

Lost But Found  
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First Presbyterian Church, Charlotte, NC  
Luke 2: 41-52  
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Listen now for the Word of God.

**41** Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. **42** And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. **43** When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. **44** 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. **45** When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. **46** After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. **47** And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. **48** 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." **49** He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" **50** But they did not understand what he said to them. **51** Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

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

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Let us pray.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

It was a moment my mom will probably never forget, but I didn't think of it until I re-read this passage. My twin sister and I were about 4 and were out shopping with her. Shopping isn't really something I enjoy and I enjoyed it even less when I was that age. So I had to find something to keep me entertained. For one second, my mom turned to look at something and Megan and I were off...hiding in the middle of a round clothes rack just a few feet away. It was like a fort to us. We were completely secluded and had our own little place to get away for a minute or two. But for my mom, it was a different story. She was frantically searching for us, wondering where we could have gone. Luckily for her, two giggling girls only a few feet away don't stay hidden for very long. For a moment she thought we were lost. Yet like Jesus, Megan and I didn't think that we were "lost." After all, we knew right where we were...safe in the clothes rack! This wasn't the first time we had played in the clothing racks and we assumed she knew where we were. When she found us she reacted somewhat similarly to Mary...relieved but somewhat irritated. Now this is a story I'm sure many of you can relate to, whether it be as the "lost" child or as the frantic parents. But in the story we just heard, Mary had to worry about Jesus for three days. I'm sure it seemed like an eternity. There was no social media or find my phone app that they could use to track Jesus down. Yet while Mary was worrying about Jesus being lost, Jesus had found where he belonged.

I realize my connection to the clothes rack and the comfort and fun it brought was nothing compared to Jesus' connection to the temple. I had no connection to the clothes rack, it just looked like a fun place to be. Jesus would have been familiar with the temple. Jesus grew up in a family that were devout, Torah observant Jews who followed the customs and traditions of Judaism. They did what the Torah required of them. Jesus was circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, was presented in the temple and at least Joseph traveled to Jerusalem each year to celebrate Passover. This year, Mary, Joseph and Jesus all traveled to Jerusalem for Passover.

They were traveling home in a large group. Mary probably thought Jesus was with Joseph and Joseph probably thought Jesus was with Mary. Then at some point they realized Jesus was not there and panic set in. His parents were concerned that he was left behind, lost. But does he feel that way? The scripture tells us "the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem." He chooses to stay behind with his parents none the wiser. We don't know exactly what motivated him to stay, but he was comfortable staying behind and what we do know from the rest of this story is that Jesus is finding his place.

The reactions of everyone to Jesus being lost are natural human reactions. Mary was both worried and angry with Jesus. Jesus, like a lot of 12-year-old boys, doesn't see what the big deal is. Mary found him, right where he felt he belonged. But it took her a while to figure out where he was. She returned to Jerusalem and searched many other places before thinking about looking for him in the temple. He was lost to her but then he was found. Jesus stayed behind specifically to be in his

Father's house. When Mary found Jesus, he was sitting with the teachers, listening and asking questions and all were amazed.

Jesus was special; he was the Son of God. Up to this point in the life of Jesus, many others had proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God. The angel Gabriel when he came to Mary said, "the holy child developing in you will be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35)." The angels at the time of Jesus' birth proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah. When Jesus was presented at the temple, Simeon, who had been told by the Holy Spirit he would not die before seeing the Messiah, and Anna, a prophet, both proclaim his destiny, seeing something in him that amazes even his mother and father (FOTW, 167). I recently saw a cartoon on Facebook that gives me a good chuckle when I think about it. It had three women sitting on donkeys. Each of the donkeys had a bumper sticker. The first was "Our son is an honor student." The second "Our son is in medical school" and lastly "Our Son is God" -and one of the women is saying "well, if it isn't Joseph and Mary." Although Joseph and Mary were aware that Jesus was the Messiah, they did not know how that would be made manifest in his or their lives. They knew him as a typical young boy. I'm sure he played with neighborhood children and splashed in mud puddles- nothing to reveal being the Son of God.

They seem to have forgotten that 12 years earlier in this same temple where he was found, Simeon and Anna had told Jesus' parents who their Jesus was. Luke tells us that they didn't understand and that when his parents found 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." What comes next catches everyone off guard. Jesus' didn't see himself as lost...he was in His Father's House...right where he was supposed to be, right where he was called to be, right where he needed to be. If you were here on Christmas Eve, you heard Pen preach about Jesus' birth from Joseph's perspective. He talked about how Joseph was a stand in for Jesus' daddy until Jesus came to understand who his Father was. And in this verse we know that Jesus has come to that understanding. Jesus knew who he was and for the first time we hear him articulating it. "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know I had to be in my Father's house?" He gently and without doubt claims God as his Father and has found himself at home in the temple.

In the 1 Samuel verse we heard earlier, we get the ending of a story similar to the story of Mary and Jesus in the temple. But while similar, there is a different backstory. In the verses leading up to what we read we get the story of Hannah and her son Samuel. Hannah was not yet able to have a child. Hannah had prayed and prayed for a son and promised to give him to the Lord if God would just give her a son. Eventually, Hannah bore a son. From before his conception, Samuel had been dedicated to the service of God and favored by God from birth. After he was weaned, Hannah went with her husband on the yearly trip to Shiloh to make their sacrifice. She left Samuel there in the temple, as she had promised to give him to the Lord for as long as he lived. Then we come to the passage read today where Samuel, a child, is ministering before the Lord. He is wearing not only the traditional linen robe worn by priests but also he is wearing a robe made by his mother, which she brought to him each year when they make their annual pilgrimage. Hannah lost her son in a different way than Mary. Hannah lost Samuel but knew where to find him. Mary lost Jesus, and had to spend 3 worrisome days trying to figure out where he was. Both Samuel and

Jesus were found in the temple. A place where “the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with the people” and where “Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.” Jesus had stayed behind in Jerusalem to learn. It was customary at this time for sons to go into the business of their father. One would have thought that meant learning carpentry from Joseph like I learned from my dad- measure twice, cut once. But Jesus had a unique quest, he sat with the teachers, eager to learn what his Father’s business was. And in 18 years Jesus will become the teacher that people sit and listen to.

We belong to God. Thankfully, this is out of our control. We have been created to be in relationship with God and each other. Hannah and her husband acknowledged Samuel belonged to God and when the time was right, Hannah took Samuel to the temple and left him there. Mary and Jesus knew that Jesus was the Son of God but did not exactly know what that would lead to. None of us know the plan God has for our lives. For me, someone who likes organization and knowing exactly what is coming, this is a bit scary. But it is the love and grace of God that is comforting in the midst of the unknown. In many ways it is not unusual for me to be found in this church. I was baptized here, grew up here, participated in almost everything the church offers, my dad teaches Sunday school and is an elder and my mom works here. But it is unusual for me to be found here in this pulpit. In fact, during Youth Sunday when seniors typically give sermons, I chose not to. I didn’t know this is where God would lead me until I was blindsided by a loving friend urging me to use the gifts that I didn’t recognize in myself and consider seminary. It is a process of slow growth and transformation that occurs when we rely on God. Just as Jesus had to grow into his role as the Messiah, we too must grow into what God has planned for us.

This is the only story of Jesus’ childhood in the gospels. This precedes the many miracle stories that show Jesus’ divinity and here for the first time, Jesus claims his identity as the Son of God. Yet in this story, there are no miracles performed but we see Jesus for the first time claiming God as his Father. These verses show how Jesus grew up listening for God’s voice, was taught by caring adults, was protected by loving parents, and was nurtured in a safe and loving community so he could mature to be strong and wise. This morning we celebrated the sacrament of baptism and we did the same things. In each and every baptism, the person being baptized or their parents proclaim their belief in Jesus Christ. The questions being asked of those being baptized, or their parents, and the congregation reflects this- listening to God’s voice through belief in Jesus Christ is proclaimed, parents promise to love and nurture their children, the congregation promises to be caring adults who will tell the new disciple the good news of the gospel, to help them know all that Christ commands and by fellowship to strengthen their family ties with the household of God, providing a safe place for maturing in wisdom. In baptism, we are marked as children of God, no matter our age. In baptism, there is acknowledgment that those being baptized belong first and foremost to God and take on a new identity as a member of the Christian church (FOTW, 150). This does not mean that the identity of father, mother, son, and daughter disappear but that it is clarified that their life belongs to God.

Like Jesus we should realize that we are never lost from the love, grace and forgiveness of God. We are never lost from the knowledge that we are a child of God, created in his image and loved not for anything we have done but because we are

God's. Just 2 days ago we celebrated the birth of Jesus. In Jesus Christ all who were once lost are yet found! Thanks be to God!