

The Boy Jesus in the Temple

Luke 2:41-52

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Now every year his parents went up to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was **twelve years old**, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, **but** his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him.

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" **But** they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

My dad and I were making the six-hour drive from Raleigh, North Carolina, to Winchester, Virginia. I was six years old, and it was just the two of us since my parents had recently divorced. We were on our way to spend a few days with my grandparents, aunt and uncle, and cousins, and I was excited.

I was also excited when we stopped at a McDonald's for a snack and a bathroom break. As my dad tells the story, he went in the men's room and because I obviously can't go in with him as a six year old girl, he first gives me strict instructions to stand right outside the door, don't talk to anyone, and don't move.

When he comes out of the restroom a few minutes later, I'm gone.

His heart stops and his eyes quickly scan the restaurant for a small girl with light brown hair and blue eyes.

He goes out to the play area – no sign of me.

He comes back inside and looks around the restaurant again – this time looking under tables and around corners – still no sign of me.

He asks a woman to check and see if I'm in the ladies room – no sign of me.

At this point, my dad is full-fledge panic mode. His heart is pounding, and his mind is racing. Where could she have gone in just a few minutes? Did someone take her? Did she wander off on her own? Surely, she didn't go out into the parking lot by herself. What should I do next? Should I call the police?

He walks back out to the play area, and – this is a direct quote from him – “There you were...tucked in between the lettuce and the tomato.” Evidently, I had climbed up inside the Hamburglar tower that some of you may remember used to be a standard feature on McDonald's playground.

To this day, more than two decades later, my dad will still point out that otherwise unremarkable McDonald's right off of I-95 in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and say, “That's where I thought I lost you.”

This is the kind of story that many of us think of when we hear Luke's story of Jesus as a boy in the Temple. It's that detail about how Mary and Joseph didn't know where their son was for THREE WHOLE DAYS that really gets us. And understandably so. Your child going missing is one of the scariest things that can happen as a parent, and even if you aren't a parent, you remember how scary the thought of being lost was as a child.

It's traumatic to think your child is missing, and even when you do find your daughter safe and sound in the Hamburglar tower or your son playing happily in the middle of the clothes rack at Target, you don't forget the intensity of the fear and terror you felt in those moments of not knowing where your child is.

So maybe this is the part of the story that sounds familiar – maybe too familiar – to you.

We tend to focus more on how Mary and Joseph felt as parents than how Jesus felt during these three days he's in the Temple. And it seems like we've missed something significant when we do.

Jesus doesn't seem to think he's lost. In fact, he seems to be pretty comfortable there in the Temple. For the first time in his life – as far as we know – Jesus is claiming

his identity as the Son of God. When he's in the Temple, he starts to understand who he really is. More than that, he acts like it.

So far in Luke, plenty of other people have talked about who Jesus is. The angel Gabriel tells Mary that she will give birth to the Son of God, and a few months later, Mary's cousin Elizabeth recognizes the unborn baby growing in Mary's womb as the Lord. When Jesus is born, the angels can't wait to tell the shepherds that a Savior, the Messiah, the Lord has been born for them. When Mary and Joseph present the eight-day-old infant Jesus in the Temple, Simeon is there, and this old man who's been promised that he'll get to see the Messiah before he dies praises God because he knows that promise has been fulfilled in Jesus. The prophet Anna echoes Simeon's praise, and she begins "to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."

All of these other people have talked about it, but Jesus himself hasn't claimed his identity...until now.

This is a **big** moment, and, at the same time, Jesus doesn't seem to make a big deal about it. He doesn't make a big announcement, demanding that all eyes be on him because he has something important to say.

Instead, he says to Mary, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?"

This week, I asked some of our middle schoolers to tell me some of the places where they would wander off to, and they gave me answers like the mall, a friend's house, a neighbor's house, Chick-fil-a. (One youth did say she would come to the church via Uber.) When I asked them why they would go to these places, they said things like, "because I'm not annoyed when I'm there" and "because it's where I want to be."

It's obvious to Jesus. He's not been lost; if anything, he's been found. Of course, he would be in the Temple. Of course, Emmanuel God with Us would be interested in talking with the religious leaders of the day and asking questions and unpacking the Scriptures and offering another perspective. This is who Jesus is. He gets an earful from Mary about wandering off, but that seems minor to him in comparison to it means to be faithful to who he is in relationship with God.

Jesus isn't lost, but it seems like the people around him – including the people who were closest to him – may have been lost – lost in their own way, lost in their own ideas of how things are supposed to go and who the Messiah is supposed to be.

I wonder if *this* is a place where we can connect with this story.

I've got to be honest with you – I've felt a bit lost this week. I don't know what to do with the fact that nine people went to their church to study Scripture and pray together and find life, and they met death at the hands of a man who was acting out of such hate. I feel lost when the place that's supposed to be a space of sanctuary and refuge is turned into a place of violence and hate. I haven't known what to say about it or how to feel other than sadness and anger.

I feel lost.

On some level, I have to think you do too. We are so lost. How are we supposed to make sense of a world in which there is so much hurt and anger and brokenness and grief?

And then I read this passage about Jesus being found in the church, and I have to tell you I want to be found here too. Don't you? I'm guessing that's part of why you came here this morning because this place and what happens here is a place where you sense that you've been found by God.

You are found by God. Susie, Sharonda, DePayne, Ethel, Tywanza, Cynthia, Clementa, Daniel, and Myra - even Dylan – are found by God. We are found and loved and claimed by God – even when we feel the most lost, and we know this to be true because of Jesus who also knew suffering and death. He knew suffering and death and because of that, he gives us hope. He assures us that we are found and we have reason to hope even in the darkest moments...

How will we witness to this hope? I don't know exactly...I don't know what that will look like for you as an individual. But I think it starts here...in worship, in prayer, in song, in stories of being lost and then found...