Home Service Sheet for Sunday 29th December 2024

Call To Worship: Psalm 119:49-56

Remember your word to your servant,

    in which you have made me hope.

This is my comfort in my affliction,

    that your promise gives me life.

The insolent utterly deride me,

    but I do not turn away from your law.

When I think of your rules from of old,

    I take comfort, O Lord.

Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked,

    who forsake your law.

Your statutes have been my songs

    in the house of my sojourning.

I remember your name in the night, O Lord,

    and keep your law.

This blessing has fallen to me,

    that I have kept your precepts.

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, we praise You today for sending Your Son into this world to reveal You and make Your plan of salvation known to us. Amongst His names revealed in the Scriptures is the name Immanuel, God with us. We thank You for the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives, walking with us everyday. Lord Jesus, we thank You for standing with us in times of pain and loneliness and rejoicing with us in times of celebration and joy! Today as we consider Your childhood, grant us wisdom and understanding so that we might grow in faith and obedience in the days to come. To You alone belongs all the glory and honour, amen.

Hymn:   Once in Royal David’s City by Cecil Frances Alexander

<https://youtu.be/PtiCLJvyePw?si=Q7RN5RhGfCRYXCsu>

Once in royal David's city

Stood a lowly cattle shed,

Where a mother laid her baby

In a manger for his bed:

Mary was that Mother mild,

Jesus Christ her little Child.

He came down to earth from heaven

Who is God and Lord of all,

And his shelter was a stable,

And his cradle was a stall:

With the poor and mean and lowly,

Lived on earth our Saviour holy.

And through all His wondrous childhood

He would honor and obey,

Love and watch the lowly maiden,

In whose gentle arms He lay:

Christian children all must be

Mild, obedient, good as He.

For he is our childhood's pattern;

Day by day like us he grew,

He was little, weak, and helpless,

Tears and smiles like us he knew:

And he feeleth for our sadness,

And he shareth in our gladness.

Not in that poor lowly stable,

With the oxen standing by,

We shall see him: but in heaven,

Set at God's right hand on high,

Where like stars his children crowned,

All in white shall wait around.

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 trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Bible Reading:  Luke 2:41-52

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, 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, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 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.” And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. 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.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man.

Reflection

Sometimes we may struggle to read and properly understand certain passages from the Bible. This may be because of our own culture or time and the differences between it and the Middle East 2000 or more years ago. Other times we may have our own personal hang ups around animal cruelty or another emotive issue, where it would be easy for us to miss the wood for the trees. Our Bible reading today covers the one recorded report of the Lord Jesus’ childhood that we find in Scripture.

As human beings we have all experienced childhood from our own perspective when we were children, and for many of us we have also experienced it as parents too. This brings its own set of assumptions with it, that we need to try to put to one side as we read the Scriptures. In our Bible reading today, Luke tells us that Jesus was 12 years old. The problem that we have is our own sinful human experience that likely involved pushing boundaries and being disrespectful to our own parents. Jesus, although He was fully human, was without sin and was also fully God. As we look at this passage from Luke’s Gospel today, it is important to keep that fact in mind. In other words, Jesus’ actions about which we read are not sinful.

Luke tells us that Mary, Joseph and their family went to Jerusalem each year to celebrate the feast of Passover, showing them to be a devout Jewish family. After the feast had ended and people were heading home, Jesus stayed behind. Our instinct is to feel a sense of outrage at our Lord’s behaviour and have sympathy for his human parents who must have become very worried when they realised that Jesus was not with them. The problem with this is that this is not Luke’s purpose in telling us about this incident from Jesus’ childhood. Notice what Jesus says when Joseph and Mary return to find Him. “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” (v.49)

This is not about pre-teen disobedience, but rather about Jesus understanding His identity and mission. It is primarily about obedience to His Heavenly Father, revealing Jesus’ character. What we are reading today is not a prescription for us to follow. There are some godly principles from which we can learn, but that is as far as we should go here. Jesus recognised the authority of His Heavenly Father and submitted to Him. He also knew that it was right for Him to submit to His human parents for a time, which we see towards the end of our Bible reading. At a basic level we too should submit to both God and human authorities. This much is applicable to us, although there may be occasions when we must choose whether to submit to God or the rulers and authorities of this world.

I believe that it is more important for us to focus on what Jesus was doing in Jerusalem whilst Mary and Joseph were searching for Him. As a boy, Jesus, was in the temple “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.” (v.46) In one sense this is perhaps not as unusual as it might at first seem. At 13, Jewish boys must recite a lengthy passage from the Law from memory, having learned it and had it explained over the last several months. Nonetheless, Luke follows this description up with the comment that “all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.” (v.47) So, seemingly Jesus was not just asking questions and listening to the teachers of the law. He was also answering questions with understanding and authority that was unusual.

Luke does not tell us what it was that amazed people about Jesus’ understanding, and neither does he tell us where He got this wisdom from. We know that Jesus was fully God and fully man, God in human skin, but we don’t know exactly how that worked. We are told on a few occasions in the Gospels that Jesus grew and developed as human children do. In fact, in the final verse of our reading today, Luke tells us that “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man.” (v.52) God, who is all knowing and all powerful cannot increase in wisdom and grow in stature, and yet Jesus did. The bottom line is that we don’t know how Jesus’ wisdom here on earth increased, but it did. Perhaps the best answer we can give is that this is the mystery of the incarnation – God in human flesh. Amen!

Prayer

O Lord our God, Creator and Sustainer of all, we pray for people of every nation and race, and in every kind of need. We ask that You would make Your ways known on earth, Your saving power amongst the nations. Strengthen Your Church, O Lord, that we may all unite in prayer and doctrine. We pray for courage, wisdom and guidance to stand up for our faith when it is challenged. Inspire and uphold all who You have called to be pastors, elders and deacons, who lead and guide Your people as they go through life. Lord, we pray for all who suffer in body, mind or spirit and for those who care for them. We pray for the sick; for those who mourn; for those without faith, hope or love. Hear our prayer for we ask it in Jesus’ Name, amen.

Benediction

May the Lord bless us and keep us; the Lord make His face shine on us and be gracious to us all; the Lord turn His face toward us and give us peace. Amen.