



Sunday Reflection Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 26 December 2021

Christmas 1

As we prepare to worship this first Sunday after Christmas, let us gather as followers of the One who has created a new people around him, Jesus Christ, the Word of God.

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

"Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

Luke 2:49

An Illustration to set the scene

When he was in the lift/elevator of a New York hotel, Martin Luther King Jr noticed that there was no button for the thirteenth floor – fourteen followed twelve.

When he asked the operator about this, he was told it was customary in most large hotels, because many guests were afraid to stay on the thirteenth floor.

The operator said, "*The real foolishness of the fear is to be found in the fact that the fourteenth floor is actually the thirteenth.*"

King recounted this story in his essay "*A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart*", and it's well worth reading.

He says that we should strive for a "*tough mind*" and "*soft heart*", rather than the other way around.

“Softminded individuals”, he writes, “are prone to embrace all kinds of superstitions,” while, on the other hand, “The tough mind is sharp and penetrating, breaking through the crust of legends and myths and sifting the true from the false.”

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Today’s reading, about Jesus at the Temple, has historically attracted much sentimental attention.

While Luke saw fit to tell only this one story about the boy Jesus, others have rushed to fill the gap, telling tales of Jesus the young carpenter, healer and wonder-worker.

Luke’s account is set against a backdrop of strife and uncertainty.

So no matter how heart-warming these other stories are, they are hardly helpful without knowing their context.

By the time Luke is thought to have compiled his Gospel, an event of history-changing proportions had taken place.

The Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed and Jews and Christians alike were dispersed throughout the empire.

The Temple was not just a religious building – it was the home of God, the repository of the hopes and dreams of an entire race.

Now it was in ruins, leaving all those who traced their identity to this place in a state of high anxiety and spiritual uncertainty.

Those who saw themselves as God’s people knew they needed to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth.

But without the Temple, how?

Luke takes pains to begin his Gospel with accounts of good people whose lives revolve around the Temple.

He wants his readers to know that their identity is rooted in the riches of Temple life and faithfulness exhibited by the likes of

Zechariah, Elizabeth, Anna, Simeon, Joseph and Mary – who, as Luke tells us several times, were followers of the Law.

Jesus is portrayed as one who loves sitting at the feet of the Temple teachers and learning from them.

But Temple life has its limits.

Jesus is the one who fulfils the Law, in such a way that he will take all the Temple functions (teaching, healing, forgiving) into himself, becoming the living embodiment of God's plan of salvation.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

We can do with some of Martin Luther King's wisdom in our reading of scripture, and it's timely after Christmas, when images of the Holy Family have abounded – on Christmas cards, in Advent calendars, in the church crib.

A scene of familial bliss is depicted, with Mary and Joseph gazing lovingly at their newborn son.

Scrolling on twelve years, today's text offers us another glimpse into the family life of Christ.

As with so many of the stories that many of us first heard as children, it's tempting to reduce it to the story of a precocious young prodigy who caused his parents concern.

This one even has a happy ending – Jesus' parents found him, breathed a sigh of relief, and they all returned home as a family.

Yet a closer reading reveals that Jesus' words about his Father are far from sentimental, or even comforting.

Of all the collected sayings of Christ, Luke chooses to make the first words he reports in his Gospel ones which question allegiance to family, the most basic of loyalties.

Just as the Temple was not sufficient for the Church's identity, so too the traditional affiliations of tribe and family are tested by the creation of the new people of God.

That doesn't mean that we don't allow ourselves to be moved by words that touch us, but that we need to be prepared to put behind us our childish reading of scripture, to increase, as Jesus did, "*in wisdom and in years*".

"Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

Luke 2:49

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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