

Pastor Chris Matthis
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Second Sunday after Christmas, Series C
Saturday, January 1st, 2022 (New Year's Day/The Circumcision of Our Lord)
Sunday, January 2nd, 2022

Sermon: The Good Son

Text: Exodus 20:12; Luke 2:41-52

Focus: Jesus humbled himself by obedience to his parents and other earthly authorities.

Function: That they would honor, serve, obey, love, and cherish their parents.

Structure: Story-Framed

Locus: "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise our parents or other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them" (SC, 4th Commandment).

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Merry Christmas! *Merry Christmas!* There are few things as exasperating in the life of a parent as the moments when your children mouth off to you. Such disrespect and blatant refusal to submit to your authority can be infuriating and, quite admittedly, can make you go a little crazy. Whether it's the rage of your toddler's temper tantrum or your teenager's glib retort, "Whatever," it can just drive you downright nutty.

No wonder, then, that the full wording of the Fourth Commandment goes like this:

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you" (Ex. 20:12, ESV).¹ The unspoken implication is that if you do *not* honor your father and your mother, then your days will be *short* instead of long. In other words, you might die. In fact, the Law of Moses did command that anyone who cursed his or her parents should be put to death (Ex. 21:17; Lev. 20:9). It makes you wonder how many Hebrew children

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

dared to scream, “I hate you!” in a fit of rage. (*Aside: Of course, none of us ever said that to our parents!*)

This reminds me of a scene in one of my favorite Christmas movies, John Hughes’s holiday classic, *Home Alone* (1990). The film stars a young Macaulay Culkin as the pesky youngest son, 7-year-old Kevin McCallister. Kevin’s family is making ready to go on a family vacation to Paris, but Kevin keeps getting underfoot and in the way. He’s a kid who was definitely on Santa’s Naughty List. So Kevin gets sent to the attic as punishment for his crimes. He lashes out his mother, Mrs. McCallister, portrayed by Catherine O’Hara.

KEVIN

Everyone in this family hates me.

MOM

Then maybe you should ask Santa for a new family.

KEVIN

I don’t want a new family. I don’t want any family. Families suck.

MOM

Just stay up there. I don’t want to see you again for the rest of the night.

KEVIN

I don’t want to see you again for the rest of my whole life. And I don’t want to see anybody else either.

MOM

I hope you don’t mean that. You’d feel pretty sad if you woke up tomorrow morning and you didn’t have a family.

KEVIN

No, I wouldn’t.

MOM

Then say it again. Maybe it’ll happen.

KEVIN

I hope that I never see any of you jerks again.

And with that, Kevin storms up the stairs to the attic as his mother shuts the door. Of course, you realize what is going to happen. After all, the movie is called *Home Alone*.

Overnight, the power goes out, resetting all the alarm clocks. The entire family oversleeps and

rushes to the airport in a panic, leaving Kevin behind. He wakes up in the attack alone and discovers that nobody is home. He thinks that his wish has been granted.

At first the McCallisters don't realize that Kevin is missing. But on the flight over, Kevin's mom keeps worrying that she's forgotten to do something, like close the garage door or turn off the coffee pot. Then it suddenly hits her: she hasn't seen her youngest son. And in that iconic moment, she slaps both hands to her face and shouts, "*KEVIN!*" The rest of the movie is about Kevin's mom trying to get home to him on Christmas while he defends the house from burglars because he is home alone.

I imagine that the expression on Catherine O'Hara's face is similar to Mother Mary's mug when she realized 12-year-old Jesus was missing. [*Mimic the look.*] "*JESUS!*" Today's Gospel lesson (Luke 2:41-52) is a strange episode in the life of Jesus the Messiah. For here we have a picture of one of a difficult situation that arose between Jesus and his mother Mary.

You know the story well. The Holy Family went each year to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. One year after the feast, when Jesus was about 12 years old, his parents, Joseph and Mary, returned to Nazareth with the rest of their relatives and neighbors. Yet unbeknownst to them, Jesus wasn't in the caravan. But although they didn't see Jesus, they didn't worry, supposing him to be playing with his cousins. But after a few days, when they still hadn't seen him, they panicked, realizing that Jesus was actually missing.

Fearing that Jesus was lost, kidnapped, or worse, Joseph and Mary hurried back to Jerusalem to look for him. They searched for days. When they finally found him, he was calmly sitting in the Temple with the teachers of the Law, engaged in theological discussion. In other words, Jesus did not get *left* behind; he *stayed* behind.

And what would you have said or done in a such a situation? I imagine that you would do much more than simply ground Jesus or take away his iPhone for a few days. You would probably explode in anger, letting Jesus have it from both barrels in a barrage of verbal volleys. That's precisely what Mary did.

“Son,” she said, “why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress” (Luke 2:48).

To which Jesus' replied, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” (v. 49).

What do you say to *that*? Luke records no reply from Jesus' parents. They didn't know what to say. “They did not understand the saying that he spoke to them” (v. 50).

We know what Jesus meant because we have two thousand years of church teaching on the 27 books of the New Testament to explain what's going on here. The reason Jesus refers to the Temple as his Father's house is because the Temple was the place for worshiping the God of Israel, Jesus' heavenly Father. Another possible translation of the Greek idiom is “Did you not know that I must be about my Father's *business*.” (*Aside*: A literal rendering is this: “Did you not know that it is necessary for me to be among the [things] of my Father?”)² Jesus' true Father was not Joseph the carpenter, but the Almighty God and Father of us all (cf. John 5:18). Jesus was born to carry out the Father's saving work, “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). He had to be in his Father's house, among his Father's things, doing his Father's business. Even as a youngster, Jesus prepared for the work ahead. “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (John 5:17).

² Greek: kai. ei=pen pro.j auvtou, j ti, o[ti evzhteite, meÈ ouv h;ldeite o[ti evn toi/j tou/ patro,j mou dei/ ei=nai, meÈ

Jesus had a higher work and holier calling than just being the son of Mary and Joseph the carpenter from Nazareth. Nevertheless, the boy Jesus submitted to his earthly parents. “He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them” (Luke 2:51a). That statement is astounding.

Jesus was the Son of God, truly sinless. He never did anything wrong throughout his entire lifetime. He was tempted in every way as we are yet remained without sin (Heb. 4:15). *(Aside: Don't pay attention to the so-called Gnostic Gospels, which present a very troubling and incorrect view of Jesus' childhood. They claim that he had a bit of a temper and dropped other kids dead if they even bumped into him on the playground).* Yet even though Jesus was true God, he remained true man. And Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Creator of all things, humbled himself by obeying his earthly parents.

That same humility would one day lead to the salvation of all mankind:

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:5-8).

Jesus submitted to his earthly parents, and in so doing, he prepared to submit to the authority of the Roman governor and Jewish priests as he went his way to the cross to save us from our sins. Ultimately, Jesus submitted to the will of the Father in heaven, to whom he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matt. 26:39). And so he died for us and our sins to earn us God's forgiveness.

Jesus obeyed his earthly parents. They were fallen, foolish sinners like us. He still obeyed them. How much more ought we to love and serve our own parents! Martin Luther famously said that if someone will not care for his or her parents or grandparents in their old age, then they can't really claim to be a Christian. Whether we are young or old, our first impulse as Christian children is to do all that we can to make our parents' lives better. And even if our parents no longer live, we can still honor them by keeping their memory alive and telling our children and grandchildren about their love and care for us.

But there is another lesson in this story today. Those of us who are parents must have the humility to realize that we are not perfect people. Unfortunately, even though we try our best, we will sin against our children. We will sin against our vocation—our godly calling to love and protect and provide for our children. Our most important task is to teach them the Word of God. And some of us have failed or neglected this holy work. Others of us are impatient or overbearing towards our children. This should not be. As St. Paul writes, “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged” (Col. 3:21). An imperious or abusive parent is just as offensive to God as a rebellious son or daughter. All sin is damning unless it is confessed and forgiven. Jesus came to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the hearts of the children back to the fathers (cp. Luke 1:17). Dear friends, if you are unwilling to get down on your hands and knees to beg forgiveness from your children when you wrong them, then you still have much to learn about the ways of God.

Mary and Joseph were wrong to become angry with Jesus. But from a human standpoint, who can blame them? Nevertheless, they scolded the sinless Son of God. And it wouldn't be the last time that Mary forgot her place (cf. John 2:3-4). But Jesus still submitted to his foolish and

sinful parents. How truly humiliating that must have been for him—a sign of things to come.

Yet he bore it willingly and lovingly for us and our salvation. Jesus was a good son.

“And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:51-52). In the name of the Father and of the Son and of T the Holy Spirit. Amen.