

# "Finding Jesus"

Luke 2:40-52

January 5, 2014

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday After Christmas

One of the most gut wrenching experiences for a parent has got to be losing their child while out and about. If this happens, the first thing you do is go back to where you think the child should be. If you last saw the child in the toy department, you don't go to the clothing depart to look for him. You go to the toy department because that's where you expect the child to be.

This is what happened to Mary and Joseph with the boy Jesus in our gospel reading for today. When Jesus was 12 years old, he accompanied his parents from Nazareth on their annual trip to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. When the festival was over, Mary and Joseph left with the group from Nazareth while Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. Mary and Joseph assumed Jesus was somewhere in the group. However, at the end of the day, they found out this was not the case. So, they returned to Jerusalem to search for Him.

Here's where the story gets a bit strange for me. It takes them three days to find Jesus. Even if you take off one day for travel, that means they were searching for Jesus for two days until they found him in the temple. What took them so long? Since they had just been at the Temple for the Passover celebration, why didn't they go there first? Why didn't they go to the place where they could expect to find Jesus?

The text never answers that question. And, before we become too critical of Mary and Joseph, we need to realize that many people, including some professing Christians essentially doing the same thing. They are looking for Jesus and His Father outside of the Father's house.

Nature is a place where people will look. Few, if any, will talk about seeing Jesus in nature, but many people will talk about experiencing God in nature. They look at the high mountain peaks, the roaring rivers, beautiful flowers, the stunning birds, fish, and animals and they claim to experience the presence of God.

Are they right? Yes, to a point. The Bible says that creation reveals the existence of God.

Paul writes in Romans,

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.” (Romans 1:19-20)

But this revelation is incomplete. Nature does not reveal the nature of God. In other words, all that nature can tell us is that there exists a God who created all of this. But how does God feel about us or towards us? That we cannot know from nature. Although people would like to *assume* that God is predisposed to be loving and kind from nature, nature doesn't exactly tell us that. There is a lot of bloodshed in nature as animals hunt down other animals to kill them for food. There is a lot of destruction in the power of nature as hurricanes, typhoons, tornadoes, floods, fires, and earthquakes destroy life and possessions. Nature could just as likely tell us that there is a powerful and angry God that exists (something many false religions believe) as tell us there is a kind and loving God.

The heart and conscience is another place people look for God. They want to experience God's existence and know that they are right with Him. People want to be led by God and go the right way. Can our hearts and consciences show us the right way to go? Yes, to a point. Again, Paul writes to the Romans,

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.

The law of God is written in the hearts and minds of all people. But, like the revelation of the existence of God in nature, this writing of the law in our hearts is incomplete. The law in our hearts does not tell us everything that God requires of us, nor does it tell us by what standard God will judge us. Does God only require that we give obedience our “best shot” (as we hope He does) or does God require us to live holy as He is holy? While our consciences will let us know when we have done wrong, can our consciences tell us if we done enough to meet God's standards? While we may know

something of God and His will for our lives by looking in our hearts and minds, it will always be incomplete. We can never know what God's complete standard is for our lives or whether we have met that standard or not.

So, how can we fully know God and what He thinks of us? We can know the Father only through the Son. We can know God only through Jesus. And where do we find Jesus? This is the great irony here. We don't have to find Jesus. He has never been lost. This is reflected in Jesus' words to Mary and Joseph when He said, "Why were you looking for me? Did you know that I must be in my Father's house?"

Mary and Joseph thought that Jesus was lost and they had to find Him. We are the same. We act as if Jesus is lost and we must find Him. Like Mary and Joseph, we look for Jesus in all the wrong places. We can find God and His might. We can find God and His Law. But we can't find God's attitude toward us. We can't find God's love and mercy apart from Jesus

We are the ones who have been lost. In our text, Jesus did not leave Mary and Joseph. Mary and Joseph left Him. In the same way, Jesus did not leave us. We left Him. We do that every time we sin. We are born sinful into this world, already lost and apart from Jesus. We move farther away from Him every time we break His Commandments and sin. Sin is all about going our own way, doing our own thing, and living our own life our way instead of going God's way, doing God's things, and living God's ways.

While we are lost, Jesus is always where He needed to be and where He has promised to be. And Jesus has promised to be here in His Father's house. This is true even though it is not some mountain top experience of His might or some emotional matter of the heart or mind. It is true because He has said it is true. Jesus said, "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." (Matt. 18:20).

Being here is not an option for Jesus. As He said in the text, He "must" be in His Father's house. Why? He is here to be about His Father's business which is distributing the forgiveness and

salvation which He won for us by dying on the cross and the new and eternal life He has obtained for us by rising from the dead and leaving the tomb alive.

Jesus is present in Holy Baptism because He has connected Himself to Holy Baptism (as we shall see next week). He Himself creates new life within each of us in our baptism, giving us the gift of the Holy Spirit and faith to trust Him for salvation.

Jesus is present in Holy Absolution because He has said to His called servants, "He who listens to you listens to me;" (Luke 10:16) He has promised that their words carry His authority when He said, "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (John 20:23) He Himself is here, speaking our forgiveness through the mouths of those whom He has called to do so.

Jesus is present – quite literally - in Holy Communion. Of simple bread and ordinary wine, He has said, "Take and eat; this is my body....Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matt. 26:26-28) Jesus is here in the bread and the wine every day we celebrate the Lord's Supper, strengthening and supporting us in our faith by personally distributing the forgiveness of sins in a very personal way.

So, if you want to be where Jesus is, don't go searching for Him in nature. Be here in His Father's House because Jesus must be here as He has promised. Jesus has made you a child of God. His Father is your Father and His Father's House is your Father's house.

If you want to experience God's will for your lives, don't look into your heart or mind. Take part in what goes on here. Your Father's business – His will - is to save you from sin, death, and hell. He accomplishes that by delivering the forgiveness of sins to you through the very ordinary means of words, water, bread, and wine and by creating and sustaining a faith in you to believe this when you have to venture outside of your Father's house to live in the world around you.

You can find God in nature, but you can't know His attitude toward you by looking at nature. You can find God's Law written in your heart, but you can't know your standing before God by looking

in your heart. You can truly know God only through Jesus. Jesus is present in nature according to His omnipotence and in your heart by His omnipresence, but you won't find Him there. He is present here in His Father's house according to His grace and mercy, but you can't find Him here because of your sin. He has found you. He has brought you into His Father's house through baptism and made His Father your Father. Here, Jesus carries out our Father's business in our lives through Word and Sacrament. If there is nothing more frightening than being lost (as I said at the beginning of this sermon), then there is nothing more calming than to be found. In being found by Jesus and brought into our Father's house, we have come to know God in His love and mercy. This means we have strength to face the present and hope to face the future. Amen