

St. Peter Lutheran Church - Modesto, CA

✠ Second Sunday after the Epiphany ✠

January 15, 2006

Sermon by Pastor Johann Caauwe

“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.” (Luke 2:41-52, NIV)

Digital photography has drastically changed the way people take pictures. If you use a digital camera you know that. You don’t need to keep buying film, you don’t have to get your film developed, and you don’t have to wait to find out if someone blinked. In my mind, one of the greatest advantages to digital photography is that you can take virtually an unlimited number of pictures. In the past three years, since our oldest child was born, we have taken over 5,000 digital pictures. And at any time, I can go back and view any one of those 5,000 photos.

That is, if I can find them. One of the tricks to taking that many pictures is that you still have to organize them. The computer can organize them by date, but it’s always nice to have a little more information with each picture, information about where it was taken, or who’s in the picture. In order to have that, I need to go through those pictures, one at a time and put captions on each one. The idea is that with each picture I can read the caption and remember the important aspects of that moment.

The Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, give us a history of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. As you read through them, they don’t cover every event of his life. They don’t always tell us every detail we’d like to know, but they do cover his lifetime from beginning to end. I guess you could say that reading the Gospels is kind of like looking at a photo album. There are a bunch of pictures from Jesus’ early days – vivid descriptions of the events surrounding his birth. Then there are several pages devoted to the last years of his life. But as we’re turning the pages of Gospel according to St. Luke, we come across a solitary picture. It’s the only picture of Jesus as a youth. If it weren’t for this picture Jesus’ album would go right from age 2 to 30. The picture is of Jesus as a 12 year old boy sitting among the teachers in the temple. In the picture we can also see Mary and Joseph, who look as though they’re half-relieved and half angry to find him there in the temple. When we look at this solitary image in the album of the Gospel, we’re left wondering, why this picture? And so we take a look at the caption, which reads “Je-

sus, the obedient Son.” Let’s study this caption for a few moments and see why it was so important that Jesus was the obedient Son, 1) **obedient to his parents**, and 2) **obedient to the will of his Heavenly Father**.

We know that Jesus’ birth was not an ordinary birth. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus had no natural father. But even though Joseph was not Jesus’ father, Luke calls Mary and Joseph his parents. That reminds us that even though Jesus’ birth was miraculous and mysterious, he grew up in a real earthly family with real parents. That leads us to wonder what kind of home Jesus grew up in. We can suppose that Jesus grew up helping Joseph in his work as a carpenter. We can dream what it would be like have a perfect child, but in all reality we know very little about the kind of household Jesus grew up in.

These words, however give us some insight. **“Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover.”** Making a trip to Jerusalem for the Passover every year was part of a devout Jewish life, and so it was part of Mary and Joseph’s life. And if this was a normal Jewish family, then Jesus had also received instruction in the law of God, long before he made this particular trip to Jerusalem. It is evident that Mary and Joseph were diligent and God-fearing parents who did the very best they could to raise this child who had been entrusted to them.

But the account we have before us probably wouldn’t qualify as a proud parenting moment for Mary and Joseph. We read, **“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.”** While the thought of losing a child for three days sounds shocking to us, we need to remember that this is before the era of Amber alerts and Social Services. It was probably common for a child to travel out of his parent’s sight with relatives. Still, it did cause great concern for Mary and Joseph. When they finally found him, we read that 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.”**

But according to Jesus, they had made a mistake. **“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.**” It was their own mistake to leave Jesus behind in Jerusalem. It was their own weakness that caused them to misunderstand what Jesus had to do.

And what did Jesus do then? **“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.”** Jesus was obedient to his parents. Even though he knew that he was right and his parents needed to learn what his role was, Jesus obeyed his parents.

The caption reads, “Jesus, the obedient Son” But why is that significant? Why is it important for us to see Jesus’ obedience to his parents? Is it so that we learn from Jesus’ example to always obey our parents? Is it so that we can tell our children, “See, Jesus obeyed his parents and so should you.”? While it’s true that this is indeed a fine example for both parents and children, Jesus was doing so much more here. He obeyed the 4th commandment (honor your father and mother) in the place of all of us who have broken this command of God – from a toddler’s tantrums, to a teenager’s rebellion, to an adult’s disrespect. Jesus was the obedient son of his parents in the place of every son, daughter, or parent who ever lived.

But there's even more here. Listen again to Jesus' words, **"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"** Do you see it? Here is Jesus, the obedient Son—of God. Jesus was obedient to the will of his heavenly Father. Now, Jesus had always been obedient to God. Even by obeying his parents he was obeying the one who placed his parents over him. By coming to Jerusalem with his parents he obeyed the law of God.

But here in the temple Jesus was also carrying out the will of His Father. The will of the Father is what the prophet Isaiah wrote about in the first lesson for today. **"The Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn."** The will of the Father was that Jesus not only learn and study God's Word but that he proclaim the good news of salvation as the main message of God's Word. Already at age 12 Jesus spoke the word of God with such wisdom and authority that those who heard were amazed and astonished.

Jesus was obedient to the will of the Father and nothing would stand in the way of completing it. He didn't allow Mary or Joseph to stand in his way. He didn't allow the devil to tempt him in the desert to give up his mission of saving the world from sin. He wouldn't allow Simon Peter to dissuade him from dying on the cross. He wouldn't allow his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane or the flogging under Pontius Pilate or the nails and spear of the Romans to keep him from obeying his Father's will.

Why? Because God the Father's will is to save you. The Father's will is that on the cross Jesus would bear the disobedience of every human being. Jesus shared in his Father's will to save you. And so he died. He rose. He ascended. And he now works through his Word and Sacraments to bring his gift of salvation to you.

When we look through the Gospels we see many pictures of Jesus' obedience. What do you suppose we should expect when we look at the album of our own lives—people who have been saved by Jesus' obedience—people like you and me?

Would we ever see them treating the words of God with contempt? Would they ever view the study of holy Scripture as something that conveniently fits into an hour or so each week? Would they consider bringing their children to church but keeping them from the many other opportunities for them to grow in their knowledge of God's Word? I hope not.

Wouldn't we rather see those who seek every available opportunity to feed themselves with the Word of God? Wouldn't we see parents like Mary and Joseph who train their children in the way of the Lord through various forms of Christian education? I pray that we would. I pray that Jesus' loving obedience to his heavenly Father might work in us a love for God and his Word that would lead us to arrange our family schedules and personal priorities so that they reflect that love.

One of the ways that I organize our thousands of digital photos is to assign a rating to them. Each picture gets one to five stars. Frankly, very few pictures get five stars. Those are the ones that I will want to look at over and over and that I will cherish the rest of my life. Perhaps there are some accounts in Jesus' life that you appreciate more than others. Maybe this story has never been one of those. But take a close look and see Jesus, the obedient Son. See him obedient to his parents so that he could give you that obedience. See him obedient to his heavenly Father so that he could bear your disobedience. Maybe it won't ever rank up there with the accounts of Jesus' birth, or his resurrection from the dead. But when you see it in the Gospels, those albums of the life of Christ, why don't you stop and look closely at it. Cherish it like Mary. And then give thanks to God for his obedient Son. Amen.