

Ex 2:1-10
1 Cor 1:18-25
Luke 2:41-52

Creator, Redeemer Sustainer, etc.

It is an interesting juxtaposition, the young Moses and the young Jesus: one who led his people out of Egyptian captivity, and the other who led the world out of the captivity and chains of sin.

But let's look at this extraordinary story of Jesus in the temple through Luke's eyes: it is very relevant to us, in Nelson, this week.

I'll start with one of those 'Steve anecdotes' that people claim to like.

In days of yore, in the UK, there were two stages of vetting for handling secret information.

The first was called 'negative vetting' and it was a trawl through the candidate's history and connections for any obvious pointers that they might not be trustworthy with state secrets.

The second tier was positive vetting. It was for people to be cleared for 'top secret' and was a very much more labour intensive and active process, including finance checks, checks with former employers,

checks with referees and checks with associates not nominated as referees. But the first check was with the candidate's school.

I once challenged a vetting officer as to why they were trying to check on me as an adolescent with my housemaster, who'd actually been called to Glory years prior to this, and pointed out that I'd left school nearly twenty years before!

He told me that there was strong empirical evidence that a young adolescent's character traits seldom changed in adulthood, but workplace polish helped people to conceal the less attractive ones. So the adolescent snapshot of personality was often starker than a more recent version!

The die is cast very young.

Hold that thought.....

You'll indubitably remember that much of the story of the encounter with Simeon, which precedes this in the Gospel, is actually about Luke establishing Joseph, Mary and Jesus' bona fides as Orthodox Jews, and of course the resonance of this transmits forward into this reading; the

family makes pilgrimages to the Temple, following the Torah, at passover. Remember the resonance here: the feast of the passover subsequently marks Jesus' throwing the money changers OUT of that very temple and becomes representative as the Lamb of God becomes the sacrifice, with His blood on the cross and not the doorpost. This is, once more, a clever overture.

But also Luke carefully interweaves a classic element of the biographies of great men (women didn't really count in those times): childhood play and activity somehow portending that of the adult. So with Jesus teaching in the temple, he is portrayed to the classical hearer as someone who will be a great teacher and preacher. (Plutarch on Cato, Dionysius on King Tullius, etc).

But of course, the crux is this: Jesus, at the threshold of his Bar-Mitzvah, Jewish acceptance of manhood, has seemingly disobeyed his earthly parents but is overtly obeying his father, God! Note how He refers to the Creator God as his Father, even to His parents.

And of course, as I keep on saying, the C1 Jewish concept of the temple wasn't some form of ancient cathedral, but instead a building designed and built in some way to 'house' God: think of it as a gilded cage for the

deity, who was somehow thought to be more concentrated in the middle chamber, the Sanctum Sanctorum than anywhere else.

So 'My father's house' is much more significant than referring to church as "God's House": it's Jesus making a clear and unequivocal statement about who He is.

But wait! As that rather annoying TV advert reminds us! But wait!.....

We've established that Jesus was brought up in a very orthodox Jewish family, following the Torah. Remember the commandment 'honour thy father and thy mother'?

Here we have clear and unequivocal evidence that the adolescent Jesus put His duty to His Heavenly Father first, above any respect due to His earthly parents who were clearly fraught with worry. And when, relieved, they find Him, His response might have caused significant offence, reminding Joseph and Mary of His lineage; 'MY father's house', he said.

So we have modern empirical evidence from the vetting office about unchanging character, as well as the classical observation that people who attain greatness evince those traits while still youthful.

So what can we learn from this?

Despite his orthodox background, Jesus' view of the world was counter cultural. He eschews the mores of C1 Judaism in favour of his higher calling.

We live in a world which enjoys outward totems and tokens of success.

Trophy houses

Expensive motor cars

The latest designer labels,

The most recent Apple 'phone,

etc., etc.,

Hi

It's not just about money, it's how these things become culturally proxies for how successful we are.

(Anecdote re cars)

.....While the Alice-through-the-looking-glass, topsy turvy, back-to-front kingdom of God is focused on the heart. God's not interested in our swimming pools or Audis, instead, in God's counter cultural kingdom, it's all about loving God and our neighbour.

It all sounds easy.

It's VERY hard.

All around us are the temptations to evince earthly success not only in our worldly possessions, but also in the people with whom we mix, because birds of a feather flock together!

We smugly eschew the temptations to make graven images, to steal, to murder or to lie, and are in danger of satisfying ourselves that we follow God's commandments (though I do sometimes covet my neighbour's Aston Martin).

But The Christ calls us to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Here we come to that relevant extrapolation to 2025 Nelson.

This can relate to one of the most dangerous temptations of all: the desire to associate with some self-selecting 'in crowd' can lead us all to turn a Nelsonian eye to the 'out crowd', who might need our ministrations more keenly. Christ was criticised by 'decent people' for eating with tax collectors and other undesirables. Of course birds of a feather flock together, and we find pleasure and comfort in spending time with like minded people, who share our values.

But is that where Christ calls us?

In our heart of hearts, we know it isn't. We sometimes need to push our comfort zones. But for me, at least, it's a sharp reminder that we all fall short of reflecting God's Glory in our lives.

But wait!..... just as the blood of the passover lamb on the doorpost protected the Israelites, the blood of our passover lamb, that which stained the cross, protects us.

With the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus the Christ, we are separated from those things that might otherwise come between ourselves and God. Those areas where we *all* fail, lay and ordained, fully to answer our calling.

As the apostle Paul taught us, our salvation is not obtained through good works, or perfection as humans, but by faith, through grace. As Jim quoted today from the first extant letter to the people of Corinth, "For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the *power of God*."

Thank God for Jesus.

Amen