

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

Sermon December 30th 2018

God Draws Us In

In our gospel this morning, Jesus is caught in a dilemma. Does he join his family and return to Nazareth or does he stay in the Temple, which he later declares is his father's house? Jesus chooses to stay at the Temple, as he feels drawn to God's house. Of course, Mary and Joseph have not been made aware of Jesus' decision, and so, think they have lost him. For anyone who has ever lost their child even for a brief moment can empathize with the panic Mary and Joseph must have felt.

When they finally check out the Temple they see Jesus sitting there peacefully. Engaging in discussion with the religious leaders. Mary scolds Jesus. In response, Jesus doesn't understand why Mary is so upset. Didn't she know he was meant to be in the Temple at this time?

Now Jesus isn't trying to be defiant here. Jesus felt drawn to God's house and so stayed. Jesus believes that we need to put God first, and so he does.

Like Jesus we often find ourselves facing a similar dilemma. As Christians, God invites us to be devoted to reading scripture, prayer, worship, serving, and giving. God draws us into a life where we long to put God first in our lives.

Yet, as parents, we are also invited to devote ourselves to caring for our children. To put our children first. As a spouse or partner, we are invited to devote ourselves to our spouse. Putting our spouse first. As an employee, we are invited to devote ourselves to our job. Making our work a significant part of our lives. As a child, we are invited to devote ourselves to our parents. Listening to their guidance for our lives. As a friend we are invited to devote ourselves to our friends. Making them an important priority in our lives, whether it is a late-night phone call to listen to them vent or a weekend ski trip.

As a human being, we are invited to devote a part of ourselves to our vocation, our relationships, and our faith. Yet, like Jesus, sometimes we face a dilemma. Do I read that bible verse or finish that project that is due Friday? Do I go to worship or do I go watch my child or grandchild's hockey game? Do I pray or finish that discussion with my spouse/partner about that conflict we had earlier? Do I give this much in the offering plate this month or do I need this money to pay off those activity fees for my child? Do I go over to the church Saturday to help make sandwiches for the Mustard Seed or do I go for coffee with my best friend?

During Advent and Christmas this dilemma is magnified as we try and balance all the things we have to do for our jobs, our loved ones, and also, for our faith.

It isn't easy to devote our lives to God and God's purpose for the world when we also need to devote our lives to our loved ones and their needs. And also, to our vocational needs.

After Jesus' conflicted conversation with Mary, Jesus goes home to Nazareth and listens to Mary and Joseph. So, God doesn't expect us to neglect our loved ones. God encourages us to devote our lives to God first, and then also, to our loved ones and our vocational calling.

During Advent we participated together in a discipleship challenge that encouraged us to grow in our practices of faith, which help us put God first. I'm sure for most of us we struggled at times to do our daily bible readings or to find time to pray five times a day. Or to attend worship regularly. Or to find the money to give more generously.

And that's okay. We will not always be able to follow Jesus. Sometimes we fall short.

What is so liberating about the gospel and the Christmas message is that Jesus loves us despite our short comings. Jesus comes to us in a manger to free us from the shame we often feel when we fall short. To show us that God chooses to forgive us. Not condemn us.

Jesus comes to draw us back to God with love not force. And so, Jesus invites us to hear the stories of how he reflects God's love in our world. Jesus invites us to pray. Jesus invites us to gather as often as we can and

take of the sacrament to remember his sacrificial love for us. Jesus invites us to be generous to others.

Jesus gives us opportunity after opportunity to stay behind in the Temple. Sometimes, we will do just that. And then sometimes, we will have opportunities to be with loved ones. Sometimes, we will have opportunities to devote time to our vocation. Sometimes, we will even have opportunities to care for ourselves.

What is so beautiful about the Christmas stories we hear in both Matthew and Luke is that no matter what we are doing, whether we are teachers of the stars in a foreign land, or tending sheep in a field, or people who have drifted from the church. God's light shines down on us in a bright star. In a choir of angels. In a meaningful candle light service. Drawing us to the manger. Drawing us to the baby Jesus. Drawing us to God.

Let us pray, gracious God, we give thanks for the Christmas season that draws us to you. Open our hearts to devote our lives to you and your purposes for creation. When we fall short shine your light on us, gathering us back to the manger. In Jesus name we pray, **amen.**