

SERMON

Luke 2:41-52

In my Father's House

Nunawading and Waverley, 26-12-21

Dear friends in Christ,

Someone was telling me that she liked to visit a particular garden nursery at this time of the year because of its Christmas display. We noticed it; a huge red and white show case of all things Santa. Occasionally, a Christian shop owner will have a manger scene but most will have Father Christmas, elves, snow and reindeer. At least we are not yet forced to use the expression Happy Holidays rather than Merry Christmas, though I notice it being used in a few places. **I must be in my Father's house**, the twelve-year-old Jesus said to his parents. He is telling us about our priorities, too. The culture of his time supported what he was doing; ours does not. What we celebrate and how we talk of Christmas or Easter will be counter-cultural, that is, not the way most people do things.

The story of Mary and Joseph finding Jesus in the temple precincts, probably in the temple colonnades, which were very extensive, is well-known to us. There were three compulsory festivals for Jewish people: The Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Passover, the latter two were combined to cover eight days of activity. Jesus belonged to a devout family that followed these requirements. Often, worshippers going to Jerusalem for the festivals, travelled in groups of relatives and friends and the young could wander amongst other travellers quite safely. And so, this assumption meant that Mary and Joseph travelled for a day before they realised their son was not with them or with any others. Mary spoke sternly to Jesus: **Child, why did you do such a thing to us? Look, your father and I have been in distress looking for you.** By the way, that is the last we hear of step-father Joseph, who did not appear to be alive during Jesus' ministry.

Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house, was the boy's reply? This response took the parents aback. Mary and Joseph were amazed at the way Jesus was conversing with the highly learned teachers but stunned by what Jesus said. He was not being insolent, of courses, but Jesus expressed surprise that they hadn't first checked the temple. There were three things he was telling them. One, he had a special relationship with God and was indeed his Son. It was not common for Jewish people to speak of God in such

personal terms yet he did. In the Lord's Prayer and in many other ways, Jesus transferred this divine relationship he had to his Father to us and so we are quite used to talking of the Lord as our Father. Two, He was making a break with his parents. He was saying that his home in Nazareth was not his real home. It could never be equal to the presence of God. Three, Jesus spoke of a necessity; **I must be in my Father's house**. The will of God was the essence of his life, already at the very young age of 12.

Because Christ has given us **the right to be called children of God** and has claimed us as his own, we can live in a counter-cultural way. We love our families and our friends but our Father comes first in our lives. He has established a relationship of love with us and has justified us freely by faith, which now means that our ultimate relationship is with him. His friendship trumps all other bonds that we have on earth. That is counter-cultural. I guess the word ultimate conveys what is being said here. A holiday at Christmas, being with family, sharing gifts, decorating the home etc are great traditions but our desire to be with Christ comes before them all. Having come to know him, we want to hear him speak, respond to him with our voices and follow his will. The fact is that we are not really at home here. As our culture moves away from its Christian roots more and more, the greater that desire to be in house of God becomes, his house on earth, the church, and his house in the eternal kingdom.

I think the difference between what we pursue and what others live for is a great mission opportunity. Our life-style, what we rejoice in, how we celebrate has the chance of raising questions, just as Mary and Joseph were provoked by their son's behaviour. I do not think we should be weirdly different, fanatics and odd balls. Rather, our eyes are set on something higher, something beyond what this world can give us. How good it is to be a child of God and come to the Father's house. There is also the need to be about the Father's business, as Christ demonstrated in the temple. His business, in its simplest form is to love others, to reach out to them with the love of Christ, and as Sam Chan has said, 'to be their go-to chaplain.'