

Sermon for 29 December 2024 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

First Sunday after Christmas

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 2:18-29, 26; Psalm 148 (Page 861); Colossians 3:12-17 ; Luke 2:41-52

Sermon

History's moving right along. After the baby is blessed and circumcised and Mary is purified, the family returns home and life goes forward. As church folks, we refer this Sunday to the story of Samuel for its similarity: another child raised to be a leader of Israel, centuries before, who helped God's people go, in his time, from the period of judges to the forming of a monarchy, and who was responsible not just for the first King, Saul, but for King David and all the years of his reign.

Then we find ourselves with Mary and Joseph and the twelve-year-old Jesus making their annual trip to Jerusalem for Passover ... the only picture of Jesus' growing up, with its slight evidence of his special quality in this entirely traditional Jewish family. For the first and only sign of his unusual qualities, he simply is found among the temple scholars learning and demonstrating unusual religious interest and insight. With just enough tension to help us see that family relations can be strained when unique character developments are emerging, Mary and Joseph find the young Jesus and carry on as the guides of this remarkable child.

The church, however, can't avoid another great psalm as we go forward. It gives us one among those that celebrate everything about life that is marvelous. We can keep on praising this Sunday, as we continue the Christmas awe of the whole of creation. There are times when there is nothing but amazement, wherever we turn ... and this psalm provides us with material to express ourselves to the limit. "Hallelujah!"

Then we are directed to learn and teach one another, in an ever-new way of seeing all things. The lesson from Colossians reminds us that Christmas is not just here for us to celebrate. Just as Advent urges us always to be expectant, to grow from what happens to us and those around us, so Christ's coming in the Christmas story show us ways we never cease to learn afresh. Just as there is always room for forgiveness in a friendship, so our own patience with ourselves can be learned from one another. God has brought us together by grace, and grace lives in our interaction with each other. Be sensitive to one another's needs. Let Christ's peace be the rule, the umpire, in how you relate to each other. We are here to benefit one another ... and to show others how to relate, and forgive, and start afresh.

All these lessons are not of our own doing. Just as the shepherds were overwhelmed with good news, so the church lives by fresh reports and demonstrations of love within its ranks. I know each of us has examples of the failure of love to abound in what we do, or see, or experience in church ... but the other side is real and solid as well, and healing expands from here. This is God's new start, over and over, Christmas after Christmas.

The hidden years of Jesus, growing up within his family; the signs of amazement and beauty that still linger from Christmas; and the knowledge of good fellowship and gentle tolerance that we have felt as we have gathered here recently....

Let us take these examples of good, trust them; give thanks for our own experience of the passing the peace among us, this Sunday and on into the New Year. Take this reminder of the holiness of life, and work with it, as God works lovingly with us.

Amen.