

Searching for God – An On-Going Journey

Sunday May 14, 2023

Luke 2:41-52

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our minds, lead us to your wisdom in our day. Amen.

There are a lot of things wrong with the following clip I am about to show you – the child who portrays Jesus is very Caucasian and Mary and Jesus have strong English accents but if you filter for this, I find the following clip sparks the imagination.

In this clip Jesus is recovering from an illness – maybe he has had a cold - or the stomach flue – maybe his allergies are acting up. Mary is concerned about Jesus' health and about the prospect of Jesus and the family traveling to Jerusalem for the Passover. She and Joseph discuss the journey and what it means to be Jesus' parents.

Play clip

Parenting is hard sometimes - heart wrenching - life altering work.

Kids grow up so fast. It seems like one minute you are trying to encourage your child to go faster on his bicycle, to get up enough speed to stay balanced, and the next you are pleading with the same boy - now at the wheel of a car - to slow down. One minute you're encouraging a shy daughter to make new friends and the very next, you're trying to discourage her from responding to strangers on the Internet.

Jesus was growing up fast too. We hear of him swaddled as a infant in a cattle shed and in the next breath, Jesus is an adolescent wandering off on his own.

In our lesson today - we meet a very human Jesus, who has scared his parents half to death - as most teen-agers do. Jesus is asking questions, as he should, and he is listening to learn, as is good for him. And in this story, we see this fully human twelve-year old Jesus expose his very divine spark as he amazes those around him with his deep understanding of the ancient stories and his profound answers. We hear Jesus declaring his unique relationship with God, his divine parent.

The thing is we know very little about Jesus as a child. We know well the stories of his birth, but we do not know if Jesus experienced the terrible twos, or if he was too tall for his age group, or if he had big feet, or if once a year he went to the market to purchase flowers for his mother to help her know how much he loves and appreciates her. Stories of Jesus as a toddler, child and teenager just do not exist for us to explore, and so this little glimpse into the 13 year old Jesus, on the cusp of manhood in his culture, is unique and when something is unique in the biblical story it is wise for us to pay attention because it is probably important. It would seem to me there are at least four things in our reading today that the gospel writer Luke is hoping we will pick up. //

Here perhaps is the first thing - As was their annual custom, as faithful Jews, the villagers of Nazareth journeyed the 70 or so miles south to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover week. It was the high holiday season for Mary, Joseph, and their family. Presumably, they all had a great time—until at some point on the return trip, Jesus's parents discover he's not in the caravan group heading back to Nazareth. (sort of like Kevin's mom realizing he's not on the plane in Home Alone 1). While we know that Jesus purposefully "stayed behind in Jerusalem," Mary and Joseph "did not know that"

for a whole day!—which would not have been unusual. In their tight-knit community, they would've assumed Jesus was somewhere among “relatives and friends” in the Nazareth travel party. In a smalltown network, parents didn't need to know where their children were every minute of the day. In any case, the narrative doesn't blame Mary and Joseph for losing Jesus. Luke tells us that Jesus chooses to stay in the temple without letting his parents know. Once they become aware Jesus is missing, however, they diligently “search for him” until they find him - **three days** later in Jerusalem. Festival traffic would still be heavy in the city, making it difficult to find a lost boy, especially one who's not that concerned about being found. But Mary and Joseph press on until they find Jesus.

This story models an important biblical theme - that of the faithful diligently seeking and searching to find and know God. There's a lot that Mary and Joseph don't know at this stage about their unique son and his intimate relationship with God. But they know enough to keep seeking and searching.

This is something many of us share with Mary and Joseph – we too seek after God in our lives. It is one of the reasons we come to church. It is not true for everyone but for some of us - we have come to know that our searching for God, is an ongoing journey through out the many stages and changes of life. In our seeking a life of meaning and abundance we need to keep looking, with other searchers, to find what we long for. The first point to note is that the gospel writer, Luke encourages us to constantly seek our God – to be life long SEARCHERS.//

Second - Mary and Joseph find Jesus not wandering the streets in a panic, but rather sitting comfortably “among the teachers” in the temple—not sitting at their feet but “in the middle of” them, “amazing” them with “his understanding and his answers.” At age twelve, Jesus holds his own with learned elders. But remember, this is the only scene we have from Jesus's promising youth, which urges us to note precisely what this scene highlights about him. In the story the twelve-year-old Jesus delivers no stunning public speech. This is not to minimize Jesus's prowess or the audience's wonder but he doesn't grandstand or lecture or preach. Rather, Jesus attends to the teachers' instruction and adds his own questions and answers—politely, respectfully. No hardnosed examination of the temple scholars, rather Jesus demonstrates his willingness to humbly learn from teachers and to “grow in wisdom.”

How much more would our journey be enriched if we too were able to maintain a posture of humility and respect in the presence of those who hold unique knowledge. Last week Brian, talked about the richness of the Spirituality of Indigenous cultures, such wisdom for all of us to take in. A few weeks ago, we learned from our Muslim friends, while sharing a beautiful meal. Each time we connect with our covenant partners of Holy Spirit Roman Catholic Parish we learn and we “grow in wisdom”. The second point to note is that gospel writer, Luke wants us to be *HUMBLE LEARNERS* so *THAT WE MIGHT GROW IN WISDOM*.

A third point of note is that although young Jesus elicits “amazement” from the temple teachers and assembly, his parents are not so impressed when they arrive after their three-day search. While an idyllic family tale might portray Mary and Joseph as, first, relieved to find their missing son and then, bursting with pride at his brilliant display (that's our boy!), in Luke's more realistic story, they react with considerable paternal angst. They are more “astonished,” we're told, than “amazed”—the term suggests being

“dumbfounded,” “shocked,” even ashamed at their son’s behavior. In this culture, a displaced son was a disgraced son, who brought shame on the family. Independence represented disobedience, rather than the go-getting initiative we tend to admire today. // Mama minces no words about her frustration with Jesus: “Child [she reminds him of his place], why have you treated us like this? Look [here], your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.”

So, what does Jesus have to say for himself? As it happens, he coolly counters his mother’s question with two of his own: “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” On one hand, Jesus’s response reflects typical adolescent resistance against parental authority; but on the other hand, it reveals Jesus’s emerging self awareness of himself as a child of God, apart from his parents ,Mary and Joseph.

So, is Jesus done with his parents? Moving on to bigger and better things? Mary, in particular, is no spiritual novice. Since the angel Gabriel appeared to her twelve years earlier announcing that she would conceive God’s Son by the Holy Spirit, she’s been pondering the deep things of God—growing with Jesus in understanding. But spiritual growth is a lifelong challenge with lots of bumps and blocks, twists and turns, along the way—as both Mary and Jesus will continue to discover. The gospel writer, Luke WANTS US not to just tow the line but to be GROUNDED – sure of who we belong to. //

The fourth point - is for me – particularly important. You see we might expect the “amazing,” self-assertive Jesus to launch out, in that moment on his ministry journey, but he doesn’t, he returns home with his “confused” parents. For all his advanced knowledge and dawning awareness of God, he still has much to learn. Jesus has more to learn from Mother Mary, who began her advanced course in spiritual formation, as the Spirit formed Jesus in her womb. Mary is a ponderer, a seeker, a searcher of the things of God. Her anxious search for the missing Jesus led her to find him. But then his puzzling, dismissive response gives her more to search for, sift through, struggle to understand. And Jesus, too, still has much to think and work through with Mary over the next eighteen years. Jesus must learn and grow into faithfulness through the ups and downs of daily life.

The gospel writer, Luke reminds us that:
imperfect though we might be,
though not as wise as we would like,
and even though sometimes family life is just hard
- we are all – every day –
the nurturers of faith for those around us –
but especially for our children.

Jesus learned to be healer, companion, justice maker, story-teller, preacher, life changer, rebel, and example of God’s profound love in the world - **at home – surrounded by people who loved him.**

Our Gospel lesson today reminds us of our high calling which is to make our homes places where we come to understand what it means to be the people of God.

May God bless our Homes and families.

Amen