

# From now on, I'll live my life ...

*... in the past, the present and the future*

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*A sermon given on the First Sunday of Christmas, 26<sup>th</sup> December 2021 – by the Youth Minister Ben Merrell, in Beverley Minster*

*Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-end*

So Firstly, good morning. Happy cooking Christmas. How's everyone doing? Everyone awake still? Everyone over there? So I'm guessing that you guys probably have about as much sleep as we did with our little ones - well done for being here! Now, reading these passages, getting ready for this service, it feels like the narrative switch in the gospel reading has taken a bit of a hint from one of the many comic book related movies or TV shows I like to watch, because yesterday Jesus was born with all the celebration of mangers and angels and shepherds, and it feels like across the screen it's faded to black and it's just gone twelve years later - it's sort of like 'What happened to the wise men. We haven't had them yet?' It's all a bit abrupt, but that's okay.

So today's gospel reading - ***'Losing a twelve year old!'***

Now this passage hits home with me because I have a six year old and a two year old. So has anyone got a short story that they might want to share of losing a child? Put your hands up if you have had a child wander off! Excellent - I feel a little bit better because, Jonathan, I have a confession to make: two weeks ago we had to start the service late at the 1030 because James thought it would be hilarious to play hide and seek amongst the Christmas trees just as we were about to start. So there I was at the front with Wendy; Wendy ready to do the notices; Sarah at the back, wardening - and suddenly, Aisla runs up to me and goes, "*Daddy, I don't know where James has gone. He's disappeared.*" Cue: Various servers and clergy running around trying to find him. And do you know where he was? 12ft away against the wall behind the Christmas tree, giggling his head off. He thought it was hilarious (but I didn't!) So that panic that I had, followed by that frustration that James would choose to play this trick when I'm at the front and getting ready to go in, in what was such a safe space ... it was hilarious to him, but not to me. And of course, any attempt to rebuke a nearly three year old is a fool's errand, because he's not bothered. So I think I can begin to understand the panic of Mary and Joseph, then

the relief that they had of finding Jesus and then the totally understandable frustration at him, *'Child, why have you treated us like this? Can you not see our anxiety?'*

It's almost as if Mary's calling Jesus out for being a bit uncompassionate and not considering what they would be thinking. Which isn't necessarily fair, of course: he is a pre-teen adolescent after all. And as I know, with working with the young people I work with, they haven't always developed the best decision making skills yet, so it's not necessarily their fault.

And of course, Jesus's reply shows that he didn't see it as an act of rebellion or thoughtlessness on the feelings of his parents, *'Why were you looking for me? Wasn't it obvious where I'd be?'* He thought it was clear that although the family had been on this pilgrimage together to the temple for Passover, his pilgrimage, his 'passing over' was more than just remembering and celebrating the events of the past. He was 'passing over' from childhood to a more adult understanding of the Scriptures, which he demonstrated by his wanting to discuss and debate with the teachers. And when he states that he was in his Father's house, there was also a hint of 'passing over' of obedience from his earthly father, Joseph, to his heavenly Father.

So going back to my comic book analogy, this is our superhero's coming-of-age moment where a decision is made, a life is permanently changed and the course of the rest of the narrative is set.

It makes me think again of the fuzziness of the timeline in this period of lectionary readings between Christmas and Epiphany, almost mirroring the fuzziness of time between Christmas and New Year that I kind of feel at this time of year

Jesus is listening to the teachers discussing scripture, discussing the past. In his teachings in the Gospels when he's a bit older, he would relate these teachings that he'd had through *his* present, to the present of the people listening to him, and by doing that he's demonstrating the importance of their interpretation for the future.

Now last night I was reflecting on these readings while partaking in the only appropriate Christmas Day evening tradition: eating too much cheese and watching the Muppet Christmas Carol on the telly, which is obviously the best version (don't try to convince me otherwise!) But towards the end of the film, and I hope the book as

well (not that I've read it), Scrooge finds himself back in his Chambers after his visit from the three spirits, and he finds that he has indeed been given a second chance to change and he's full of relief, and he goes, *"From now on I'll live my life in the past and the present and the future."*

And I think this is helpful for the message of this period of Christmas season. So Firstly, don't try to keep up with the jumping around the timeline, it doesn't matter. What matters is how we live our lives in the past and in the present and in the future: in the past, by reading and listening to the stories and experiences and writings of those who have gone before, who have already grappled with what it means to be people of God who have wisdom that we can learn from and interpret and have written it down in here [holds up a Bible]; in the present by allowing Christ's Word to dwell in us, clothing ourselves in love and allowing Christ to rule in our hearts, just as Paul wrote in the reading that Jane read for us just now; in the future, by acknowledging that by allowing the Spirit to work through us, we can change the world for the better - we can be a part of making God's Kingdom come here on Earth now.

So just to remake the point of a topsy-turvy timeline: that little baby who was born yesterday; today, we've seen him growing up and in a moment we will remember and relive his death as we approach the Communion table. But because we know the story, we will also remember his rising and his victory over death too, trusting that that's our story as well, knowing that we live out our lives in this truth.

## Reading Texts

### Colossians 3:12-17

<sup>12</sup> As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup> Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

### Luke 2:41-end

<sup>41</sup> Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. <sup>42</sup> And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. <sup>43</sup> When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. <sup>44</sup> Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. <sup>45</sup> When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. <sup>46</sup> After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup> And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup> When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." <sup>49</sup> He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" <sup>50</sup> But they did not understand what he said to them. <sup>51</sup> Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup> And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.