

Luke 2:41-52  
December 27, '09

“SEARCHING FOR JESUS”

HERE WE ARE – THE LAST SUNDAY OF THE YEAR & EVEN THE LAST SUNDAY OF THE DECADE.

IT WOULD SEEM AS THOUGH THIS WOULD BE A FITTING TIME TO FOCUS ON THE OLD YEAR – OR DECADE – BEHIND US & THE NEW YEAR – OR DECADE – BEFORE US.

WE’RE NOT GOING TO DO THAT, THOUGH.

LET’S SAVE IT FOR NEXT WEEK.

TODAY’S LECTIONARY GOSPEL READING IS JUST TOO INTRIGUING – ESPECIALLY IN TERMS OF ITS TIMING.

WE’RE JUST TWO DAYS REMOVED FROM A MONUMENTAL EVENT – OR THREE DAYS IF YOU COUNT LIKE THE BIBLE DOES IN OTHER SITUATIONS WHEN WE’RE CONSIDERING A FRIDAY TO SUNDAY SCENARIO.

ON FRIDAY WE CELEBRATED THE BIRTH OF JESUS & HERE WE ARE ON SUNDAY & HE’S ALREADY 12 YEARS OLD.

IT’S NOT LIKE WE SKIPPED WAY AHEAD IN LUKE’S GOSPEL, THOUGH.

WE’RE STILL IN THE SECOND CHAPTER – A MERE 20 VERSES REMOVED FROM THE GLORIOUS ACCOUNT OF THE NATIVITY.

THE ONLY THING WE’VE PASSED OVER IS THE PRESENTATION OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE 8 DAYS AFTER HE WAS BORN.

AND NOW JESUS IS ALREADY 12 YEARS OLD.

WE LEARN IN THE OPENING WORDS OF THIS PASSAGE THAT THE FAMILY OF JESUS TRAVELED TO JERUSALEM FROM NAZARETH EVERY YEAR FOR PASSOVER.

THIS WAS A JOURNEY THAT WOULD HAVE TAKEN 5-6 DAYS – EACH WAY.

THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN AN ANNUAL TWO-WEEK EVENT FOR THE FAMILY.

MARY & JOSEPH WERE OBVIOUSLY VERY FAITHFUL IN THEIR OBSERVANCE OF JEWISH CUSTOMS.

ON THE WAY HOME, THOUGH, ON THIS PARTICULAR VISIT TO JERSUALEM, THEY DISCOVER – AFTER TRAVELING FOR A DAY - THAT JESUS ISN’T WITH THEM.

NOW OUR FIRST THOUGHT IS *“HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN? HOW COULD THEY NOT KNOW WHERE JESUS WAS?! HOW COULD MARY & JOSEPH TRAVEL AN ENTIRE DAY & NOT KNOW THAT THEIR 12-YEAR OLD SON WAS MISSING?!”*

WELL, FIRST OF ALL, THEY WERE TRAVELING AS A GROUP.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN LOGICAL FOR THE ADULTS TO BE WALKING TOGETHER & THE KIDS ON THEIR OWN, WALKING TOGETHER.

THEY PERHAPS STARTED OUT THAT MORNING & DIDN’T ALL RE-CONNECT UNTIL IT WAS TIME FOR THE EVENING MEAL & TIME TO SETTLE DOWN FOR THE NIGHT.

PERHAPS IT WAS THEN THAT MARY & JOSEPH FIRST NOTICED THAT JESUS WAS MISSING.

YOU CAN IMAGINE THEM RUNNING FROM FAMILY TO FAMILY – “*HAVE YOU SEEN JESUS? IS JESUS WITH YOU?*”

CAN YOU POSSIBLY COMPREHEND THE TERROR THEY WOULD HAVE FELT AS – AT EACH CAMPFIRE THEY WERE TOLD THAT JESUS WASN'T THERE – THAT NO ONE HAD SEEN HIM AT ALL THAT DAY?

EVERY PARENT WHO HAS EVER LOST A CHILD – IF ONLY FOR A MINUTE OR TWO – UNDERSTANDS THE AGONY THAT MARY & JOSEPH FELT THAT EVENING.

I CAN RECALL TWO DIFFERENT OCCASIONS WHEN I FELT THAT KIND OF TERROR.

OBVIOUSLY THOSE TIMES HAD HAPPY ENDINGS BECAUSE DEREK, DREW & DAVID ARE STILL AROUND.

THE FIRST TIME WAS WHEN DEREK WAS JUST OVER A YEAR OLD (HE WAS ABOUT THE AGE OF JAC & EWAN) & WE WERE IN EUROPE WITH EMMA SUE'S PARENTS.

IT WAS LATE IN THE AFTERNOON & WE WERE IN A LITTLE GROCERY STORE IN GERMANY THAT WAS ABOUT TO CLOSE FOR THE NIGHT.

AS THE STORE EMPTIED OUT & WE SCURRIED AROUND PICKING UP SOME ITEMS, I DIDN'T SEE DEREK.

I WAS NEAR THE BACK OF THE STORE.

I LOOKED TO THE CHECK-OUT LINE & I SAW EMMA SUE.

I SAW MY MOTHER-IN-LAW AND MY FATHER-IN-LAW.

BUT I DIDN'T SEE DEREK.

I CALLED OUT TO THEM, ASKING IF THEY KNEW WHERE DEREK WAS BUT THEY JUST TURNED TO ME & GAVE ME A STRANGE LOOK.

I RAN UP & DOWN THE AISLES, CALLING OUT FOR DEREK BUT I COULDN'T FIND HIM ANYWHERE.

NOBODY REMAINING IN THE STORE COULD UNDERSTAND A WORD I WAS SAYING & I RACED TO THE FRONT IN A PANIC.

JUST AS I WAS ABOUT TO SHOUT OUT & GET EVERYONE'S ATTENTION, I HEARD A LITTLE SOUND BEHIND ME – JUST TO THE SIDE OF MY LEFT EAR.

I GLANCED BACK & THERE WAS DEREK – IN THE BACKPACK THAT I WAS CARRYING – ON MY BACK!

I'M SURE THE REMAINING CUSTOMERS IN THAT LITTLE GROCERY STORE IN A TINY VILLAGE IN GERMANY THOUGHT THE GUY SPEAKING ENGLISH WAS A NUT!

THE OTHER TIME I FELT PANIC OVER A LOST CHILD WAS WHEN DREW WAS ABOUT THE SAME AGE AS JESUS IN THIS STORY.

HE HAD GONE OUT SLEDDING WITH SOME FRIENDS AFTER A BIG SNOWFALL.

AFTER A COUPLE OF HOURS, I SAW THE REST OF HIS FRIENDS COMING HOME.

I ASKED IF THEY KNEW WHERE HE WAS & THEY SAID THEY HADN'T SEEN HIM IN QUITE SOME TIME.

I WALKED UP & DOWN THE STREETS CALLING OUT HIS NAME.

I'D GO DOWN THE STREET & THEN RETURN TO THE HOUSE & ASK IF HE WAS HOME YET.

EACH TIME, EMMA SUE TOLD ME WASN'T THERE.

AFTER 15 MINUTES OR SO, I GOT IN THE CAR & STARTED DRIVING THROUGH THE NEIGHBORHOOD.  
I'D DRIVE FOR A WHILE & THEN GO BACK TO THE HOUSE, PULL IN THE DRIVEWAY, TURN OFF THE CAR,  
GET OUT, GO IN THE HOUSE & ASK IF HE WAS HOME.

I WENT THROUGH THE SAME ROUTINE 4 OR 5 TIMES & EACH TIME, I'D BE GIVEN THE SAME ANSWER –  
“HE'S NOT HOME YET.”

AFTER ABOUT THE SIXTH TRIP, I DID THE SAME THING – OR NEARLY THE SAME THING.

I PULLED IN THE DRIVEWAY, GOT OUT OF THE CAR, WENT INTO THE HOUSE & ASKED IF DREW WAS HOME.  
FINALLY, I GOT THE ANSWER I WAS LONGING TO HEAR.

“HE'S HERE. HE JUST WALKED IN.”

WHAT RELIEF I FELT, KNOWING HE WAS HOME & SAFE.

END OF STORY, RIGHT?

NOT EXACTLY.

THE NEXT MORNING – ABOUT 12 HOURS AFTER I'D COME HOME FOR THE LAST TIME FROM MY  
SEARCHING – WHEN I WENT OUT TO THE CAR, ANTICIPATING I'D HAVE TO WARM IT UP & CLEAN OFF ALL THE  
SNOW, I DISCOVERED THE CAR WAS ALREADY WARM & SNOW-FREE – OR, MORE ACCURATELY, *STILL* WARM &  
SNOW-FREE.

YOU SEE, AFTER THAT FINAL TREK LOOKING FOR DREW, I'D GOTTEN SO ACCUSTOMED TO HAVING TO GO  
OUT SEARCHING AGAIN THAT I'D JUST JUMPED OUT & RAN INTO THE HOUSE.

IN MY EXCITEMENT AT FINDING HIM HOME, I'D FORGOTTEN THE CAR WAS STILL RUNNING!

IT RAN ALL NIGHT & WAS STILL SITTING IN MY DRIVEWAY THE NEXT MORNING – AND STILL HAD GAS!

THOSE ARE *MY* MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES OF LOSING A CHILD.

I'M SURE THAT ALL OF YOU WHO ARE PARENTS HAVE HAD SIMILAR – THOUGH SURELY NOT QUITE SO  
FOOLISH – EXPERIENCES.

AND, LIKE MINE, YOUR EXPERIENCE PROBABLY DIDN'T LAST MORE THAN A FEW MINUTES.

AND YET YOU KNOW & CAN REMEMBER THE TERROR YOU FELT IN THOSE MOMENTS.

CAN YOU POSSIBLY ENVISION WHAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE FOR MARY & JOSEPH THAT DAY?

LUKE TELLS US IT WAS THREE DAYS BEFORE THEY FINALLY FOUND HIM!

WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT THAT, I THINK HE MUST BE GIVING US THE SANITIZED VERSION OF THE STORY.

YOU KNOW THE MIXED EMOTIONS A PARENT FEELS UPON FINDING A CHILD WHO HAS WANDERED OFF &  
NOT COME HOME UNTIL WELL AFTER CURFEW.

MY FAVORITE DEFINITION OF MIXED EMOTIONS IS THAT OF THE GREAT DALLAS COWBOYS  
QUARTERBACK ROGER STAUBACH WHO SAID, “*MIXED EMOTIONS IS THE FEELING YOU HAVE WHEN YOUR 16-YEAR-  
OLD DAUGHTER COMES HOME AT TWO O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING WITH A GIDEON BIBLE UNDER HER ARM.*”

SURELY MARY & JOSEPH MUST HAVE EXPERIENCED MIXED EMOTIONS UPON SEEING THEIR LITTLE 12-  
YEAR-OLD IN THE TEMPLE AFTER THREE DAYS OF SEARCHING FOR JESUS.

THEY WOULD NATURALLY HAVE BEEN RELIEVED TO SEE HIM, BUT THEY ALSO PROBABLY WANTED TO SMACK HIM UPSIDE THE HEAD & SAY, “WHAT WERE YOU THINKING!?”

NOW, LUKE, OF COURSE, DOESN'T SAY THAT'S WHAT MARY DID & SHE PROBABLY DIDN'T – NOT RIGHT THERE IN THE TEMPLE IN FRONT OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS.

BUT WHO KNOWS WHAT HAPPENED LATER THAT NIGHT.

HE UNDOUBTEDLY GOT A TONGUE-LASHING IF NOT A MORE LITERAL LASHING TO HIS BACKSIDE.

NOW THAT MAY TROUBLE YOU, BUT IF IT DOES, I THINK YOU MAY HAVE DIFFICULTY IN ACCEPTING THE FACT THAT JESUS WAS A REAL PERSON.

YOU SEE, I THINK MANY OF US CAN ACCEPT HIS DIVINITY MORE EASILY THAN WE CAN HIS HUMANITY.

IF WE WAS, IN FACT, A REAL PERSON, THEN HE WAS – AT ONE POINT IN HIS LIFE – 12 YEARS OLD.

HE WAS ONCE A 12-YEAR OLD BOY & I DON'T WANT TO OVER-GENERALIZE BUT 12-YEAR OLD BOYS CAN SOMETIMES BE A HANDFUL!

THEY CAN BE PRECOCIOUS.

THEY CAN BE – WELL, LET'S JUST SAY IT – THEY CAN BE BRATTY AT TIMES!

WHILE JESUS MAY NOT HAVE SINNED, HE WAS ONCE 12!

NEED I SAY MORE?!

BUT NOTICE THE EXCHANGE BETWEEN MARY & JESUS WHEN THEY FINALLY FIND HIM.

SHE SAYS, “YOUR FATHER & I HAVE BEEN SEARCHING FOR YOU...”

AND JESUS, IN TURN, RESPONDS, “...DIDN'T YOU KNOW I MUST BE IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE?”

WHEN MARY SAYS, “FATHER,” SHE DOESN'T MEAN GOD IN HEAVEN.

AND WHEN JESUS SAYS, “FATHER,” HE DOESN'T MEAN A CARPENTER FROM NAZARETH.

THIS IS A PIVOTAL MOMENT IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE.

IT WAS A PIVOTAL MOMENT IN THE LIFE OF JESUS & A PIVOTAL MOMENT IN THE LIFE OF MARY.

THESE ARE THE FIRST WORDS WE FIND JESUS SPEAKING.

THIS IS THE ONLY EPISODE OF JESUS' LIFE THAT IS RECORDED IN THE GOSPELS BETWEEN THE TIME HE WAS BORN UNTIL HE BEGAN HIS MINISTRY SOME 30 YEARS LATER.

THIS INCIDENT IS ALSO FOUND IN “*THE INFANCY GOSPEL OF THOMAS*,” WHICH IS FULL OF STORIES ABOUT YOUNG JESUS.

THAT DOCUMENT IS DATED ABOUT 125.

ANOTHER ONE OF THESE STORIES WE FIND THERE READS – “ONCE AGAIN HE (JESUS) WAS GOING THROUGH THE VILLAGE, AND A CHILD WHO WAS RUNNING, BANGED INTO HIS SHOULDER. JESUS WAS ANGERED AND SAID TO HIM, ‘YOU SHALL GO NO FURTHER ON YOUR WAY.’ AND IMMEDIATELY THE CHILD FELL DOWN DEAD.”

THIS STORY MIGHT AN INDICATION AS TO WHY “*THE INFANCY GOSPEL OF THOMAS*” WASN'T INCLUDED IN THE BIBLE.

IT JUST DOESN'T PRESENT A PICTURE OF JESUS THAT SQUARES WITH WHAT OTHERS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT HIM.

IT SOUNDS MORE LIKE THAT "TWILIGHT ZONE" EPISODE WHERE LITTLE 6-YEAR OLD ANTHONY FREMONT GETS MAD AT HIS DAD & TURNS HIM INTO A JACK-IN-THE-BOX!

YES, THIS ENCOUNTER BETWEEN JESUS & MARY WAS A PIVOTAL MOMENT FOR BOTH MARY & JESUS.

NOTE THAT LUKE REPEATS ABOUT MARY WHAT HE HAD SAID EARLIER IN THE CHAPTER – IN THE BIRTH NARRATIVE: "...SHE TREASURED ALL THESE THINGS IN HER HEART."

SHE WAS TRYING TO FIGURE IT OUT.

SHE KNEW THAT SHE HAD TO LET HIM GO, BUT IT WAS SO VERY HARD TO DO SO.

THE LAST TIME DARYL SANG A SOLO IN THIS SANCTUARY WAS AT HER HIGH SCHOOL BACCALAUREATE SERVICE.

SHE SANG "THE ITSY BITSY SPIDER" AND IT WENT ALONG WITH A MESSAGE ABOUT THE DIFFICULTY PARENTS OF GRADUATING HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS HAVE IN LETTING GO OF THEIR CHILDREN.

THEY KNOW IT'S TIME & YET IT'S STILL SO HARD TO DO.

THIS IS WHAT MARY WAS EXPERIENCING.

THIS IS WHAT SHE PONDERED.

THIS IS WHAT SHE TREASURED.

SHE KNEW THERE WAS SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT HER SON, BUT IT WAS SO HARD TO LET HIM GO.

SHE WAS JUST TRYING TO FIGURE IT ALL OUT.

AND SO, SURELY, WAS JESUS.

IT WAS DAWNING ON HIM WHO HE WAS & WHO HIS REAL FATHER WAS & WHAT IT WAS HE WAS CALLED TO DO.

THE REAL COMPLAINT THAT JESUS HAD WITH MARY IS THAT SHE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND HIM.

DID I ALREADY SAY THAT HE WAS 12 YEARS OLD?

WHAT 12-YEAR-OLD HASN'T FELT THAT HIS OR HER PARENTS DON'T UNDERSTAND THEM.

MARY & JOSEPH RETURNED TO JERUSALEM, SEARCHING FOR JESUS, WHOM THEY HAD LOST ON THEIR JOURNEY & WHEN THEY FINALLY FOUND HIM, THEY DIDN'T REALLY UNDERSTAND HIM.

PERHAPS THERE'S A LESSON THERE FOR ALL OF US – ESPECIALLY ON THIS SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

IN YOUR CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS, DID JESUS GET LOST?

DID YOU LOSE HIM AMID THE FLURRY OF ACTIVITY – THE BUYING & WRAPPING & EATING & DRINKING & PARTYING & SOCIALIZING?

DO YOU FIND YOURSELF SEARCHING FOR JESUS IN THE MIDST OF YOUR OWN JOURNEY THROUGH LIFE?

AND EVEN IF YOU'VE FOUND HIM, DO YOU REALLY UNDERSTAND HIM?

LET'S FACE IT – NONE OF US REALLY DOES.

OH, YOU MAY PRETEND THAT YOU UNDERSTAND HIM – OR FOOL YOURSELF INTO THINKING YOU DO.

YOU THINK EVERYONE ELSE MAY HAVE GOTTEN HIM WRONG, BUT YOU'VE GOT HIM ALL FIGURED OUT.  
MAYBE THE "AFTER CHRISTMAS" TIME IS A GOOD TIME TO HONESTLY REFLECT ON YOUR  
UNDERSTANDING OF JESUS.

MAYBE THE DAWN OF A NEW YEAR & NEW DECADE IS A TIME TO BE MORE LIKE MARY & TAKE A GOOD,  
HARD LOOK AT JESUS.

MAYBE IT'S TIME TO LOOK AT HIS LIFE & TEACHINGS IN A NEW WAY & TREASURE THESE THINGS &  
PONDER THEM IN YOUR HEART. AMEN.

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