

"Where Christ Is Found"

(Luke 2:40-52)

Pastor Al Espinosa

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Our Church, the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, is the only Christian Church body officially represented in the annual Tournament of Roses Parade. What a magnificent witness the Lord has permitted us to give to the world every year on national television! But how does one present the saving faith on a float? In 1997 I had the honor to be on our theme-winning float that year and the saving faith was shown through the stages of our lives highlighted by our being in the Father's house. There was a scene of a baptism, when we were brought to the Father's house to be born again. It showed confirmation, when we were brought to the Father's house to confess our faith at about 12 years of age (this was the same age that Jesus was in the temple as recorded in our Luke 2 Gospel: the age at which Jews began advanced training in the Scriptures/the Word of God). And there was a scene of holy matrimony when we came to the Father's house to become one with our beloved in the Name of the Triune God. That float did not include our funeral (I suppose for understandable reasons: not wanting to dampen the New Year celebration since the world does not see death through the lens of faith). But hopefully our funerals will be in the Father's house...always in the Father's house, the best place to be on earth...the Father's house.

The Psalmist wrote, "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked." (Psalm 84:10) We learn to emphasize all of this in the third commandment and its meaning as taught in *Luther's Small Catechism*. Let's review these. As I ask the questions, please read the answers back (or do so by memory).

What is the third commandment?

"You shall remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy."

What does this mean?

"We should fear and love God, so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it."

This holy commandment is vital to keep before us. God is taking good care of us by commanding us to be in the best place throughout our lives so that our faith is kept alive and caused to grow in a healthy way. This happens because in the Father's house the Lord Jesus comes to us to feed and nourish our faith in Him through His Word and Sacrament. Even in the New Testament, we

are admonished therefore not to give up gathering in the Father's house so that we may encourage one another and all the more as the Day of Christ approaches (Hebrews 10:25). To be sure it's a big deal to be in the Father's house!

The problem dear Christian is that this is not at all obvious to us. This is quite simply not our way of thinking. Our first inclination and natural way of reasoning is *not* to be in the Father's house. There are many reasons for this, but the main one is because by nature we don't believe God's Word that this is where the Lord is to be found. We want to find God and try to find God in other places; in so many places *other than* in the Father's house!

We act this way – in sin against the Father's house – for a wrong internal reason and a wrong external reason. The wrong internal reason is that we want to go along with the idea that "God is in our hearts." So if God is in your heart, then why in the world would you ever need to connect with Him in His house? You see, if God is in you, then you don't need the Father's house! The problem here is that in-spite of how religious and spiritual we might think ourselves to be, our hearts are in themselves in bad shape. Jeremiah 17:9 states that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" It is a bad move Christian to ever substitute your heart for the Father's house. Not a good idea!

The external excuse is the supreme cop-out that equates the Father's house with the institutions of man. How many of us have heard the objection against attending worship since this is a giving in to "man-made institutions." The implication is obvious: the church = a man-made institution. Now while it is true that men have created institutions, the Church however is not man's creation, but God's. The Church is God's holy bride; in the Father's house God has arranged to meet us in order to save us from sin and death. Don't let the "man-made institution" deception and logical fallacy get you off track in coming to the Father's house!

In the meantime, don't ever think that it is mere coincidence that one of the basic attacks against our faith is when our minds list all of the reasons why we shouldn't come to the Father's house! This is not coincidental but part and parcel the battle that is constant in our lives. Now this is not to say that the Church is not to strive to be as faithful as it can be and avoid unnecessary roadblocks. We are to show Christ and the love of God. When we do a poor job of this, we create obstacles for people to be in the Father's house. But having said this, we also must be aware that -- at the same time -- our sinful nature generates excuses to avoid the Father's house.

Nowadays the younger generation is challenged in wondering if the church is even relevant anymore. We need to be aware of the current issues that challenge how we present ourselves as the Body of Christ. Tony Cook in his Next Gen. presentation about reaching today's millennial generation

(those born between the early 80's and the early 2000's) wants to make us aware of these things that are on the hearts and minds of millennials today. They desire a Church that:

- Focuses on Jesus and his teachings
- Connects to daily life
- Provides models of maturity and character
- Demonstrates love, mutual respect, and unity
- Doesn't compromise doctrine
- Provides supportive intergenerational community
- Address issues of equality and justice
- Serves community and world
- Allows diverse leadership and participation
- Listens to perspectives and allows discussion
- Utilizes Internet as educational platform
- Connects stewardship to mission not administration

That is we should do all that can – as long as it is consistent with the Word of Christ – to be faithful to what it means to offer the Father's house to people for whom Jesus shed His precious blood! We need to do this, because so many people – even those without faith in Christ – know that Christmas is about the birth of Christ, but it is easy for us to miss the rest of the story: the Savior who was born kept coming back to the Father's house. Have you noticed this about the Word of God? Jesus was only 8 days old when He is brought to the Father's house to be circumcised. The world celebrated New Years on January 1st, but the Holy Church remembers that this was the 8th day; the day of our Lord's circumcision. To even mention it seems weird and detached and the skeptic will say, "No wonder people view the Church as irrelevant!" But people often complain about what they don't understand.

Jesus had to go to the Father's house, the holy temple in Jerusalem to have done to him what the Old Testament Law required. It was the sign that Jesus was truly a son of Abraham, a member of God's covenant people. But much more occurred that day. Again, this happened in the temple – the Father's house – where all of the holy and bloody sacrifices were offered up to God, but now an 8-day old baby came and his blood was shed for the first time in the Father's house...Jesus was not merely keeping the Law of God for you, but He was already showing why He came. He came to shed His blood so that all who come to the Father's house trusting in Jesus' blood shed for their sin would be acceptable in the sight of the Heavenly Father. Then 32 days later, Jesus is brought back to the Temple/The Father's house *again*. This time for the holy presentation and this was when Simeon sang his song. This was when He said that Jesus was the salvation of God, the long-awaited Savior -- God with us -- hiding in a baby who came to give Himself in the Father's house for all sinners. And now here we are *again* – in our Gospel today – Jesus comes back at age 12...and where is He? What is the

Biblical message for us Christian? Where is Jesus to be found? Where do we find Him AGAIN?!
Answer: in the Father's House!

But Mary and Joseph are alarmed. Where was He? They had left the Passover Feast in Jerusalem in caravan, among many people, trusting that their 12-year old son was more than capable of remaining with the larger group. One day they discover He's missing, the second day they must return to Jerusalem, and the third day they search for Him in Jerusalem. For three days He is out of sight – like when he died and was buried – for three days it was not known where He was! They were worried, they were scared! Has this ever happened to you? I was in London with one of my daughters and all of a sudden, I didn't know where she was...I got really scared! I actually started thinking to myself, "What in the world am I going to tell my wife?!" I started to panic! But that was just for a matter of 20 or 30 minutes. Mary and Joseph didn't have their son for three days! On another occasion Traci and I were on vacation in Canada and I couldn't find her. I had thoughts that someone had kidnapped my wife...and that this would eventually lead to our congregation getting a ransom note! But really, I was scared, but again this was only for about 20 or 30 minutes...what was going through Mary's mind as she looked and looked, calling out for her son and probably thinking about the Lord's judgment against her!

Why did it take her so long? But why does it take **us** so long? We look for God in all of the wrong places! Our sin leads us astray every, single time! Finally, they go to where they should have gone right way: to the Father's house!

Jesus is not here in this Gospel merely giving you and me an *example* that we should follow. There is much more going on. This was the Feast of Passover when God had entered into Egypt and killed the firstborn of the rebellious Egyptians, but "passed over" the houses of the faithful Israelites who had placed the blood of the Passover lambs on the lintels and posts of their doors. Jesus was in the Father's house, the One who was given by the Father to give His blood to cover the lintels of our houses and the doorposts of our sinful hearts; the One Who's blood saves us from our sin.

Indeed much more is going on here. Jesus does not merely give us an example of keeping the Law. If going to the Father's house is all about Law, then no wonder we don't want to come to church! Instead, Jesus keeps coming back to the Father's house over and over again to do His mission to save. If we will not come, He comes to save us anyway; if we will not sacrifice, then He has nevertheless sacrificed His whole life for all; if we will not love the Father, then it is still true that He loves the Father even in our stead...and if we have nothing to give for our sins in the Father's house; then we may rest in Him who came to the Father's house to give His life blood right outside the gates of the Father's house for you...for you...Jesus *had* to be in the Father's house. Again, all for you, all for you...and by doing so, finally, the Father's house is *your* house.

Saved by grace through faith in Jesus through His Word and His Sacrament, being in the Father's house is no longer about what we *got* to do, but rather about what we *get* to do. We are now invited to a feast, to the place where our salvation is guaranteed; where God's love is assured; where the Holy Spirit works to give us peace in this crazy world. This is where we find Jesus over and over again. This is where we see Christ in His body and blood given and shed for us for the forgiveness of sins. Here Jesus still abides in the Father's House; this is where in all of the coming 2015 God promises you Christian: "never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." He says to you, "this is where I promise you will always be able to find me, in my Father's house for you, for you, for you."

This coming summer of 2015 will be the four year anniversary since my dad fell asleep in the Lord. Towards the end of his life he was greatly distressed that he could not be at home. He didn't want to be at the residential home that provided the 24-care he needed. What was so special about being home? One day during his last days he revealed the reason: he told my mom that *she* was his home. Home was not simply "where the heart [was]" but it was where a *person* was. We long to be with God. We long to know forgiveness, and peace, and love, and joy, and life...so where do we go to find a home like this? We go to the Father's house...this is the singular reason for coming to church, it is the *reason* the church is more than just *in* our lives but why our lives need to be anchored to the church; it's the reason the Lutheran Hour put it in a Rose Parade...not because it is a building or an "institution," but only because it is where we find a *person*, and *this person also happens to be God our Savior...and every single time you come to the Father's house; He comes to you dear Christian...He comes to meet you -- not to condemn, not to load down -- but to forgive; to impart grace; to lift you up; to draw you to God; to keep you in His tender care and mercy...and to assure you that you, yes you belong right here in the Father's house, always to reconnect to a person: the King of kings, the Lord of lords, Jesus Who has paved your way and guaranteed your place in the Father's house. You come now not as an obligation but as coming to an earthly paradise, where you are loved and where your life overflows...in the Father's house and because you are now in Christ, we may say, "in your Father's house!"*