

Conversations in the Temple

The Second Sunday after Christmas Day. Luke 2:41-52 (The Youthful Jesus in the Temple.) January 3, 2016. The Episcopal Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance in the Diocese of Ohio. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove.

Long, long ago, in a diocese not very far away, I heard a young man about fifteen years of age stand up on Sunday and read from the book of Revelation. This is how he introduced it: "A reading from the book of the revolution!"

We all got a kick out of it, not just because of the fierce earnestness of the young man's malapropism, but because there *is* something of a tone of revolutionary upheaval in the Revelation of St. John the Divine. If you take it on the whole, that book of the Bible is indeed about a cosmic revolution precipitated by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Death is turned on its head; life and light are triumphant; the old order is remade, restructured, redeemed.

As every new year rolls around we attempt to counteract the inertia of the same-old, same-old with new year's resolutions. We know a revolution of sorts in our behavior would be a good thing. Old habits are not always good habits; our growth in virtue is never complete. Grace and truth remain to be fully appropriated in our lives.

We can find encouragement in our lifelong project to increase in wisdom by contemplating today's Gospel reading. Jesus, at what we would call middle-school age, is accidentally left behind in Jerusalem after his parents depart for Nazareth in Galilee following the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. Yes, this prefigures the Passover at the end of Jesus' earthly ministry when he will celebrate the Last Supper and face the Cross. But it also shows us something about how to grow in grace, truth, wisdom, virtue, all that good stuff, while in the middle of the mess that is ordinary life.

Who knows who got their signals crossed so that Jesus missed the rendezvous for the caravan's departure? But once he was left behind, he did the thing that came most naturally to him: he went to the Temple. Having reached the age of twelve, the age of bar mitzvah, he had the status of a full participant in the religious life of the Jewish tradition. And being the kind of young fellow he was, he went where he could spend his time getting to know grace and truth better. The Jerusalem Temple was not just a place of worship but of teaching and scholarship. And his parents, after days of exasperated panic, found him there, more than holding his own in Godly conversation with learned adults.

Being the kind of human beings we are, that is, Christians, we ought to know where we can spend our time getting to know grace and truth better. We are in the Temple when we are with Jesus in prayer, when we are with one another in Godly conversation, when we are studying scripture, because Jesus himself is the new Temple and the Holy Spirit offers continuous access to him. We are invited every minute of our lives to join the conversation with Jesus that is prefigured in today's Gospel reading. We don't need to be in a designated holy place to find grace, truth, wisdom, virtue and so on, but we do need to be designating our intentions as holy. That is, we need to offer our time, awareness, intellect, emotions and staying power to God.

Now: Do we do that when we're considering our new year's resolutions? Do we do that when we're considering losing weight, spending more quality time with our spouse, getting control of

our finances, or whatever the resolution is? Most times those resolutions have to do with good things; I'm not belittling that. What I'm asking is, do we treat the new year's resolution thing as a secular ritual or as something that involves God? All human choice involves discernment, which for Christians means asking, "Where is God in this?"

I submit that this off-putting to us. It is off-putting because it is frightening. It is frightening because it is potentially transformative, maybe involving profound and challenging changes to our lives. What if God tells me not just to help out at the Wednesday free lunch program but to turn my yard, my garage and most of my house into a free vegetable garden? What if he tells me to give up ice cream—not just for Lent, but forever? These are somewhat humoresque exaggerations, but the fact is that we typically experience resistance or reluctance to really involve God in our choices, and even as we joke about it we touch upon an important reality: the whole Bible, not just the New Testament and certainly not just the Book of Revelation, is the Book of the Revolution. The Bible is witness to a God who wants to be involved profoundly in transforming the life of the world.

The young Jesus jumped into holy religion like a kid doing a cannonball off the high board. We barely stick our big toe into the shallow end of the pool. Time to hop in and wade toward deep water. A new year is beginning. A new age began when Jesus rose from the dead. Time for renewal. Time for Godly resolutions. Time to read that Book of the Revolution. Time for Godly conversation with our brothers and sisters in Christ—and with those who may be seeking him. Time to remember that we walk around drenched and dripping with the water of Holy Baptism. Time to rise again.

❖ *This sermon is a modification of the sermon preached on January 2, 2011 at Salem and Alliance.*