

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, December 26th, 2021
Rev. Gerry Gallant

First Sunday after Christmas Day
Luke 3: 7-18

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship (Responsive)

Great and marvelous are your deeds,
Lord God Almighty.

**Just and true are your ways,
King of the nations.**

Who will not fear you, Lord,
and bring glory to your name?

For you alone are holy.

All nations will come and worship before you.

Prayer of Adoration

God of our lives and the times in which we live,
we come before you on this last Sunday of the year,
marvelling that another year has passed.

For some of us, time has slipped by and we wonder where another year went.

For others, the pressures of the pandemic have been intense;
the sorrows, heavy; the conflicts, challenging.

O God, you have seen us through this peculiar year and we are grateful.

We praise you for your love,

for your comfort and joy which are there whenever we need them.

In this time of worship, receive our prayers and our praises

as we honour your gifts of Light and Love

which shine upon us through Jesus Christ

this day and every day by your grace.

Amen.

Opening Hymn

Call to Confession

God's Word assures us:
 If we say that we have no sin,
 we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
 If we confess our sins,
 he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins
 and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
 In humility and faith let us confess our sin to God.

Prayer of Confession

**God of our lives and the time in which we live,
 we know you are with us through thick and thin,
 in times of great joy and at moments of disappointment.
 We confess we sometimes feel let down when the joy of Christmas day has passed.
 Our hope seems to get folded away with the gift wrap,
 our energy for the future feels a bit tattered.
 Forgive us when our faithfulness flickers like a Christmas candle burning down.
 Renew our hope and energy for the year ahead
 through the steadfast grace of Christ our Lord.**

Assurance of Pardon

The mercy of our God is from everlasting to everlasting. Hear and believe the good news of the Gospel. In Jesus Christ, God's generous love reaches out to embrace us. We are forgiven and set free to begin again. Let us forgive one another just as God has forgiven us. May the peace of Christ be with us all.

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
 Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread.
 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.
 For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,
 Forever and ever. Amen.**

Responsive Reading

Colossians 3:12-17

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

¹⁷ **And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

Music Ministry

Prayer for illumination

Source of all wisdom and understanding,
by your Word you give wisdom to guide us on the path you set before us.
Send your Holy Spirit to open our hearts and minds to receive your Word
and strengthen us to follow Jesus into the year that waits before us. Amen

Scripture

Luke 2:41-52

The Boy Jesus in the Temple

⁴¹ Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. ⁴³ And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, ⁴⁴ but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, ⁴⁵ and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." ⁴⁹ And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. ⁵¹ And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

Children's Hymn

Children's Lesson

All through Advent we talk about the coming of baby Jesus. We learn that he was born with a family in this world just the same as every one of us. Yet here we are, just one day after Christmas talking about Jesus as a boy. He was around the age of 12 in this story. Being 12 was a special age for young Jewish boys. Being 12 meant that they were able to take part in the Passover festival as men, to be part of the temple discussions.

Now Jesus's parents, Joseph, and Mary, had fulfilled their promise to raise him in the ways of God, so he had been learning about God his whole life, even though he was God! Then when he was 12, they took him to the Passover to take part in the festival.

After they left the festival and were on their way home, how do you think Mary and Joseph felt when they could not find Jesus? How about Jesus, when he realized that his parents had left him behind, how do you think he felt?

We do not have many stories about the boy Jesus, in fact this is the only one in the gospels. That is why it is important for us to study it and remember that Jesus grew up just like every one of us, he had his mother and father, his friends, and the community he lived in and went to synagogue with. Jesus had human experiences, happiness, and sadness just like we do. Jesus who Mary knew without a doubt was the son of God watched her son grow up and experience all the human things that everyone here experienced.

The scripture tells us that Mary treasured up all these things in her heart. Moms and Dads, Grandmas and Grandpas keep things about you in their heart. They keep things like the times you teach them about God's love, or about being closer to God, just like Jesus had just taught Mary.

Think about that and how God our Father treasures us in his heart as well. God treasures each of us the same way that Mary and Josephs treasured Jesus as a boy. Just the same as your parents treasure you and their parents treasured them. God keeps you in his heart. We do things that show we love and respect him like spending time in Bible study, in praise and in worship, so we can remember that we are treasured by God always.

Sermon

We have just passed through the season of advent and Christmas. One where we have hopefully refreshed the call that has been placed on our hearts to seek our Lord and Savior with all of our hearts, minds, body, and strength. A season where we are reminded of the truth of his second coming and of the blessing of eternal life we will

receive as his followers and a season where we recognize just how important and valuable Jesus is in our lives.

In today's scripture we are looking at that babe Jesus as a young boy, a story that only appears in Luke. Where he is visiting the temple with his parents. They are fulfilling a religious obligation that all the Jews of the region would fulfil during Passover, a visit to the temple. The scripture teaches us about family, about parental obligations, and about expectations we have on raising our children to worship our God. Jesus's parents were good parents; they looked after him well, they educated him in his religious obligations, they made sure he was well fed, and they taught him everything he needed to know to be a good boy. They loved him.

It also speaks of the authority and passion that even the young Jesus possessed as a teacher of God's word. How he enthralled the people around him in the temple during his interactions there, and how they were all amazed by his understanding and his answers to their questions.

Finally, it teaches us the importance that Jesus placed on the Temple and teaching. When his parents found him and asked, 'why he had treated them so', Jesus responded that he, 'had to be in my father's house'. The meaning of 'had to be in my father's house' is much deeper than physical presence in the temple. This is a place where we go to another translation of the Bible is useful, The KJV translation says 'about my father's business' and the Message explains his answer as 'dealing with the things of my father', both which more accurately describe what is written in the Greek, 'to be occupied in the things of my Father' Jesus was not just in the synagogue to be there, he was there to do God's work even at his young age.

For as he said in

Matthew 10:34

"Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword."

Jesus's focus was on doing his Father's business regardless of the viewpoints of those around him or the world.

After Mary and Joseph have started their return trip home, they travel the whole day before they notice their son is not with them. This would be possible, because people usually travelled in large caravans, sharing in the responsibility of looking after the children as they travel. When they finally realized that Jesus was not with the caravan they must have panicked. As many of us know, the sense of panic felt when a child is missing is like nothing you have ever felt before.

I can imagine Mary and Joseph rushing along through the caravan, asking everyone if they have seen the boy Jesus. Panic setting in deeper and deeper as they realize that he

is not with anyone in the caravan. Then after they have looked everywhere, the fear of knowing he is not with them. Daniel wandered away once when he was young, and I can remember this exact moment; it is as if the whole world has a different timeline. Seconds become minutes as your mind races through all the possibilities of where your child is and what could be happen to them.

Mary and Joseph rush back along the road the way they have come, checking all along the way for any sign of their son. Hoping that they will find him safe with someone, but with a sense of dread growing as they approach the city. Then they return to the temple and find Jesus calmly sitting with the teachers of the temple, listening, and asking questions of them.

I guarantee that Mary has much more control than I would have had at this point. I do not think I could have been as composed as Mary was at this point. I would probably grab him and pull him to me; I do not think my mind could formulate a sentence with the rush of relief I would experience. However, Mary calmly asks him why he has caused such anxiety on his parents, explaining that they have both been worried while looking for him.

Jesus's calm response is what astounds me. "Why did you seek me? Did you not know I had to be in my father's house"?

Jesus had gone along to the Passover festival as many other boys his age had, but what made this boy special was the calling. He said he, 'had to be in my father's house'. It is that calling that stands out. Jesus was not just going to temple to hang out and play with the other boys his age. He is going there because he is called to his Father's business. The word "had" in this verse is translated from the Greek word "δεῖ" and it can be looked at to further understand the importance of this calling. "δεῖ" is defined as necessity of happening, something one must do, or one has to do, it denotes a compulsion that one cannot avoid even if they wanted to.

This kind of calling, this compulsion to worship our God is something that is so powerful it gives people the ability to endure challenges and hardships that would normally break a person. It gives people the strength to stand up against what the world tells them they ought to be doing and instead do what God calls them to do. It gives them the fortitude to stand in a world that is sometimes full of chaos, anger and hatred and act with love and mercy as God has called upon all Christians to do.

A good example of this was a young man by the name of Desmond Doss. Desmond, who was born in the early 1900's, dedicated his life to God while he was a very young man. Desmond served God with an empathy that compelled him to go above and beyond to help people. When he was very young, he once walked six miles to donate blood to an accident victim - a complete stranger – after he heard of the need for blood on the radio.

The sense of conviction that this young man felt was not probably unlike the sense of conviction that the boy Jesus felt to stay at the temple. A sense of conviction so strong that Jesus chose to disobey his parents. A conviction that made Jesus forget his duty to obey his parents and to stay with them. P.W. Marty states Jesus stayed at the temple because "His commitment to the Father now transcends his love for the family." Jesus knew that he was meant to serve his father and that was the most important thing for him to do, even if it meant disobeying his parents and the worldly and social obligations of his time.

This was only the beginning of Desmond's tale in his service of God. Where his story gets interesting is after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Like many young American men, he signed up to answer the call of his country. However, he refused to touch a weapon and insisted on being a field medic, he conscientiously objected to hurting another human because of his belief in 'Thou shall not kill'. The army assigned Desmond to a rifle company hoping that he would just give up and leave. His fellow soldiers made his life as difficult as they could. They threw boots at him as he prayed, they verbally abused him and even physically beat him because of his refusal to pick up a gun and learn how to fight. They saw him as useless and a burden on the company because he would not "have their backs" in battle. His officers even went as far as to give him extra tasks to complete on the sabbath because they knew it was his Holy day, and they wanted to force him out of the company.

This is not unlike the way many people treat those who stand up for their religious convictions in the modern world. People who publicly proclaim their faith are often treated differently by coworkers and at time even employers. Sometimes they are treated with rudeness or contempt and at other times people intentionally try to upset them or goad them into arguments for their own amusement. There are even companies that will recognize all religious holidays except for those of Christians, who when they request Sundays off to attend service are denied.

However, it is this calling to follow God that gives people the strength to swim against the stream. The ability to discern between worldly obligations and expectations, and those commandments that God has placed upon each of us as his children. Jesus stayed in the temple, even though he should have been with his parents. Desmond stayed in the army even when everyone did their best to force him to quit. Being Christian means at times to follow a calling that for many is seen as a foolish endeavor, and at time requires going against the will of our family, friends, coworkers, employers, and anyone else that tries to come between Our God and us. Being teased and ridiculed for our belief in a "fantasy" or 'Sky daddy' by the people of the world and even at times by those we know, and love is a reality of this world.

Jesus's desire to serve his father is an inspiration for those who feel the call to be a Christian. It is his commitment to his father that transcended all his worldly obligations

and duties that shows us when God compels us to answer his call, we will be just in doing so. For when Jesus was discovered in the temple by Mary. He is not punished by his parents. Instead, even though his mother did not understand his reply she gathered him up and took him home. I find this of great interest, because I can tell you when I discovered my son after just a few minutes of not knowing where he was, I was quite flustered and wanted to do everything possible to ensure that it would never happen again. This is why it had to be God's will that allowed Mary to release all the emotions that had built up over the three days' worth of searching, all that anxiety and tension she is experiencing is just gone as she gathers her son up and takes him home. It as if she recognizes at some level that he was doing what he was called to do and that is more important than her emotional reaction.

Desmond's answer to the father's call was also a just call, his unit was sent to Okinawa in Japan. The fighting that occurred in the pacific was some of the most bloody and brutal of the entire Second World War. Desmond's company was deployed to Hacksaw Ridge, a battlefield where there had already been hundreds of American lives lost. On the day they ascended up Hacksaw ridge on a rope ladder the Japanese Army waited for them. When they began to enter the open plateau at the top of the ridge the Japanese attacked and slaughtered the American soldiers.

Desmond's company retreated as quickly as they could down the ridge and back to the camp, Desmond however, stayed atop the plateau and started to work at saving the lives of wounded soldiers. Amidst enemy fire and never-ending mortar rounds, Desmond patched up soldiers as he found them. One by one he would drag them to the ridge and lower them down on ropes to his fellow soldiers. Desmond knew that the Japanese soldiers would sometimes torture the wounded American soldiers, so he felt a compulsion to continue. He felt that he could not stop or even rest. For 12 straight hours he would find a man, bandage him up and lower him down. He prayed after each soldier that God would give him the opportunity to save the life of just one more man.

God was with Desmond that night. Desmond claimed that many times Japanese soldiers had tried to shoot at him, but their guns had jammed. In total that night Desmond saved 75 men - men that had all hated him, men that all spoke against him, men that physically beaten and verbally abused him - he saved their lives because that was his calling, what he felt God compelled him to do. In a world that hated and ridiculed him for his faith, he was the salt and light showing them what it meant to be Christian.

Desmond answered God's call willingly, he endured the persecution, the ridicule, the mistreatment, and the abuse that the world threw at him... He was laughed at and mocked by people who knew little of God or did not know God at all. He did not retort, fight back or even complain. He believed his call was to be there and no matter how hard the world tried to persuade him to give up, he would not. He persevered, he showed respect and love, he showed mercy and compassion to all. Desmond lived his life as our father has called all of us to live.

We are called, we are compelled to do God's work as Christians. What should we be anticipating from the world? Like Jesus we may be required to disobey our worldly parents so that we can answer to our Father in heaven. Like Jesus we may at times stay behind or stray away to the temple, to God's word, so that we can spend time with other people who are also interested in teaching, learning, and understanding about God. At times may be required to disobey our worldly obligations and expectations at times so that we can become more knowledgeable in God's Word and live in obedience to His Word.

This is what the church is, a place we may pursue the knowledge and understanding of God's business here on Earth. A place where we can learn as Jesus did in the temple; gathered together in fellowship, listening, and asking questions. However, we will face many other challenges as well when we become members of the Church. We will need to be willing to set aside the power and influence of the worldly, so that we are able to focus instead on Jesus and our service to him.

As Jesus said in

Matthew 10:38-39

"And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."

We live in a world where speaking about God's word is becoming more difficult. With changes in law that make the choice of words we use much more important, as a wrong word could get us fined or even imprisoned. A world where the feelings and perceived truths are becoming more important to people than the Biblical truths we learn of in the bible. A world where people can now become offended at the mere mention of God in a public setting.

So, in some ways we are like Desmond while he was in basic training. We are surrounded by a world that believes we are of little use. One where we may be persecuted, condemned, and even prosecuted for our faith.

Yet, we are compelled. Compelled like Jesus was, compelled like Desmond was to answer a call that God has placed in our hearts. Compelled to study God's word, compelled to research and to understand it, compelled to see it as a living word and understand that it is as relevant today as it was the day it was first penned. Compelled to bring the knowledge and love of Jesus to those around us, to those who may know a little of him and to those that know nothing of him. We are compelled by our father to answer his call even if the whole world were to stand against us.

As we set forth from today back into the world in which we live, we should feel the seriousness of the path to which we have been called. We should also rest assured that like Desmond we have God with us, and he will ensure we are capable of enduring anything that interferes with us carrying out His will.

Just like Desmond who in the middle of the night, while a top Hacksaw Ridge, a lone man prayed for the strength to save just one more man's life. We should be praying each day for the chance to bring the knowledge of God to just one more person.

To do this we need to ask ourselves:

When are we faced with the choice between sharing God's word and conforming to worldly expectations will we be willing to go against the world?

When we are asked to conform to the ever-changing perspectives on what is acceptable, will we look first to the bible for guidance, or will we trust in man's law instead?

It is my hope and prayer that each of us has the strength and perseverance to answer Gods call upon our hearts truthfully and wholeheartedly every day of our lives.

Let us pray,

Mighty and everlasting God,

We ask that you are with each of us as we answer your call. We ask that you strengthen us and give us the courage to move forward in a world that may challenge us. We pray that you continue to be with us and help us to be bold and persevere as Christ's Disciples when we feel the burdens and pressures of the world upon our shoulders.

May our lives be fully dedicated to you Lord. Grant us the resolve and endurance to become devoted students of Your Word. Grant us the willpower and resilience to live by your word as it is written and not to be tempted to soften or avoid messages that we feel might not be well received by those who oppose Your will here on Earth.

Father we ask that you bless each of us as we seek to answer your call. Father we submit ourselves to your will and humble ourselves to be obedient followers of your word. Give us the perseverance to live by your word every day in our lives and be the salt and light of the communities in which we live.

In Jesus' name, we pray.
Amen.

Hymn

Invitation to Offering

The letter to the Colossians reminds us that whatever we do, in word or deed, we do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. May our offering this day show our gratitude to God in Jesus' name.

Offering

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3) We also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer.

E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. standrewspert offering@gmail.com Please include your Offering Envelope # in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (eg Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.

Offertory Prayer

God of love, we give thanks for the many blessings you have given us throughout our lives. We are grateful to celebrate the birth of your greatest gift, our Saviour Jesus, once again. Bless the offerings we make in his name, and use them and us to serve you well in the coming year.

Amen

Closing Hymn**Pastoral Prayer**

Lord God, creator of heaven and earth,
We bring you our prayers with glad and grateful hearts
in this season of hope and joy.

For your image set within us all, calling us to love one another and to care for your creation,
we give you thanks.

For the gift of your Son who redeems us and guides us to serve you in the world,
we give you thanks.

For the energy and inspiration of your Holy Spirit, who equips us to meet the challenges we face,
we give you thanks.

By your Holy Spirit, empower us to show your love to those for whom we pray this day:

For the Church and those who lead in it, as they seek to refresh ministries after months of pandemic restrictions . . .

For the world that you have asked us to care for amid the challenges the climate crisis creates...

For those who rule in the nations of the world, that they will attend to the needs of the most vulnerable and cries for justice in their lands . . .

For those who serve as teachers, instructors, and mentors, and for students who face a world of constant change and challenge . . .

For those who serve others as healers and caregivers, especially those feeling exhausted by the demands the pandemic has created on them and their workplaces . . .

For those struggling with poverty, homelessness, and hunger, and the challenges to recover amid steep economic pressures . . .

For those who mourn the loss of someone dear and those who feel alone or neglected...

For those imprisoned for defending truth and justice, and all who experience exclusion, powerlessness, and oppression . . .

As this year of ongoing and unexpected challenges draws to a close,
 give us grateful hearts for what has been loving and life-giving;
 give us peace about things that have been painful;
 and focus our attention on emerging opportunities to grow closer to you and to each other.

Keep us faithful in all we do in the name of Jesus Christ, our friend and saviour

Amen.

Benediction

*May the love of God surround you,
 the wisdom of Christ guide you,
 and the power of the Holy Spirit encourage you
 as you joyfully proclaim:
 Our world belongs to God!*

Amen