



Hazelbank Presbyterian Church



Rev Alan Johnston

This being a Baptismal Sunday I like to take a moment to look at some aspects of family life. We are all part of families either past, present or future. We have generations in the sanctuary this morning. We have newborn babies born this week into families of this Congregation. We have other folk who have celebrated birthdays in their nineties and there are all the ordinary run of the mill people in between. But we are all part of a family - if not necessarily at home but certainly here in Hazelbank. And if you are new to our Church or if you have just popped in today to see how things were done in this Church then you are very welcome and we would love to have you come and join what I hope is a happy family. But family life is funny.

I recently read this notice that is intended to be attached to the outside of a bathroom door. It reads:

Attention Everyone: The Bathroom Door is Closed!

Please do not stand there and talk, whine or ask questions.

Wait until I get out.

Yes, it is locked. I want it that way.

No, it is not broken; I am not trapped.

I know I have left it unlocked, and even open at times, since you were born, because I was afraid some horrible tragedy might occur while I was in there. But it's been ten years, and I want some privacy.

Do not ask me how long I will be. I will come out when I am done.

Do not bring the phone to the bathroom door.

Do not go running back to the phone yelling, "She's in the bathroom!"

Do not begin to fight as soon as I go in.

Do not stick your little fingers under the door and wiggle them. This was funny only when you were two.

Do not slide pennies, Lego, or notes under the door, even when you were two, this got a little tiresome.

If you have followed me down the hall, talking, and are still talking as you face this closed door, please turn around, walk away and wait for me in another room. I will be glad to listen to you when I am done.

Oh and yes, I still love you. Mum.

A little girl called out, "Mummy, you know that china vase in the cabinet, the one that's been handed down from generation to generation?"

"Yes, dear, I know which one you mean, what about it?"

"Well, Mummy, I'm sorry, but this generation just dropped it!"

Now some earthly possessions have sentimental value, and to break them is great loss, but how much more tragic it would be for a new generation to "drop it" spiritually - to fail to pass along the Godly heritage they have received! That would be an eternal loss.

In Deuteronomy 6:1-3, ¹These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to

possess, ²so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you.

Moses gave the Israelites instructions before they entered the promised land. The purpose was, in Moses words, "that you may fear the Lord Your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I commanded you, you and your sons and grandsons, all the days of your Life".

God's laws were to be observed from generation to generation. Moses therefore told the people "You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, where you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up". He also instructed them, "you shall write them on the door post of your house and on your gates".

Jesus' parents did this - the question this morning is - are we? Luke only gives us this one story about what happened in the early years of Jesus life. But we read in Luke chapter 2: ³⁹When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him. ⁴¹Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. ⁴²When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom.

Because of Mary and Joseph's devotion to their faith they took time every year to travel to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Jewish men were required to travel up to Jerusalem three times a year to worship at the temple. However this involved cost and not all could afford to make this journey so often and so they would have chosen one celebration to attend and that one usually was the Passover. There was therefore the opportunity to make it a full family celebration, as the children would have gone too. The procession would have been in caravans with the women and children leading the way as the men followed behind. This would not have been simply a family event but neighbourhoods and villages would all have been travelling together. In some ways I suppose it is a bit like today with families all coming to Church together and being part of a greater fellowship. Although we are not here today for the Passover we are here to celebrate Annie's baptism.

You know what it is like if you are a parent after Church here on a Sunday morning when you are trying to get your own child to come home with you! They are everywhere and all together having fun, racing around and laughing together - praise the Lord! But if you can, try to imagine what it would be like as these pilgrims made their way up towards Jerusalem and back home again. All the children would have been running around laughing and playing with each other. And you can be sure that Jesus was amongst them.

Often a lot is expected from the manse children because they live in a manse - which is unfair because they are just children and need to be allowed to be children. Please understand that this is a generalization and not a criticism of the folk in Hazelbank - but you know what I mean. Now, I often wonder if this is the case, then how was it for Jesus? Did his parents ever expect him to be better behaved as a child because he was the son of God or did they simply allow him to have his childhood? I don't know and I am not sure that this should be our focus this morning...

Anyway there they were on their way home from Jerusalem and Luke tells us: ⁴³After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him.

Can you imagine what they must have been feeling? I cannot begin to think what it must have been like for them. Perhaps it wasn't so bad for them because they didn't live in the society that we live in today where children face abuse in the home, in care, in public and there are fears over where known paedophiles are living. I don't believe that these issues were really as bad as they are in our own crooked and depraved generation. You would wonder though because in Phil 2:14 Paul says: ¹⁴Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe ¹⁶as you hold out the word of life in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.

If the day in which Paul was living was a crooked and depraved generation then what words could he possibly find to describe the generation we are living in? I believe that words would fail him. We are bringing up children in a world where there is such depravity all around us that we cannot let them out of our sight.

We cannot let them browse the newspapers or magazine on the shelves in filling stations or newsagents because of the images that assault their senses and rob their innocence.

We cannot let them surf the Internet for the fear of pop ups or wrongly typed web addresses.

We cannot let them play out of our sight even around the neighbourhood because we do not know who might be lurking around the corner or just about to drive past...

Granted things have got somewhat out of hand especially within Church activities when child protection guidelines cramps our operation with its almost overkill approach. And yet on Friday we were informed by the BBC that the largest Roman Catholic diocese of Down and Connor released statistics this week that revealed that in the last 50 years in that diocese alone there have been no fewer than 15 priests accused of sex abuse. I use this fact not as an attack against the Roman Catholic Church, please be assured of that, but simply to highlight the age in which we are living and why we have such things as Child protection guidelines.

How must Mary and Joseph have been feeling? I know how we would have been feeling. No police to phone, no mobiles at hand to contact anyone back in Jerusalem. No fast car to hop in and speed back up the road to Jerusalem. No all they could do was to turn around and hope that they could get back to Jerusalem before it was too late. ⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

I think that this is curious but I also believe that there is a powerful lesson in this for us not in so much what is said but rather in what is not said.

Three days! Three days! When you read this verse, verse 46 do you sense the panic in the parents? Do you pick up on the fear and desperation in the pair of them? No you

don't. We don't read of the emotions we would expect from them. Why? Is it just because Luke felt no need to mention them? I don't think so because Luke is known amongst scholars as the one who spoke most about people's feelings and emotions. He was the most sympathetic of the gospel writers. Strange how we don't read this here. Why?

I can't help but believe that it was because Mary and Joseph clearly understood who Jesus was and that as such God had a plan and a purpose for him. No harm could come to Jesus because He was under God's protection. How do we know this?

Well we just have to read the verses that come before today's reading: ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." ³⁶There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

What had been promised had not yet been fulfilled but we do know that there was obviously some natural anxiety because when they eventually find Jesus he is in the Temple and Mary says to him, ⁴⁷Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

If we who are parents and have had our children baptised, have we totally understood the impact of the vows we made before God? We promise, with God's help, to provide a Christian home and bring our children up in the worship and teaching of the Church so that if it is according to God's will, our child will come to know Jesus as Saviour and Lord. If we have been faithful in keeping our vows then we have every right to believe that God himself will be faithful in looking after and blessing our children according to his will and for his glory.

But before we try to conclude let's take a moment to look at Jesus answer to his mother. ⁴⁹"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰But they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁵¹Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵²And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

We don't know for how long Jesus had actually been in the Temple but we have no reason to doubt that he had been there all the while he was away from his parents. He seems to feel that this is the first place that they should have looked for him, in God's house. He was after all the son of God and the most natural place for him besides his parents house, was at the Temple in Jerusalem, his Heavenly Father's house. Don't forget we believe that Jesus was fully God and fully man therefore he would have had two fathers as indeed each one of us has through faith in Christ.

Last Wednesday was a highlight for me from my time in Hazelbank to date. Kids Rock + The hall was filled with families. We had 44 adults, 36 children, 3 teenagers and a host of carved pumpkins all declaring God's love instead of the traditional carved scary faces. It was a tremendous evening together and many of you were there and can vouch for what I

am saying. Children were bringing parents to Church. The parents would not have been there if the children had not brought them. The children wanted to be in Church because this was their club. Some had decided to come to kids rock instead of going to other potentially more attractive events on the same evening.

Mums and dads, you children want to be here, they want to be at Church, they want to be found in their heavenly father's house but the question is do you? Do you set them an example of coming to Church as regularly as you should, as regularly as you promised if indeed you are a communicant member? But not just Sunday morning - what about our evening service and the prayer meeting before it? What about our midweek, along with many of the other activities through out the week? Are we so poor in our example to our children and youth that it takes the little children to lead us?

On this baptismal Sunday wouldn't it be great if we as grown ups decided to give our children, not just in our own family, but in our Church family, give them an example of how we should be about our father's business in our father's house?

Let's pray together.