

**Sermon: 2021/01/12 (ALTERNATIVE - 1st Sunday after Epiphany) -
Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 147; Ephesians 1:3-6,15-19a; &
Luke 2:41-52_BTR**

[Invite children to the front. Large circle of cardboard pre-painted light blue, fat green marker-pen, yellow duct-tape.]

Nothing surprises God.

[Begin drawing on the continents.]

He sees *all* of human history - *everything* we're doing today, everything our grandparents did, and everything our own children will do - *right at this very moment*.

(Always has and always will.)

And so when He decided to build the universe, He could see *already* that it would "break;" that we would break it.

[Tear cardboard in half.]

So He decided upon a way to fix it *even* before He began His work of creating it!
- 'through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of His will'.

[Tape it together with a cross.]

This is what Saint Paul reassures his audience "the Ephesians" about today in the epistle reading.

That, whatever happens - whatever mistakes we might make, there is, in fact, this *overarching* plan, which "rolls" relentlessly forward toward something far, far better.

And we can be part it(!), *if* we agree to be "adopted" as God's children by faith in His Son.

Let's pray:

Lord God, ..., in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

[Dismiss children.]

Next week, the Church celebrates Christ's baptism by His (distant) cousin, John. And John, as he performed the rite on the Savior, standing in the Jordan, saw the

Holy Spirit, shaped something like a dove, flow down from Heaven into Jesus - and the significance of this is that, from that moment on, He - *Jesus* - was then able to perform... *miracles*.

- Miracles by which He could then prove Himself the unique, *eternal* Son of God - that is to say, God Himself, in fact.

And that's why He did them - to underscore His *unrivaled* authority to preach and teach.

To "underscore" how *His* voice wasn't just another voice among many; and *His* opinion wasn't just another opinion among many.

For there have *always* been *countless* philosophers and gurus, commentators and pundits in the world, competing for our attention; competing for influence in our lives and homes.

And it's deafening!

And bewildering.

Who should I listen to?

Who do I permit to have power over what *I* and my children think and believe?

It can be very hard to separate the truth from "alternative facts;" to discern the real news from "fake news."

And, thanks to social media and cable news and unashamed partisan journalism, this problem is worse than ever!

Jesus, therefore, needed a "device;" a stratagem that would lift *His* soul-saving message above the confused clamoring of the crowd, and this He does by extraordinary feats of stop-and-stare angelic ability.

Thus, later, when John, imprisoned and feeling pretty sorry for himself, perplexed that the Messiah he himself had announced - "as the Lamb..." - hadn't just immediately transformed everything, began to doubt that he had seen what he had seen at the river, what does Jesus say to his followers?

"Go and tell John what you hear *and see...*"

And His ministry that follows is a veritable smorgasbord of evidence:

nobody else could do all those remarkable things.

Nobody has done so since.

But up to that point; that juncture - His baptism, the universal witness of the *reliable* testimony available to us is that Jesus, being truly human after all, could *not* demonstrate His divinity:

There was, before then, no walking on water or multiplying loaves and fishes; no turning water into wine, etc.

But even though He hadn't, yet, such a capacity, this didn't alter the reality about who He was: the Creator who existed before the foundation of, well, anything.

And so this fact about Him emerges in much more *subtle* ways - "ways" that we need to pay close attention to discover: such as during the trip to the Temple

when He was twelve.

What happens?

He "amazes" some scribes employed there by His knowledge of the holy Scriptures.

And it seems that they were testing Him; trying to "catch Him out;" "trip Him up."

But, again and again, we hear, they find He has the 'answers'.

It is as if He had this encyclopedic knowledge of - what we would call - "the Old Testament."

But then of course He would, yes?

That's what you're probably thinking.

After all, indirectly, He wrote it.

He is *the* Word of the Lord, right?

But that's not to say Jesus hadn't needed to expend effort or time on learning those things about the Bible that He shared that day: notice the final sentence in today's gospel extract - I quote, 'And Jesus increased in wisdom...'

Implying a change in quantity from less.

(And Paul does stress how Christ "emptied" Himself to be incarnated: [\[Phil. 2:7\]](#).)

He wasn't, then, born a rocket-scientist;

He hadn't come from Mary's womb speaking multiple languages and wearing a monocle, a little PhD scrolled up in his tiny baby-hand.

But having God's heart, and pious Jewish parents had meant that, we can guess, the sacred literary-tradition of Abraham's people - Moses' law - were supreme in that Nazarene household.

So, what about in your home?

If Jesus is our model; our ideal, how are we imitating Him in *this* respect?

Is the Bible and the Bible-stories the center of our families?

Are we intentionally striving to place it at the centre of our worldview?

Not to *earn* some holier-than-thou credit - we can't, but because we earnestly desire to please the Lord and to implement His vision of the Kingdom.