

## The Divine Example

And he went to the synagogue, *as his custom was*, on the Sabbath day. Interpreter's Bible: Luke 4:16

These four words, *as his custom was*, are a striking phrase, the more so because they occur only twice in the Gospel. The first instance is here; the other one comes near the end of Jesus' life, when he "went, *as was his custom*, to the Mount of Olives". Both times the custom had to do with prayer. Instinctively and habitually Jesus prayed, not only in the solitary hours of his own communion, but in the public worship of God's people. To put it in modern terms, he made it a practice of going to church.

Why did he do this? Nazareth was a little place, inhabited by ordinary people. The service in the synagogue could hardly have seemed in itself to be particularly inspiring. Nevertheless, Jesus was there. What made him choose to go?

In the first place, perhaps he recognized that there were associations of time and place which make the approach to God moresure. Shallow talk may often be heard from people who say that they do not need to go to church because God can be worshiped anywhere. Why cannot he be found equally well out under the open sky, on the hills, in the fields? Why cannot he be found when people are playing as well as when they are going to church—as a matter of fact, on a golf club veranda, on the first tee, or the eighteenth green? Theoretically, he might be. And of course, in honest fact, he generally is not. Jesus knew in shining reality, that which some lightly pray about: that God is everywhere. Jesus did find beauty in the Galilee lilies or under the silences of the stars; but he knew God there because he knew him also in the place where since he was a little boy he had gone to think of him, in the house of worship consecrated to his presence, where the revelation of himself was both intensely and particularly set forth.

The synagogue meant fellowship. And it is in fellowship that the fire of the spirit may kindle best. For a soul in isolation the fire may die, as the fire dies out in a coal set off by itself; but as coals, each one of which was only partially glowing, when brought together turn into flame, so do the souls of men when they are brought together in corporate worship attain the glowing heat which one by one they might have lost.

Such were some of the values to which Jesus gave his silent and steady testimony when he went, AS HIS CUSTOM WAS, to the synagogue. Those who in their complacency imagine that public worship has no importance for them may well look at him and consider whether he represents for them agreement or rebuke.