

## “Adjusting Expectations ”

Luke 2:40-52

January 5, 2020

Second Sunday After Christmas

You have probably heard the old joke about a man who came out of a store one night only to find a young man on his hands and knees in the brightly lit parking lot, fervently trying to find something which was obviously lost. So he asked the young man, “What are you doing?” The young man replied, “I lost the diamond ring I bought to propose to my girlfriend with.” So, the first man got on his hands and knees also and began helping him look. After about fifteen minutes, the first guy asked the second guy, “Are you sure you lost that ring here?” The man replied, “No, I lost it in the park across the street.” The first man asked, “Well, then why are you looking for it here?” The second man replied, “The light is better here.”

This joke gets laughs because of how incredibly stupid it is. First of all, no one would be dumb enough to do such a thing. Second, even if someone actually did this, it would never work. The act of looking for something, no matter how diligent or committed you are, is of no help if you’re not looking in the correct place. You can look as hard and long for something as you want, but all of that effort will do no good if you’re looking in the wrong place, even if the light is better there.

On the Second Sunday after Christmas, we read the only text in all of Holy Scriptures that tells of Jesus’ childhood, a time when he was twelve years old. The text recounts the story of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus traveling from Nazareth to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, something required of all adult Jewish males. Since Jesus is twelve years old, he is now considered to be a man under the Mosaic law and so required to attend Passover. For protection against robbers and for companionship, the family traveled in a group with other friends and relatives from Nazareth.

After celebrating the Passover in Jerusalem, it was time for the family to return to Nazareth. When they left Jerusalem for their trip to Nazareth, Mary and Joseph don’t actually see Jesus with them, but assumed that Jesus was somewhere with the entourage of family and friends somewhere. After an entire day of traveling, they tried to find Jesus but Jesus was nowhere to be found. So, they rush back to Jerusalem in a panic in order to find young Jesus.

After a day of traveling, Mary and Joseph spent three days searching for Jesus in Jerusalem – three days! Why did it take them so long? What were they thinking? Now, I think we need to cut Mary and Joseph some slack here. They were probably worried sick about where Jesus was and terribly afraid about what could’ve happened to him. That had to have confuse their thinking quite a bit. If you have ever lost a child in a huge place, you know exactly how they felt. Fear messes with your ability to think clearly. Our family went to Disney World in the boys were young and were at Epcot, waiting for the Parade of Nations to begin when Matthew decided to go off exploring. Becky and I were panic stricken about what to do when our son was lost in a place like Disney World. Fortunately, we didn’t have time to think about what we needed to do. Someone returned Matthew to us.

So, Joseph and Mary were likely confused their thinking as they tried to find Jesus. That's understandable. But three days? Why couldn't they not find Jesus sooner? They were obviously looking for Jesus in the wrong places – places where they expected Him to be. Its like they were looking where the light was better. Obviously, they didn't find Jesus for those three days.

Many Christians are likewise looking to find Jesus in our day and age. Why are they looking? Why are you looking? Maybe you are lonely and want to be in the presence of Jesus. There is something you fear and you are looking for protection. Maybe you feel guilt over something you've done or not done and you are looking for absolution. Maybe you are worried about life in general and you are seeking peace. Maybe you have problems and you are looking for help. Maybe you simply want to know the Lord's will for your life and you are looking for guidance.

All of the strong emotions involved in these instances may cloud our thinking as they happened to Mary and Joseph. We look to find Jesus in the places where we expect Him to be. Where are some of those places? Basically, it boils down to Jesus is wherever you feel He is or where you desire for him to be.

Our culture preaches a very subjective view of reality. Feelings are more important than facts. Opinion is valued more than truth. It is not only the people of this world who are paying attention to this message. This message is seeping into the Church as well. So, when people want to find Jesus, they look for Jesus in their hearts, in their feelings, in some perceived signs, dreams, visions and so on. We probably look longer than three days, yet we don't find Jesus. We don't obtain deliverance from our fear, forgiveness and for our sin, peace in our worry, or help for problem. Or, worse yet, we construct a new Jesus based on our feelings, opinions, and needs from whom we receive false peace, false hope, or false relief.

After three days, Joseph and Mary wander into the temple and there they found Jesus. He was sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking all sorts of questions. The teachers were quite amazed but that's a story for another time. Joseph and Mary do the typical "parent thing" for the situation. You know how it goes: you're extremely happy and relieved and angry and vindictive at the same time. Again, if you ever lost a child for a short time, when you do see him, you grab them in your arms to hug him and then, when you are sure he is safe, you say in a loud and angry voice, "Where have you been? We have been searching all over for you. Don't you know how worried we were?"

Mary says approximately the same thing, however in a slightly more gentle way. She says, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." Jesus' reply is, on the face of it, quiet and respectful, but it is really a bit of a stinging rebuke. Jesus says, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

"Did you not know?" Such a question implies that they should have known. They should have known because they knew Jesus better than anyone. "Did you not know?" Had they forgotten? Had they forgotten the message of the angels who had told each of them individually that this baby is the Son of God who had come into this world to do His Father's will.

There was absolutely no reason for Mary and Joseph to have wandered around Jerusalem for three days. They had known who Jesus is. They had known why Jesus had come into this world. They should have known where to find Jesus when they return to the city. Jesus would be where He had promised to be in His Father's house doing his Father's business.

This is really typical in the events surrounding Jesus' birth and childhood. Not only did Mary and Joseph failed to find Jesus when they looked in places where they expected Him to be, but the Magi failed to find Jesus in following a star. Instead going to Jesus' birthplace in Bethlehem, they followed the star to Jerusalem. The only way the shepherds found Jesus is because the angel told them where to look: "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

This is typical for us, as well. As Christians, we try our hardest to find Jesus in our hearts, with our feelings, through our intellect and intelligence, but we find nothing. In our frustration and failure to find Jesus, Jesus says to us, "Did you not know?" Did you not know where to find Jesus when Jesus told you and promised you exactly where he would be? Or, do we forget where Jesus has promised to be or fail to believe Jesus' promises to be. Are we like the young man in the story who looked for something in a place more appealing than where the diamond ring actually was?

The Good News which is certain and yet humbling is that Jesus has promised to be in very specific places to do very specific things for us. We don't have to search all over the Jerusalem of our lives to find Him or His blessings. He is and always be where he has promised.

If you want to be in the very specific presence of Jesus, simply be in worship at church. Jesus has said, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." (Matthew 18:20) The key phrase here is "in my name." Although Jesus is present everywhere, He has promised to be present in a special way when people gather in His name. Divine service is where we gather and begin in the name. When we gather together in this Holy Place, Jesus is truly and specially present.

If you want to receive all the benefits of Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, go to the waters of Holy Baptism. There, Jesus has promised to be. Through the waters of Holy Baptism, God connects you to Jesus and His death for the forgiveness of your sin and to His resurrection for a new and eternal life. As Jesus said to Mary and Joseph, "Did you not know...?", So also St. Paul Writes to the Romans, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too may walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." (Romans 6:3-5)

If you want to find the forgiveness for all of your sins, go to where Jesus' voice has promised to be – His called servants. In granting the apostles and those who follow them the authority to forgive sin, Jesus said, "The one who hears you, hears me." (Luke 10:16) Jesus is truly present in the words of the absolution which he has

called pastors to speak in His stead and by His authority. The words the pastor speaks to you are true and valid as if Jesus Himself had spoken them to you.

If you want to find God's will for your life, go to where God has promised to reveal it: in the words of His Holy Scriptures. Remember the beginning of the Gospel of St. John. Jesus is called "the Word". As our mouths use words to make known our thoughts and feelings to other people, so did the Word who was with God and who was God. The Word of God flows from the mind of God to those who hear it, expressing His thoughts, love, and will for us. Jesus is present in the Word of God to reveal His will toward you. When the Word of God says nothing about a particular situation, we have great freedom in Christ to make our own choices.

If you want to have God's assurance, His peace, and His forgiveness, go to where Jesus has promised to be in a very real – the Lord's Supper. Here, at His altar, you receive the very body and blood of Jesus Christ with the bread and the wine for the forgiveness of your sins. As you commune with Him in the most intimate way, you have the forgiveness for all of your sins and everything which that forgiveness gives: peace, assurance, and hope.

Make no mistake about it, but God finds us first. Despite all the talk many people do about "finding Jesus", Jesus has never been lost. We are the lost ones because of our sin. As one poster put it, "If God feels far away, guess who moved?" We have moved. Jesus came into this world to find us and to bring us to Himself. He once described his ministry as, "to seek and to save the lost." He did this by speaking the Word of God to people; loving them; serving them; and to "give His life as a ransom for many." So, I'm not talking here about unbelievers finding Jesus.

However, having been found by Jesus, converted to faith in Jesus, and becoming part of His people, God provides ways for us to find Him when we are in need. He leaves to us the Word & Sacraments as ways to find Him when we are in need. Our catechism refers to them as the "Means of Grace". These are more than religious rituals to be performed on a regular basis. They actually do something. The Word of God, Holy Baptism, the Lord's Supper bring us into the presence of God, convey God's grace to us as we hear, receive, and experience these things. They are more sure, more certain, and more comforting than all of the worldly answers to our needs because they have been given by God, promised by God, and convey God's gifts to us.

Therefore, we need to do some adjusting of our expectations. In terms of finding Jesus, looking for Jesus where we would like him to be (in our hearts, emotions, desires, dreams, and so on) would be like the young man looking for a diamond ring and a brightly lit parking lot. It seems to make sense and certainly is easier to do. Rather, we should expect to find Jesus where Jesus has promised to be in the objective Word of God and in His life-giving and life-sustaining Sacraments.. These are objective and visible signs from God which clearly convey Christ and all of His gifts for us. When we experience loss, feel alone and abandoned, and in need of God's mercy to us in Jesus Christ, may Jesus not say to us, "Did you not know?" Rather, may Jesus say to us, "You know where to find me for I have told you so. Come to me, receive my gifts for you, and never forget that where I am, you shall be also." Amen.