

12-26-21
Christmas 1
Luke 2:41-52

Did You Not Know?

When Mary and Joseph got back to the Temple to see if they could find Jesus, their twelve-year-old son, things were a lot different than when they left. We can probably identify. At Passover, the Temple was bustling with activity and people. A lot like Bethlehem had been when Jesus was born. There's no mention of no room in the inn this time, but Passover was as big a celebration for them as Christmas has been for us. Mary and Joseph didn't worry about anyone calling Child Services on them when they left their traveling party and went back to search for Jesus. They were not bad parents. Families meant a lot then, as they do for us now, but communities meant a lot, too. So they really did just figure that Jesus was with the other children from Nazareth who had come to celebrate Passover. It took them a full day on the road to miss him. Maybe he didn't show up for meal time, or maybe some of the other kids came looking for him for some game they were going to play to pass the time. This wasn't a matter of Mary and Joseph and their children piling into the family SUV and heading home after the holiday. Everyone from Nazareth, friends and family alike, travelled together. Sort of like we do when our teams make a championship. Friends and family pile in together and become a community in Omaha or in Dallas or wherever our teams are playing, and we become a community until we either win it all or lose and go home. We used to do Spring Break in Panama City with half of Owensboro where we lived them. We all descended on the same condo community, and nobody thought much about it when we didn't know where our kids were every minute. They always found their way home when they needed money, but we generally knew there were safe

and with people we knew would keep them that way. Mary and Joseph and Jesus and, by then, probably some other children, had been with their extended family of faith to celebrate Passover. Not exactly the same as Spring Break, but the lodging arrangements were similar.

When they realized Jesus was gone and ran out of options except to go back and look for him, they left friends and family and all the talk about how wonderful Passover had been this year and went back to the Temple. Sort of like this room is this morning, things were different when they got there. It was a lot easier to search for someone because the big crowds were all on their way home. The crowd in the Temple was reduced to those who were there every day. We know how that is.

One of the dear friends we hope to reconnect with when we resettle in Alabama is a woman we've been through a lot with. I buried her son, her husband, and her father all within about a year and a half. This friend has crippling rheumatoid arthritis, and Deanna used to drive her to appointments when she participated in research studies, and sometimes just when they wanted to go to lunch and walk through T. J. Maxx. We buried her husband, also a dear friend and colleague in ministry, after a long struggle with illness. The funeral was on Friday afternoon, April Fool's Day, and you'd have to have known Jim to fully understand how appropriate that was. On Sunday morning, our church gathered for worship just like you did here. We didn't really expect to see Jean. It was the first Sunday of the month, so that meant Communion. Those of you who help with such things know that that means we had to be sure and get the Table back out from wherever we had put it for the funeral. Where that Table sat is right where Jim's body had lain on Friday afternoon. It wasn't a real big crowd that morning, but I hadn't noticed that Jean was, in fact there, until we began to serve Communion, and I saw her in line down the aisle. I offered her the bread, as I offer it to you, and said, "Jean, this is the body of Christ, broken for you." Then I added how good it was to see her there that morning, how much it meant for her to be there so soon after Jim's death.

Jean is much shorter than I. She looked up and looked me straight in the eye and said, “And just where did you think I’d be?” That says a lot about who she was and is.

When Mary and Joseph finally met up with Jesus, it was more than a little strange that they found him sitting and talking with the elders of the Temple. As they drew closer, it seemed that he was teaching them. That’ll be important later in their life together, but Mary and Joseph, who weren’t used to running in those circles themselves, slinked in and tried to retrieve him from those important people. Scripture records that they asked him why he had not thought more about them than to stay behind and not tell them where he was. I’m sure there was more to that conversation than we know. Parents will fully understand that.

It is how Jesus responds to them that we focus on today. Much like our grieving friend, he said, “And just where did you think I’d be?” What he really said was, as you heard, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I would be about my Father’s business?”

Scripture doesn’t tell us that Mary and Joseph wanted to jerk a knot in his twelve-year-old, holy little neck, but if Jesus grew up in a real human family, you know they did. Years ago now on a trip to Cumberland Falls in Kentucky, our Blake went missing. We were frantic until we finally caught a glimpse of him up above the falls, in a place, of course, where he had no business, but when we finally caught up with him, he was fine. He just wanted to see what the falls looked like from up there. When we finally got our hands on him, we couldn’t decide whether to wrap our arms around him and never let him go or wrap our fingers around his neck and strangle him. Again, parents will understand. Kids, don’t try stunts like that. You’ll worry your parents to death.

There are a couple of things to think about in what Jesus said to his parents. “Why were you looking for me?” he asked them. And we all respond, “Because we’re your momma and daddy!” But he continues to ask us the same question. We look for Jesus in all kinds of places, thinking that if we can just get everything right about our spiritual life, our family’s life, our

church, our community—we really think it's up to us to get everything all like it's supposed to be, and then Jesus will come and be with us and help us keep it that way. Some probably worked ourselves into a frazzle to make Christmas everything it is supposed to be in this second year of Covid when we think it might be a little safer to gather. How'd that work out for us? I'm sure someone was disappointed with something. I'm sure something didn't arrive on time or didn't fit or just didn't suit, and that meant someone had ruined Christmas. Jesus stands somewhere away from all that and says, "Be careful where you look for me. I'm right here. Where I've always been. Where I'm supposed to be. Why do you look in all those other places? I'm right here."

And then there is that business about being about his father's business. That one hits us all, those of us who try to keep the Church afloat in the most demanding and confusing times we've yet experienced. This morning we will install three new/old elders to positions on our Session. I started not to tell you I was retiring at the end of the year until sometime in November. Lame duck times are never fun and never easy, and from September until now is way too long to deal with all that. But we chose these three who will rejoin the Session in October. And, although, I am certainly not the most important person in that process, it just didn't seem right to let you elect a Nominating Committee and select people, maybe even some new ones to serve on the Session and then to set out to get those people ready to serve, and then say, "Oh, by the way, I won't be here to be your Moderator in January." So when the Nominating Committee began its work, they knew that this was probably a year for experienced people, people who were committed to being sure that God's business gets done during this time of transition. They have all three, in one way or another, already jumped into that role and that process. God's business may look a little different for a while, but God's business is what had to continue to happen here. This continues to be a place where people know they're welcome and where the Gospel is the rule by which they will live

here, that love and grace are the things that govern and sustain life here, and that that won't change. The Session may not always be able to tell you specific details about what they're doing, especially when the search for a new pastor gets rolling soon. But today as we install Suzi and Melisa, and Whitney to places around that table, you will stand and affirm that you trust them and the six other they will join to be about God's business and to be sure that you have opportunity to be about it, too. The sky is not falling. And a big part of their job is to insure you, as many times as it takes, that it's not.

All of us, whether we sit around a Session table or not, hear that same call from Jesus, to join him in being about his father's business.

I leave you in good hands and with a clear conscience that the work we have engaged in together has been God's business. See that it stays that way. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Gracious God, who loves us, just a night or so ago we gathered here and sang, "O come, let us adore him!" Now that you are among us with plans to stay, help us find ways to let our adoration show. We give thanks for the time we spent in worship preparing for your coming, and we give thanks for the glorious time of worship we experienced together when you came. We adore that fragile, vulnerable little baby, and we adore the Savior and Lord he grew to be. We pray today for the most vulnerable among us, for the sick, the abused, the poor, the forgotten, the neglected. We pray for all who are weary from the work of the season, that they might find peace before the real world sets in on us again. We pray for all who feel helpless and hopeless. We adore you, O God, for doing what you promised to do, for coming to share our life, for experiencing all the best and the worst of what life brings and for redeeming it all and guiding us to life beyond both life and death when we will know the joy of your perfect will, which we have such a way of getting in the way of.

We pray for people who feel misunderstood, for those who live in anger and can't find peace. We pray for families in tension in these days, for people who live amid violence in their home and in their communities. We pray that Jesus, the Prince of Peace will heal us and guide us in the way of peace.

We thank you, O God, for the mystery that remains about your love for us and for the lengths you continue to go to to show it to us. You make our joy more joyful and our pain at least bearable if not always understandable. You call for thankful hearts and obedient spirits, and we struggle to offer them. Help our lives be gifts of praise, Loving God. Help the joy of Christmas to remain and among us as we strive to show compassion, respect, and understanding to each other and to the world. Help us to move each other as you love us, whatever that asks of us. Loving God, we have seen your glory and celebrated your love among us. Help us to be effective and faithful witnesses to Christ, both in our worship and in our lives beyond this place. Hear us now as we pray as Jesus taught us to pray when he said: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.