

***“They Found Him In The Temple” (Luke 2:41-52)***

The Second Sunday of Christmas and the Twelfth Day of Christmas, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. We can still say it, “Merry Christmas!” And what a Christmas gift it is when we have clarity of purpose in life: when we know who we are, why we’re here, and where we’re going. You are a Christian, baptized into Christ and a child of the Living God; you are here to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself in the holy and sacred vocations you serve in, employing the gifts the Lord has given you for the greater good; and you are going into your future to be a blessing here on earth and to *be* blessed when you get to heaven. We don’t talk about these things often enough. We have much to be excited about. Such things relate to the concept of “destiny”. Do you dear Christian know your destiny? It is both an interesting and important question and one which should immediately be qualified. There are after all different ways to understand the concept of “destiny”.

What we do *not* mean in Christ’s Church is the idea of a nebulous and mindless fate; a hard determinism that points to a kind of hard-wiring in the universe. In this case, all forms of experiential freedom are just figments of your imagination. All forms of freedom in this worldview are illusory and every time you think you’re “choosing,” you are really just going through a predetermined course. In this case, you are a robot and the tautology “*whatever will be, will be*” means that you’re cast in a pre-written script. This sort of thinking is repugnant to say the least. Who could blame anyone who espouses it for tumbling into a depressive state when such fatalism rules the mind? The even greater problem, however, is that such a view contradicts the Word of God.

But our sin is that inherent tendency to live counter to God’s Word. How often do we treat life in a bored and perfunctory manner? But how dare we?! If we are children of the Living God, the God of miracles and eternal salvation who are here to be His living temple, equipped with His gifts, literally living our lives in the Lord Jesus Christ to share His love and to share His light...how *dare* we treat life as boring and perfunctory?! And yet we do; that is what sinners do.

But never deny this truth: you are always, 24/7, in a position to live in your faith to be a blessing. And even if your sinful nature and the world tries to convince you that you have nothing to do and must live in a frustrated way, then it is time to crucify the flesh, tell the devil to get behind you, and remember to pray, get up and serve, and recall that the Lord uses us to show the world the presence of Jesus and it is entirely possible that you may be that missionary

through whom the Lord works salvation in the heart of another human being. This is how precious you are to the Lord and to His Church.

The devil wants to tell you, however, that you are worthless so that all that is left to do is to serve your self-pity and self-indulgence. But this is not the way of the Lord. The Lord comes and sheds His light upon you, so that you will see that there is such a thing as a Christian destiny full of life and full of purpose in accord with our Resurrected Savior who works in and through you to do good even through the storms. This past week I called a former parishioner in Texas whose husband – another former parishioner – is dying and is in hospice. Her life has been very hard as of late and yet she is serving with clarity of purpose: she is loving and comforting her husband during his last days. She is actively living out her destiny as a servant of the Lord even as she shared with me her heart's desire to be as a lamb held by the Good Shepherd, just resting upon His shoulders as she lives in Christ even through the current very difficult season. She is a Christian who knows her destiny.

And while living in this purpose – enabled by God's grace – you and I know a formal freedom in which we are not coerced by pre-determinism. God allows you to freely make choices regarding your life and experiences. I'm not here denying the bondage of the will when it comes to conversion, but the inability of the human will to save itself from sin does not mean we are trapped in fatalism.

Much to the contrary God desires all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:4) and then to know as a new creation in the Lord a living will that drowns the old man and rises in accord with the new man...that is, we are permitted to experience a daily choosing (by God's grace) to live in our baptism. And if God is at work in your life, then you do choose just as you have chosen to come to Church today; just as you are choosing to receive this proclamation, and just as you will choose to receive the Holy Sacrament, choosing to believe the words of Christ: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Such choosing is consistent with the testimony of God's Word:

Joshua said to the Israelites: ***"choose this day whom you will serve..." (Joshua 24:15)***

And the author of Hebrews wrote to Christians then and to Christians now: ***"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." (Hebrews 3:7 & Hebrews 3:15 & Hebrews 4:7)***

**None of this is said to pat you on the back. We say, "to God alone be all the glory," because if we so choose these good things, it is only by the enabling work of God...still, the point is that fatalism does not have a leg to stand on.**

And now for the rest of our version of destiny: yes your destiny includes the formal freedom of making real choices along your journey of faith, but the Lord is more involved than we realize. Every hair on your head is numbered and known by God (Matthew 10:30 & Luke 12:7). Should it surprise us that He also provides for us a destiny in and through which He works in our lives through all things? Philosophers describe this balance through the word “compatibilism” and theologians speak of “concurrency”...yes, we use our wills and the Lord is always – at the same time – guiding us and this translates into a destiny that is led and empowered by the grace of God. This is a deep mystery and it’s all good (Romans 8:28).

So in Acts 17 we learn that the Lord has determined allotted periods and the boundaries of our dwelling places (verse 26). We know that Sampson was appointed to be dedicated to the Lord as a Nazirite before he was born (Judges 13); and we know that Jeremiah was consecrated and appointed to be a prophet before he was born (Jeremiah 1). The Lord leads us more than we realize.

Oftentimes, however, we see signs of our destiny. When my eldest son was a young boy he was drawn to sacred theology in an inexplicable way. It is one thing to be a “P.K.” (a “pastor’s kid” who of course is around the faith and around the church all of the time), but it is another thing to gravitate towards the discussion of the sacred things. I remember taking him to lunch and spending the whole time talking with him about the faith. He never ran out of questions. This coming Thursday, this son who is now a 25-year old man will be preaching in chapel at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. It is not unreasonable to say that one could see what was coming long before it happened. The point here though is that there were signs of his destiny if you will. I am sure that many of us have similar stories about people we know.

But there is only one destiny dear Christian that makes the rest of our destinies good and that is and was the destiny of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a sheer wonder beyond words that this destiny – Jesus’ destiny – means that our salvation rests secure since we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Jesus’ destiny was clear even when He was a 12-year old boy. How do we know? Because after he was lost to His family for three days (Luke 2:46), he was finally found in the temple in Jerusalem. Talk about signs pointing to one’s destiny! The Scriptures say, ***“they found him in the temple...”*** (Luke 2:46).

We need a little background to appreciate the significance of these words: “Israel’s journey to the Promised Land was rehearsed every year at the Passover as Israelites from around the world journeyed to Jerusalem to eat a lamb that had been sacrificed in the temple and whose blood was poured out on the altar where God was present for salvation....The

celebration involved the liturgical slaying of the lamb at the temple and then a family meal of that lamb after sundown on the fifteenth day of *Nisan*. The feast celebrated the greatest redemptive event in the history of Israel, when God delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. The angel of death killed all the firstborn of the Egyptians, but ‘passed over’ the firstborn of the Israelites because of the blood of the lamb on the lintel and posts of the door.” (Just, *Concordia Commentary, Luke 1:1-9:50*, 22 & 129).”

This great saving sacrifice of the lamb’s blood was the reason the people came to the temple. In the temple is the lamb that saves. In the temple is found the blood of the lamb that saves. In the temple, there is God’s salvation that can only be known through the saving lamb of God. In the temple, in the temple, in the temple...this was the sign of the most important destiny in the history of man.

By answering his mother, ***“Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49)***, Jesus was – in his earliest words of His life recorded in the Bible – saying that He was the Son of God, true God and true man by calling God His Father. And just as significantly, informing his mother Mary that He had to be in His Father’s house, that is, in the Temple where the Father gives salvation to His people. Where else could Jesus be in order to show the greatest sign of His destiny?

Jesus gave this sign of His destiny at age 12 because He was in the process of becoming the New Temple of God, the *only* place where sinners can possibly find salvation and freedom from sin. He is also the new and final Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. In Jesus, the Lamb and the Temple remain intact.

And it is in His blood alone that sinners like you and me find God’s hope and blessing for our new lives in Him. Through the Lamb of God whose blood ended the sacrifices in the old temple, and whose blood makes you join Him as the New Temple of God, Jesus’ destiny to save you has also defined your blessed and wonderful destiny!

Yours is a destiny of living in forgiveness, yours is a destiny of sharing in the life of Christ, yours is a destiny to live out your salvation as the born-again people of God, yours is a destiny that leads you to experience the sign of your destiny of glory: you are in the Father’s house, in His Church, where the Lamb is still found and where His blood is still received over and over again for the forgiveness of sins. This seals your destiny and it is a glorious destiny; it is a beautiful destiny, and it is ***your*** destiny.

