

Christ Dwelling

Psalm 148

Colossians 3:12-17

Luke 2:41-52

OT: 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26 (Courtesy Vanderbilt Divinity Library)

2:18 Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy wearing a linen ephod.

2:19 His mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.

2:20 Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the LORD repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the LORD"; and then they would return to their home.

2:26 Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and with the people.

Why would we have the story of the boy Samuel as a lesson on this very holy Christmas season? Well let us take a look at it for a moment. Samuel was just a boy, growing up in the presence of God in the holiest of holy places. He was serving the Lord *in the Temple* in his responsibilities as a Priest. His mother had a miraculous birth. Samuel saw his role as growing in favor with God as well as serving the people. Sounds very similar to the Gospel reading for today, to me.

The choice of this text of the boy Samuel, naturally and graciously serving God and his fellow humans in the sacred temple, bonds Christians to the ancient Jewish wisdom which is so vital a part of our Christian faith and was a vital part of Jesus' life. Here there is precedent for who Jesus was to become - there is awareness and a sacred moment of connection.

Samuel at a young age was learning his trade in the Temple to serve the institution of faith. His family had shown great discipline and respect to tradition, and Samuel's life reflected that.

Jesus' life also reflected a certain respect for the temple and tradition. He was circumcised, taken to the temple to be presented to God, regularly went to Jerusalem for the religious holidays, recognized by the prophets Simeon and Anna. Jesus was brought up with an acute awareness of the sacredness of holy places and time.

We come here today because we recognize that as well. During a time where the profane is all around us, the clamoring of loud noises and stores selling their wares, the underlying unease about the pressures of the holy season, draws us ever closer to the need to routinely go to a sacred place where we can better focus on Christ's dwelling space. This building may be just wood, wires, cement and metal, built in a unique fashion to meet our spiritual needs, but it is definitely a sacred space. But it will only reflect what we bring into it. This building cannot instill a sense of awe and inspiration; it can only offer a place to realize what is here. And actually the sacred is not only here - it is everywhere! The advantage to coming here is the practice. Practicing being aware of the mystery and wonder of God in life, in a place that is designed to do that, helps us to become aware of the sacred in the rest of the world. Like practicing basketball in a gym would give you skills to play street basketball.

So *welcome* to Christ's sacred dwelling place. Humans throughout history and over all cultures have known that there is something that is a part of our humanity that is powerful and mystical and beyond our understanding, and we have grown as humans in each of our cultures as a result of the recognition of this awareness. Sometimes our humanity has tried to take dominance of the deity, and caused

great harm, but the reality is that there is a power of love and reconciliation that is greater than all humanity and it is calling all of creation into peace.

In Paul's letter to the Colossians we find Paul saying, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . . do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus." Words, names, why are they important? Shakespeare wrote, "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." What is in a name? Well, actually a lot. For one example, the German word "Mist" has absolutely nothing to do with the weather.

Maturing means we take more time to take seriously our thoughts and our actions and take responsibility for them. The words and thoughts that pour into our psyche reflect how important words really are. For example, it really does seem natural to feel great joy at the downfall of someone we don't like; Schadenfreude. The thought process goes something like this:

"Ugh, there is Sam, he is such a pompous jerk."

"Didn't you hear? He just lost all his money and his house is in Foreclosure!"

"Well, I hate to say it but he deserved it! There is justice in the world!"

"I hate to say it" - but I *will* say it or *think* it anyway. We have all done this! The movies are filled with it. In movies there is rarely a realistic portrayal of humanity. Bad guys are truly bad guys and we get to experience great pleasure at their demise.

But the unsympathetic portrayal of 'the other' damages our own souls as well. We become busy judging others and ourselves and are caught up in a cycle of condemnation that reaches in to our own souls as well. How hard is it for us to accept forgiveness for some of the things we do at times? Could it be the result of 'the word' and the thoughts that we are not totally aware of that we allow untamed to rule our psyche?

And if we were to focus on the word of Christ to rule our thoughts? If we were to be *able* to "do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus"? What differences would that make on our inner thoughts, our outer pronouncements, our actions, even our feelings about ourselves? Growing in faith, in Christ means struggling to come to terms with our childish natural reactions and grow beyond them until we are clothes with love. Christ dwelling in our hearts.

In Samuel we saw Christ dwelling in sacred space. In our Epistle we saw how Christ dwells in our hearts. So let us look now at our Gospel.

Jesus was twelve years old. He would be considered just a boy by our standards, but in the Jewish tradition he would have been the age of the bar-mitzvah - he would be considered an adult male, able to participate fully in the Jewish life. Here we see Jesus, whose *apparent* father's business would be carpentry, recorded for the first time to be fully aware of and stating to all who would hear what his relationship to God was. He was listening and asking questions "and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers." His parents come in, naturally upset, and he said to them, "Did you not know that I must be in my father's house?"

Christ is dwelling in the Holy Trinity. And because of this, he can move beyond the building, beyond our hearts - he is part of the whole universe, and Christ's will is clear, as was Samuel's. "Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with the people." "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor."

That is every human's greatest accomplishment - to increase in wisdom and divine and human favor. We are not part of the Holy Trinity as Christ was; but we have access to this transforming power through this child who was born in a manger - so accessible to the world. As we practice listening to

"the Words" in our souls - here in this sacred space and in the profane world outside - and as we practice loving each other as Christ loves us, there is little greater to our lives, and the hope for the world than living towards the goal of divine and human favor.