

Sermon

When I read today's text I thought to myself, boy is this really the reading for the first Sunday after Christmas? I mean we made quite a jump here. Just couple days ago we were talking about the birth of Jesus, the miracle of Christmas when God out of his unconditional love for this world and human kind sent his son in human form. And now, twelve years later we hear about Mary and Joseph taking Jesus to Jerusalem for the festival of Passover.

I thought to myself, what is the connection between this text the message of Christmas? And as I read this text couple times I started to see all kinds of parallels. The first thing that struck me is the parallel between Christmas and Passover. Passover was one of the major Jewish festivals during which Hebrews remembered the "passing over" of the angel of death prior to the exodus from Egypt. During Passover they remembered how they were freed by God from the Egyptian slavery. **How does this connect to Christmas?** Well we believe that it is in this child of Bethlehem that we're freed from the power of sin and death. And so in a way Passover and Christmas are very closely connected.

But this is not the only parallel. For the second thing that jumps out from today's reading, and both Passover and Christmas story is **journey**. (pause) See Passover was the breaking point when the Egyptian pharaoh said, fine you can go. I can't rule over you anymore. You're free. But this was just the beginning of a journey. Long forty years of traveling through the desert, that's what was ahead of the freed Israelites. They had to overcome many challenges, many struggles and battles before they entered the Promised Land.

Christmas is in the same way a very important breaking point, but at the same time it is a beginning of a journey. A journey for Mary and Joseph. The journey of Jesus and his disciples. The journey of every single one of us.

And we can see this wonderful symbolism of a journey in today's reading. There were thousands of people traveling to Jerusalem from all corners of the ancient world. Some lived nearby, and had a comparatively easy journey; some came from neighboring lands and others traveled great distances. People made these journeys to remember the journey of their ancestors and then they celebrated Passover to remember the redeeming works of their God.

Mary and Joseph together with Jesus were on their way as well. They celebrated the Passover in Jerusalem and were headed back to Nazareth. Now we need to understand that the pilgrims came in caravans, numbering hundreds and sometimes even thousands of participants. And so when we read that Mary and Joseph didn't realize that Jesus wasn't with them thinking that he was with their relatives and friends, this wasn't an unusual thing. They were probably visiting with people they haven't talked to for a long time, they were busy and occupied with many different things plus they were a part of a moving mass. Of course they just assumed that Jesus was walking somewhere along.

Yeah, this reading isn't a guide on how to be a good parent. But what this reading does point out very well is a behavior of someone who is on a journey pulled by the crowd of people that surround him. As I read this text I had to look at my life journey. It had couple of those breaking points, when I realized that I'm loved and accepted by God without condition. When I realized that I'm given a second chance, and a new beginning. There were moments when I knew exactly what my call is and where Jesus is in my life. We all have moments like that. When we realized how blessed we are. When we rest assured in faith, and trust that we, our loved ones and everything around us is in God's hands.

I believe that Christmas is for many of us this kind of breaking point. A fresh and new beginning of a journey. For it is during Christmas that we hear that good news: to you a Savior is given to you a son is born. And we sit back, rejoice and listen, for there is nothing else we can do. Everything that needed to be done has been done; everything is in God's hands. Jesus is born, he's here, and it's going to be ok.

But as I said our life is a journey, and soon, many times too soon, we start to move on. We start to be pulled by that crowd of pilgrims, pulling us with its ideas, traditions, and conventions. We're on our way and how easily we forget the miracle of Christmas. How easily we forget the magic of God's presence in our lives. Mary and Joseph were on their way home, they just had their mountain top experience but it hasn't been even a day and they have already forgotten something. They left someone very special behind.

Now I understand that this analogy might be a little bit of a stretch, but how many times did we leave the most precious and valuable thing in our lives behind. How many times were we

overwhelmed by the “crowd”, the responsibilities, the busyness of our lives and left Jesus and everything he brings into our lives behind?

See Christmas is a beginning of a journey, something new has happened, that’s never happened before. God became man, so that he can journey with us, so that he can be close to us. So that he can be there for us. And we come to the manger, together with shepherds, angels and wise men and we pause in awe. We sing in joy and we say thank you Lord for loving us. And then we start to head out and often times we leave that baby, with the joy and peace it gives behind.

I believe that while we are still in this Christmas season, God is reminding us through today’s reading, that no matter where our journey takes us, we are not to forget to take with us his son Jesus. God is telling us today, don’t just assume that Jesus is somewhere out there traveling in the crowd. But make sure that he’s in your heart, in your life, walking right next to you.

And if you lose touch with him, if you’ll walk too far away from him, and you’ll wonder how can I find him again, try his Father’s house. It worked for Mary and Joseph, they found Jesus in the temple, in the community of believers. The door is always open.

Amen