

Jon Hauerwas – December 30, 2018 – Subversive Faith Colossians 3:12-17 and Luke 2:41-52

“The philosophers, particularly the Stoics, taught that there is a right time and wrong time for everything. Philosophy devoted itself to discerning the proper time. Everything, when you think about it, is a matter of proper timing. What am I seeking when I ask the advice of a stockbroker? Is this the time to buy, or is this the time to sell?” A doctor may say that “timing is everything in diagnosis. If the patient comes too early to the physician, the complaint is unspecific, difficult to pinpoint, vague. But, if the patient waits too long, the illness has progressed too far, and it is too late for treatment.”¹

“Mark Twain said the difference between the right word and almost the right word ‘is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.’ The same could be said about the difference between the right time and almost the right time.”² And yet, Christmas is the right time. “Mary and Joseph didn’t know it as they went about paying taxes, visiting relatives, getting engaged, having babies, that it was the right time. God knew.”³

¹ Will Willimon, *Lectionary Sermon Resource, Year C, Part 1* (Abingdon Press, 2018), 77.

² *Ibid.*, 79.

³ *Ibid.*, 80.

But, if Christmas is the right time, then an obvious question remains. It's the right time for what? As we wrestle with that question, we've already begun the journey beyond Christmas, into a new year, and into a new season in the life of Jesus. Luke's primary interest here is to establish that from birth, Jesus was "brought up in the moral and ritual life of Judaism. Home, temple, and synagogue formed him," and "at every significant period of his life he was in continuity" with the faith of his parents and his ancestors.⁴

Our second lesson "unfolds normally, free of miracles, fulfilled prophecies, and special revelations."⁵ In our second lesson, Jesus is twelve-years-old. "He is obeying the command to attend the Passover. When the seven-day festival ends, the pilgrims from Galilee return home. In such a caravan it is not surprising that a boy among relatives and friends would not be missed for a day."⁶

And while Jesus' parents believe that he is near, in reality, he is still in the temple, debating the religious scholars of his day. Yes. Even at this stage of Jesus' life, "there were in him stirrings of his own identity. The circle of his awareness and

⁴ Fred B. Craddock, *Luke, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 41.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

the sense of a larger duty begin to widen and deepen beyond the home in Nazareth.”

7

That day in Jerusalem was a coming of age. Jesus began to lessen “his reliance on his parents’ protection. At Passover time in the holiest of cities, he wandered away to immerse himself in the Jewish faith they had instilled in him since his birth. He loved it, and wanted to explore it even more. So he ventured off on his own – without permission, without a plan. Through his adolescent rebellion, he buried his childhood and began a new life fit for the danger and wonder of God’s only Son.”⁸

“He did not run away that day – not really. Rather, he ran towards what had been tugging on him his whole life. He elbowed his way through the long temple lines. He boldly planted himself before the high priests and rabbis. He did not stay silent. He asked questions. He challenged the answers. This was the essence of his faith. And all were amazed (and maybe some understandably annoyed) by this eager young man. Yes, that day Jesus the child died when he jumped feet first into an unknown journey, and it was there in the terror, in the danger of it all, that his ministry was born.”⁹

⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁸ Samantha Gonzalez-Block, “Let the Journey Begin,” *Journal for Preachers*, Advent 2018, 18.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

When Mary and Joseph discover that their child is not with them, they return to Jerusalem in a panic. And, when he is finally found, the tensions between the parents and child are palpable. “Son, why have you treated us so?” “Your father and I have been looking for you anxiously.” But, as Luke implies, “family love and loyalties have their place and flourish under the higher love and loyalty to God.”¹⁰ Soon, Jesus “goes with them to Nazareth ‘and was obedient to them,’ seemingly restoring parental authority.”¹¹

But, before he does, he offers a startling response. We imagine him saying, “Why are you searching for me when you know I have already been found? Mom and Dad, you introduced me to the turbulent waters of faith. You yourselves knew what it was like to trust God and to dive into the unknown. You brought me on long pilgrimages by foot each year to the holy city. You taught me how to praise God on my knees. You introduced me to a community that despite being oppressed continues to faithfully believe – no matter the cost. So here I am amongst my people, the ones you showed me to love. Here I am in God’s house, the One who calms the seas with just a voice. Here I am – right where I belong – where the Lord has always been waiting. How did you not know that I must be here?”¹²

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹¹ David Keck, “Living by the Word: Reflections on the Lectionary,” *Christian Century*, December 5, 2018, 21.

¹² *Ibid.*, 19.

At the beginning of my remarks today, I said that Christmas was the right time. And then I gave you a question to ponder. Christmas is the right time for what? On Christmas Eve, we spoke about how Mary, following the birth of Jesus, “treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.” And today, our text says that while Mary did not understand everything that her son said to her, she “treasured all these things in her heart.”¹³ There is so much to consider.

And, in our pondering, we learn that Christmas is a season of discomfort. For “when Christians and churches get comfortable with Jesus – when like his parents we presume to know where he should be and what he should be doing – Jesus rebukes us with what should have been obvious. He is not where we think he is supposed to be, rather he is doing the work of his heavenly Father. Jesus turns, looks us in the eye, and asks us one more time, *What, exactly, are you looking for?*”

¹³ *Ibid.*, 21.