

Leaving Jesus Behind

Luke 2:41-52
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In her book titled “Consider Jesus,” Elizabeth A. Johnson says, “As a community the church is a story-telling group of people, telling the story of Jesus as the story of God with us. The church does in fact tell this story: Parents tell it to their children, (confirmation students) tell it, preachers tell it. ... We are a story-telling people.”¹

And of course, it is eye-witnesses like Luke who entrust this pattern of story-telling to us, as people of faith. In this gospel story, we just heard the life of Jesus as a boy, Luke eludes to the fullness of Jesus the man, while hinting at the divinity of Jesus our Lord and Savior.

Luke begins this story by reminding us that Jesus was the baby boy of Mary and Joseph, saying, “... Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.” And of course, every year, they took their little boy with them. But this particular year, when Jesus was 12 years old, something happened. Jesus went missing.

As Luke says, “When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. ... When they did not find him (among their group of travelers), they returned to Jerusalem to search for him ... After three days, they found him in the temple.” “Child,” said Mary, “why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.” And Jesus says, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” When they left the Temple, and Jesus “went ... with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. ... And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.”

By including all these details, Luke wants us to know that Jesus truly was born the baby of Mary and Joseph, that he grew to childhood worrying his parents and learning obedience, and that he grew to adulthood acquiring wisdom, as someone who was pleasing to God and neighbor. In this way, Jesus truly was one of us. That’s what we learn from Luke’s story about Jesus at age 12, as he grew into manhood.

Everyone here in worship today is in the same place Jesus once was – either as a little child, a young person or an adult. Everyone is living out the same pattern of life as Jesus, who adopted our pattern of life so as to be totally human.

¹ Elizabeth A. Johnson, Consider Jesus (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 61.

Now of course, Jesus not only lived as we do, but he is the pattern of our lives, as imprinted upon us by God. Jesus shows us how to live a blessed life as a child of God, as brothers and sisters in Christ.

I don't know if you noticed, but I skipped a few details in retelling Luke's story. For instance, when Jesus was in the temple, what I didn't mention was that he was found "sitting with the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all were amazed at his understanding and his answers."

Well, that's part of growing up, isn't it. Part of growing up – at any age – means taking an interest in what others have to say. It means listening to other people and sharing with them what you know and think and feel. Sadly, this seems to be a lost art these days, as people seem determined to discredit one another, unwilling to reconsider their preconceived ideas about what's right and wrong, true and false.

This is why we so desperately need a place where we can share and learn from one another, a place where we can grow in wisdom and understanding, as Jesus did. The place Jesus went to grow in wisdom and understanding was the temple, the church.

It is in our knowledge and love of God, our devotion to Jesus that we find divine wisdom and an understanding heart. That's why God sent Jesus to live among us, as one of us. Church is where we go for wisdom and understanding, the source of God's blessing. God is counting on us to bring such wisdom and understanding to bear upon the troubles of our day, in the pattern of Jesus.

Jesus went out of his way to develop and maintain a life-long pattern of church-life, a pattern of moving from sacred to secular. Jesus didn't stay in the temple all his life, nor did he rush back afterwards with little thought of God. Instead, Jesus developed a pattern of taking time with God and then spending time in the world, with those around him. And through that pattern, he blessed the lives of all he met.

What blessings does your pattern of life bring? How aware are you of the source of those blessings? Now, of course God is the source of all blessings. But where do you encounter God's blessing most fully, so that you can share them with others? How do you keep from missing out on what God has for you?

For Mary and Joseph, they nearly missed out on the greatest blessing of their lives – the special relationship between God and their child Jesus. Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph, and all their friends and neighbors and relatives made the required pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover feast.

But as soon as it was over, they hurried home, anxious to get back to their chores and responsibilities. In fact, they were so anxious to get back to their normal lives, they left Jesus behind!

Sadly, that's a danger we all face. We all run the risk of leaving Jesus behind as we rush back to life a usual. And in doing so, we miss the purpose of lives, as revealed to us by Jesus. Jesus makes it clear that his purpose is to make the world a better place, by bringing us and all creation into that special relationship with God that he has. Church is where we do that for ourselves and others, including the children in our lives.

Interestingly, some translations of the Bible have Jesus saying, "I must be about my Father's business," instead of "I must be in my Father's house" – that from the King James Version. Or as it says in the Message, "I must be ... dealing with the things of my Father."

Jesus didn't enter the temple as something to check off his list before getting on with his day. He entered the temple because he wanted to be a part of God's work, he wanted the guidance and wisdom needed for that day, so that he could share it with others.

"Did you not know...", asks Jesus, "that I had to be here, dealing with things of my father?" Luke tells us that they did not know. So Jesus spent the rest of his life showing them and all the world what it is to live as a child of God and a friend to neighbor.

Because of what we know about Jesus, we devote our lives to growing in our knowledge and love of God. Because of who Jesus is to us, we are to each other brothers and sisters in Christ. Those two relationships – our relationship with God and our relationship with others – that is the source of the blessings we receive and share.

And as if that isn't a great enough revelation about who Jesus is to us, Luke slips in another detail pointing to Jesus as the hope and salvation of the world. Did you notice that it was after three days that his parents found Jesus in the temple? Three days. Three days in the temple, three days in the tomb, three days to burst forth in the glory of God as the gift of salvation.

When we develop a pattern of taking time to be with God and then returning to our home, our family, and friends – our workplace, schools and communities- that is when we are able to reflect the glory of God to others, that is when we shine light upon the hope and salvation that Jesus brings.

So, let us not be in such a rush to get on with our day after worship this morning. Instead, take whatever time you need to think about what you've seen and heard at church, and how God would use that – use you – to nurture and grow your faith, and the faith of others. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

As move, O God, from the season of Christmas and Epiphany into the ordinary season of church life, help us bring with us the anticipation and joy that Jesus brings to our hearts.

Help us to nurture the child within us into the person you desire us to be, people who turn to you for wisdom and guidance.

Help us to grow in our faith even as we seek to nurture the faith of others, until that day when all people would see themselves as children of God, brothers and sisters in faith.

We pray your healing touch, your comfort and care upon all those dealing with illness and disease. And for us, O Lord, free us from all that hinders us in following you with joy in our steps, with your guidance upon our path, and with your care and compassion reflected in our words and actions.

We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, who came to live among us that we would know how to live with God and neighbor, and who taught us how to pray together, saying:

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 forever. Amen.