The Bible says,

“I was sinful at birth,  
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”

Already at that point, we are accountable to God. God's standards for young people are just as high as His standards for older people. God expects perfection from every single one of us, no matter what age we are. Which is why King David, in one of the Psalms, Psalm 25, in a prayer to the Lord said,

“Lord, remember not the sins of my youth.”

He looks back over his life and he remembers, also, the sins he committed as a young person.

There was a pastor who lived back in the early 1600's. (I have mentioned his name before.) His name was Johann Gerhardt. When he was in his early 20's, he wrote a beautiful, little, prayer book called, *Sacred Meditations*. It was intended to help the users of this

prayer book to grow in their Christian piety. He wrote prayers for all different circumstances that we might be under, different sins that we might be tempted with. And, one of the prayers he wrote is called ***Remembering the Sins of my Youth***. This is a great prayer. I don't care how old you are. You may be 90 years old. You are still accountable for the sins you committed in your youth. Maybe you are twelve years old. You are accountable for the sins you commit in your youth. So, I want to read through this prayer. It will get each one of us to consider our own youth, and the situations we were in and the sins we committed. And then, it does something masterful, at the end. Please follow along with me.

*O HOLY GOD, just Judge, do not remember the faults of my youth (Psalm 25:7). Do not recall any more the sins of my past (Jeremiah 31:34). The root of evil desire produced so much poison fruit in my childhood. The evil of original sin produced so many actual sins. The thoughts of my heart are depraved and perverse from earliest childhood, even from tender infancy (Genesis 6:5). If I were a day-old infant, in Your sight I would still not be innocent (Job 14:4). The faults and failures that weigh on me are as many as the days of my life; in fact, they are many more because even a righteous person falls seven times in a day, (Proverbs 24:16). If a righteous person falls seven times in a day, I believe that I, hopeless and unrighteous, have fallen seventy times seven times in a day. Life increased and the web of sins increased. However much You kindly added to the length of my life, my defective and corrupt nature added an equal amount to the weight of my sins. I look back at my life and find the most foul and filthy cloak of sins. When I compare the course of my life to the light of Your precepts, I find only darkness and blindness. My youth should have been picked like a tender young flower, worn as a crown of virtue, and offered to You as a fragrant scent. The best of my years should have belonged to*

*You, the Creator of nature. But the filth of sins polluted that flower of my youth in the foulest way. The stinking filth of transgressions fouled it terribly and miserably. Of all our years, the earliest are the most apt time for us to serve God. However, I used most of mine to serve the devil. The memory of many sins committed in my promiscuous and uncontrolled youth weighs heavy on my mind. Worse yet, many more of these sins escape my memory. Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults (Psalm 19:12).*

(And now, having confessed the sins he committed in his youth, I want you to see the masterful thing he does, as he turns to God's grace and mercy.)

*For the disobedience of my youth, I offer to You, holy Father, the obedience of Your Son. I offer to You the perfect innocence of the one who became obedient to You, even death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:8). Even as a boy of twelve, Christ showed a holy obedience to You and followed Your Will with great willingness (Luke 2:42). This obedience, O just Judge, I offer as my price and satisfaction for the great disobedience of my youth.*

*Amen*

There in a masterful way, in that prayer, where we are taught, as we look at our own sins, no matter what age we committed them at, to realize that it is not just Jesus' death on the cross, that has paid for our sins, but the perfect life of Jesus has been given to us, as our very own perfect life. There is a Bible passage that says,

“Through the disobedience of the one man,  
the many became disobedient.”

Through Adam's disobedience, we all became sinners. But then, it goes on and says,

“So, through the obedience of the one Man,

the many were made righteous.”

Through Christ's holy obedience, through His perfect keeping of the Law, God sees us, as if we have been obedient. Here, Johann Gerhard teaches us, as we look at the sins of our youth, to look at the perfect youth of Jesus, our Savior. We see Him at age twelve. And, at age twelve, what is He doing? He is perfectly keeping the Law of God. He loves the Word of God. He loves the House of God. He loves to sit and learn the Word of God. He is keeping the Law perfectly. He is perfectly obedient to His parents. He never sins against His parents. The Bible says,

“He went down to Nazareth with them  
and was obedient to them.”

And so, as we look at our Lord Jesus, we are comforted by His holy perfect life, as if it were our very own.

I knew a pastor, a confirmation pastor, who ever year at a certain point of the year would say to his confirmation students, “I want you all to get out two white pieces of paper. In pencil, I want you to write your name on the top of one.”

And so, each of them would write his or her name on the top of one piece of paper, in pencil.

And then he said, “On the other piece of paper, I want you to write the name Jesus, in pencil.”

Then he would say, “I want you to cover up the piece of paper with your name on it, with your arm, so nobody can see it, and then I want you to write down all of the sins you have committed that you can think of, even if they really trouble you. Write them all down.”

And so, they would write down these sins, and of course, they would cover them up so nobody could see them, because they did not want anybody to see them.

Next he would say, “Now, look at Jesus' paper. Write down all of the sins Jesus committed.”

Well, of course, Jesus did not commit any sin, so that piece of paper

remained white and clean.

Finally, the pastor would say, “Now I want you to erase the names on the papers. I want you to put Jesus' name on your list of sins.

And, I want you to put your name on Jesus' perfect life. That is what the Lord Jesus has done for you. He has taken your sins, as His very own. He has died for them. He has given you His holy life as your very own. It is yours! And for His sake, God sees you as holy and forgiven, for Christ's sake.”

What a comfort we find in our Lord Jesus, no matter what age we are.

**Our Savior has died for us.  
He lived a perfect life for us and  
we are forgiven.**

No matter who you are, no matter what age you are, always learn, (as Bach taught his young boys who sang that cantata, on that particular day, 285 years ago), when you feel as if you have lost Jesus, when you have fallen into some sin and you are troubled over your sin, or when your life grows dark and there are many dreary things happening around you and it seems as if Jesus is lost, always know where to go to find Him. Where was Jesus found? His parents found Him in the temple. They found Him at the Word of God. And that is where you go to find your Lord Jesus. You go to His House.

**You go to the Word.**

There you hear your Lord Jesus.

- He always comes to you in the Word.
- He always tells you your sins are forgiven.
- He always comforts you.

**Always go to His Word.**

And, to all of us, whether we are parents, or grandparents, or youth, let's look to the wonderful example we see here in this text of Christian family life. The Bible tells us, it was Mary and Joseph's

custom to go to the festival of the Passover. As parents, they wanted to bring up the boy Jesus, going to the House of God, coming to God's House. Look at Him, the boy, Jesus. He was happy to go to the House of God. He considered the House of God His very own house, His Father's House. In fact, it IS His Father's House. He loved to sit and listen to the teachers, (although He, Himself, is God and Man in one person), and hear the Word. And, He loved to ask them questions, so they would grow in the Word. What a beautiful example we have there, to all of us, and especially to our youth. Here is a twelve year old who loved the Word of God. I can't tell you, young people, how much joy it brings to the heart of a parent, when a parent says, "It is time to go to church," and that young person gladly and willingly has a heart to go and sit at the feet of our Savior and hear His Word. You know there is a commandment that says;

**"Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy."**

What does this mean? **"We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it."**

If our Lord Jesus, perfect as He was, gladly heard and learned the Word of God, how much more so should we, sinners that we are, in great need of the Word of God, (where we go to find our comfort, where we go to find our guidance, where we go to find our strength), how much more gladly should we sit around the Word of God and hear our Lord Jesus?

Jesus was twelve years old. Many people believe it is possible this was the year of what was called His Bar-mitzva, His becoming a "son of the commandments," kind of like our being confirmed. And so, to our young people, I encourage you to take every advantage, as you sit in confirmation class, as you sit in Sunday School Class, as you sit here in church, to grow and drink in the Word of God. You know, in the book of Ecclesiastics, which Pastor Tweit read earlier,

it says you should do it now, while you are in youth, because the day is coming when your eyes will grow dim and your ears will go deaf and you won't be able to read and hear the Word of God. Now is the time to learn it, drink it in, and be built up, so that when the day comes when you really, really are in need, you can apply it, as you learn to do all of your life.

We also see how our dear Lord Jesus was obedient to His parents, in this beautiful, little, scripture reading. It is interesting, as we look at this scripture reading, to see that Jesus' earthly parents had their flaws, didn't they? First of all, they lost Him! Secondly, they didn't know where to look for Him. It took them a while. Thirdly, when they finally found Him, they didn't quite understand the answer He gave them. They were flawed parents. And yet, our Lord Jesus honored His flawed parents. He went home and was obedient to them. Young people, your parents are flawed, and I bet you see that as well as any body does, don't you? Parents are flawed people. They make mistakes. They don't know very much, sometimes. And yet, look at our Lord Jesus. He was obedient to His flawed parents. **Honor your father and mother that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.**

What does this mean? **We should fear and love God so that we do not despise our parents or superiors, nor provoke them to anger, but honor, serve, obey, love and esteem them.**

I love how Bach used this little text to teach, particularly, those 55 young people that day, 295 years ago. Where is the Lord Jesus to be found?

**He is to be found in the Word.**

**You have found Him!**

**You have Him.**

**Never forsake Him!**

**Always stay by His side.**

Amen