

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26

Colossians 3:12-17

Luke 2:41-52

## **Sermon December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

### *Jesus' Commitment to Rituals*

Rituals are an important way that we connect with God, and with one another.

During the Christmas Season we participate in many rituals. We gather with family and friends to share in a meal together (**Image**). Usually, different relatives are responsible for preparing different parts of the meal. Then there is good old Uncle Frank who has to be the one who carves the Turkey every year. No one else would dare touch the carving knife.

Once the meal is on the table. We feast on turkey, pork roast for those who don't like Turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, apple pie (**Image**). We reconnect with extended family. We play fun games or sing carols together after our tummies are full. We look forward to this ritual every year.

Other rituals that come to mind are decorating our houses with lights and ornaments to reflect the joy of the Christmas season (**Image**). As well as the belief that God's light shines in the midst of our darkness.

We put up a Christmas tree (**Image**), and place a star or an angel on the top of it. An angel if you prefer the Christmas story in Luke. A star if you like the Christmas story in Matthew better. This topper helps us stay connected to the central meaning of Christmas. The birth of Jesus. The messiah.

We reflect the generosity of Christmas by exchanging gifts with one another, as we remember the wisemen who brought gifts to Jesus (**Image**).

And let's not forget how we love going to church for candlelight service on Christmas Eve. A service where we reflect on the original Christmas story. The baby Jesus in the manger. The poor Shepherds. The Choir of Angels singing. We light candles as we sing Silent Night (**Image**). For some of us who have been away from church for a while, we reconnect with God, and with our faith community at this service.

Rituals are an important way that we connect with God, and with one another.

In our gospel this morning, Luke emphasizes Jesus' commitment to ritual when he states that Jesus and his family went to the Temple every year. We can see from this story that Mary and Joseph see ritual as very important in connecting with God and with the community. As does Jesus.

In fact, Jesus isn't ready to leave the Temple when his parents are. Jesus wants to stay longer. Jesus feels deeply connected to the festival rituals he participates in.

During an Interfaith bible study last winter, the Cantor from Beth Tzedec, when talking about Hannukah (**Image**), pointed out that in the gospel of John Jesus attends the festival of lights. Hannukah. I thought that was rather cool.

Jesus is very committed to the rituals of his faith, and even the rituals of his family, as he comes home with his parents after his extended stay, and is obedient to them.

Jesus sees that rituals are an important way that we connect with God, and with one another.

Over Advent we participated in a discipleship challenge where we committed more time and energy to some of the rituals of our faith.

We participated in daily readings of scripture to help us listen to what God was saying to us through the Christmas story. We participated in prayer five times a day to feel more connected to God's presence in the midst of this season of waiting (**Image**). We participated in the act of giving. Helping us feel more connected to one another. We participated in worship regularly. We listened to the Word being proclaimed. We felt the physical presence of Christ in the sacrament.

Rituals are an important way that we connect with God, and with one another.

Jesus understands this importance, and even though later in his ministry he will challenge the Temple cult, he continues to value the rituals in his life.

This is why in his last meal with his disciples, he chooses to initiate a new ritual for us to remember. A new ritual that helps us connect with Jesus and with one another. The ritual we call communion (**Image**). The Eucharist. The Lord's Supper. The Sacrament of the Altar.

During the early parts of the pandemic, we missed out on this ritual as we took time to figure out how to participate in this ritual in new ways.

When we started to offer communion virtually, I'm sure it was weird for many of us. But, after a while we found our own way to connect with this traditional ritual in this new way. Understanding that this ritual is so important for us in connecting us to God and one another.

The rituals of our faith and of our family traditions are an important way that we connect with God, and with one another.

Rituals are an important way that God connects with us.

Let us pray, loving God, we give thanks for the rituals that connect us to you, and to one another. Help us stay connected to these rituals not only during the Christmas season. But throughout the year. **Amen.**

© copyright, 2021, Wallace Bornhuse. Used with permission.