

Second Sunday after the Epiphany; January 15, 2023

+ Luke 2:41-52 +

“Our Jesus is Our Perfection”

Every year his parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. When he was twelve years old, they went up according to the custom of the Festival. When the days had ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it. Since they thought he was in their group, they went a day’s journey. Then they began to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.

After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were 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 this way? See, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you.”

He said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be taking care of my Father’s business?” They did not understand what he was telling them.

He went down with them and came to Nazareth. He was always obedient to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.

A few years ago, I was at Burger King in Upstate New York. I had placed my order and was waiting for my Whopper and other good things. Standing next to me was a group of Amish boys in their early teens. There were many things about this scene that confused me. First, they were not supervised by an adult, which in my many interactions with Amish people I had never witnessed before. Second, they were laughing, smiling, and joking. This was also unusual because, while warm and friendly, the Amish are typically careful to be reserved and quiet in public. Third, they were eating at Burger King. If you’ve never been, Burger King uses a lot of electricity, which is a no-no for most Amish groups.

Not many days later, I was speaking to a kind Amish man named John as he hitched his horses to a pole on the property of the church I served. Over the previous few years we had had many discussions about our Christian faith and other things. I mentioned to John the scene in Burger King days earlier, and how surprised I was by it. And he explained: In certain clans, the Amish allow adolescent boys a time to explore and even to rebel just a bit. They are allowed, sometimes for a few weeks or months, to go off by themselves or in small groups, and do some things that are normally against the rules. John explained further: “We know boys that age will rebel. If we don’t allow them to rebel a bit, they will rebel a lot.”

So, I learned that the Amish expect and accept some rebellion from adolescent boys. And that was amazing. Most Amish don’t accept the inevitability of plumbing and electricity; but they do accept the inevitability of rebellion from boys of twelve or thirteen!

Where especially would you expect to see rebellion from a boy of, say, twelve years old? Against his parents, right? When Jesus was twelve, his parents obediently travel to Jerusalem for the most important festival of the year, Passover. Jesus obeys and goes along. After those parents turn around, search three days, and find him still in the temple, his mother asks, **“Son, why have you treated us this way? See, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you.”** And although he has done nothing wrong, how does he answer? Does he get cheeky or sarcastic? I mean, have you ever questioned a twelve-year old who

actually stood on the moral high ground? You will get sass and sarcasm! But he gives none. Just an honest answer that will make them think, although they don't yet totally understand it.

And when they return to Nazareth, we learn that this boy's remarkable obedience and respect for his parents is not a flash in the pan. It's what he *always* does. Anyone can have a good day. He has a perfect life of obedience to his parents: **He was always obedient to them...Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.**

There is no trace of rebellion in him toward his human parents. And that is good news for us. Because we do plenty of kicking against people God has placed in authority over us. We have disobeyed the rules of parents and answered them rudely. We have thought disrespectfully of teachers and pastors. We have ridiculed and railed against people in government, and disobeyed laws because we thought they were stupid. (This is to say nothing about laws that contradict God's Word; that's another topic for another day. But we have no right to break laws just because we don't like them. And we do.) All of these sins snap God's Fourth Commandment, and all such rebellion against human authority leaves us condemned.

But Jesus is our perfection. For all of our sins against God's command to honor, obey, and respect those in authority, especially our parents, Jesus is perfect. Even when he's twelve. **He was always obedient to them.** Our Jesus keeps the Fourth Commandment without exception. And he does it to save us.

There is another area in which twelve-year old boys aren't exactly famous for being obedient. They generally aren't really good about keeping God's command to gladly hear and learn his Word. I have taught the Catechism to dozens of male adolescents slouched in their chairs, arms folded, with a look that screams, "You just go ahead and try to teach me something, sucker."

But at the age of twelve, the age at which sinful boys fake illnesses to skip Sunday School and sprint out of sanctuaries the second the final "Amen" is sung, this boy Jesus stays in the temple for a total of at least four days learning more of God's Word. And it's not just that! He's teaching it to the experts! **After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.** Now here's something subtle, but amusing. Luke doesn't say the teachers answered the questions. **And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and answers.** He's both asking and answering the questions, and showing such a knowledge of God's truth that it amazes people!

And although our mothers taught us not to answer a question with a question, Jesus rightly does exactly that. When his parents finally find him and question him, Jesus gives an answer that is a question, but also a beautiful truth: **"Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be taking care of my Father's business?"** This is what Jesus has to do, because he is perfect. When the opportunity is there to be in his Father's house and in his Father's Word, he is there taking full advantage. That's the heavenly Father's business, so it's his business too.

And that's good news for us again. Because it's not just sinful twelve year-old boys who close their ears to God's Word. It's all of us. We pass on family devotions, because, hey, our families have important things to do. We skip church because it's boring or because, again, we have important things to do. Who do I think I am, anyway, to turn away from the words of the Almighty God because I'm busy? What's more important than what God has to say to me? Here our sin is a double-whammy. Yes, it breaks God's Third Commandment, to gladly hear and learn his Word. But it also breaks the First and most important of all:

You shall have no other gods. If I think my work, rest, or play is more important than God's Word, I've just elevated myself above him. Yikes!

But our Jesus is our perfection. For our sins against the Third – and First! – Commandments, Jesus must be taking care of his Father's business. Why must he? Because he's perfect, of course. But also because he loves us, and we need him to be our perfect substitute. And he is. In his holy life we have God's forgiveness for all our sins against Commandments Three and One.

When God speaks, Jesus listens. Because that's true, Jesus is not just our perfection. He is also the sacrifice who pays for our sins with his holy life.

Roughly two decades after Jesus travels to Nazareth with his parents, Jesus will come back from Galilee to Jerusalem. He will return to Jerusalem, this time to die on the cross. Why? Because it is Father's will. Jesus will return to these temple courts to teach more, during Holy Week. He will teach about the kingdom of heaven and the end of the world. He will attack the hypocrisy of his enemies and declare himself the Son of God and the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Jesus will come back to Jerusalem two decades later to complete his perfect life and die on the cross for us, because he listens to his Father's Word.

Jesus will pray in the Garden, the night before he will die for there to be another way, for the cup to pass from him. But that will not be the Father's will. So Jesus will listen again. And then they will lead him just outside Jerusalem's cross to die on the cross. He will be the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

On this trip to Jerusalem, we see so clearly his holy life lived for us. And on that final trip, he will die to wash our sins away. So he is both our perfection, and the one who takes our punishment.

In thanksgiving for his perfection and his sacrifice, we ask God to make us more and more like our dear Savior. We ask him to give us hearts like Jesus and to keep his Commandments. We pray: Dear God, thank you for forgiving all our rebellion and disobedience toward those you've placed over us. Thank you for forgiveness in Jesus. Now help us to show honor and respect for pastors and teachers and elders. May our children show love and obedience for their parents. May we all obey and honor our leaders, whether we like them or not, even when we think their rules are silly or needless.

And we pray: Dear God, thank you for forgiving our neglect of your Word, and you yourself. Thank you for forgiveness in Jesus. Now help us be more like him. Make it our business to be about the business of what you say. Help us put your Word first, and learn it eagerly and gladly. Because you want us to. And because that's where we find our Jesus, our perfection. Amen.