

## WE LOST JESUS!

House of Hope Presbyterian Church  
Saint Paul, Minnesota  
January 9, 2022  
Luke 2:41-52  
Luke 24:13-32 – *(Updated from bulletin)*  
Colossians 3:12-17

**Let us pray: OH GOD, WE PRAY THAT ARE OUR EARS ARE OPENED AND OUR HEARTS ARE ENLIGHTENED AND THAT YOUR WORDS WILL COMFORT. AMEN**

**Good Morning! This is the Sunday after Epiphany which tradition tells us that the Christmas season is over. But is it really over? If you think about it -- the stories that undergird the reason and meaning of Christmas are truly just beginning. And I would like offer to that because Jesus *is the reason* for the season, I can share with you today- “two” of those stories about pivotal events in Jesus’s life and ministry -- stories.. that perhaps will deepen for us the meaning of Christmas and the true legacy of Jesus’ time on this earth.**

**So... by a show of hands or heads nodding online, in the affirmative..... I want to ask you all if you are familiar with the popular Christmas movie “Home Alone”? It was a story about a large, extended family who packs up to go on a long, anticipated trip to Europe and they lose track of their youngest son, Kevin and then inadvertently leave him behind in the home, alone. As a result, a considerable amount of mayhem ensued – but at the end, it took a child to protect the family homestead from those who would rob them of what they hold precious. The parents were panicked thinking their child is in dire straits, but he acted in unexpected ways to keep himself and the home safe against hostile forces that would seek to steal and destroy. He was doing business in his Father’s house – (in 21<sup>st</sup> century language “his Parent’s house”) In the end, though Kevin was reunited with his family and all was well. I’ve personally experience this movie serving as an equivalent narrative of this post-Christmas Jesus story. Stay with me now!**

**The author of our scripture today, Luke, tells us a “Home Alone” account about the twelve-year old Jesus, one that doesn’t get shared much until perhaps when it shows up every three years in the Lectionary! However, in reference to what I said at the opening of this sermon here is my point: one of the things that we are invited to appreciate about all of the Gospels, is that they often make connections between different stories, connections that are easily missed when we hear the stories in isolation from one another, but which make those stories all the more meaningful and powerful is when we discover their correlations, and subsequently, it is with today’s two interwoven stories---**

**Here is the first one: Jesus’s family went up to Jerusalem on one of these annual multigenerational/ extended family pilgrimages for the Passover, and Jesus, at the age of twelve, on the verge of his transition from childhood to young manhood, goes missing while there.**

**In this ” twelve-year old” story, the young Jesus is mistakenly left behind when that aforementioned big extended family group prepares to head for home at the end of the festival, and he is discovered to be missing! Can’t you imagine Mary asking Joseph to go get Jesus for the trip home, and him saying to her, “I thought he was with you!” Then in one moment of complete panic they look to each other and say: “we lost Jesus” – our precious, vulnerable young son, we forgot him and left him behind – what will he do without us!!! Who will protect him from harm!” In a frantic rush, they leave the group and run back to Jerusalem to look for him, and it is three long days before they find him in the temple. Furthermore, they are amazed and a little taken aback when their child says to them: “Hey I got this, no worries, just taking care of my Father’s business discussing the theology of the scriptures with these nice people” – more on that later.**

**So, now, we’ve received our first hint of how the two tales connect will with each other, because the act of Jesus traveling to Jerusalem for the Passover becomes a major theme in the Gospel narratives; a theme which Luke emphasizes *more strongly* and deliberately than do the other gospel writers, and much of Luke’s gospel is structured around the big final trip up to Jerusalem for the Passover, the trip which culminated in the arrest and execution of Jesus. Therefore, it is the “three days” missing reference of the 12 year old Jesus that gives you the introduction to our second story and the connection to Luke’s overarching narrative on the adult Jesus’s return to earth after his physical, human death. Because, this was not the only time the people will think they have lost Jesus in Jerusalem, and he again reappears after three days. It is also not the last time that Luke will introduce us to a couple on the road who are distraught at having lost Jesus but who find him again engaged in a discussion of the scriptures.**

**Do you recognize the second story I’m pointing to here? Right near the close of his gospel, Luke tells us the tale of the couple on the “Road to Emmaus”. He tells us that they had put their hopes on Jesus, but now he had been lost and they were devastated, and it’s been three days now. And then Jesus appears with them, unrecognized at first, and discusses scripture with them, pointing**

out to them exactly the sorts of connections between stories that I'm pointing out now, and finally they recognize him in the breaking of the bread.

Both of these stories — the “twelve year old” Jesus lost in Jerusalem, and the road to Emmaus account — appear only in Luke’s gospel, and with one of them being close to the start of and the other close to the end of his ministry they serve as “bookends” for the theme of being lost and found within the ministry. In fact, Luke is the gospel that puts the most emphasis on images of being lost and found. He is the only gospel writer to include the stories of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost prodigal son.

Losing Jesus or being lost ourselves and being found by Jesus are significant themes for Luke, and you will notice of course, that in neither of the stories of Jesus being lost, does Jesus think he is lost. It is other people who think that, not him, so Luke is begging the question for all of us: “Who is really lost when we think we’ve lost Jesus; .... him or us?”

Because, Jesus knows what he is about — his Father’s business. And he knows where he needs to go to fully engage in that business, and it is often to places we would neither be expecting, nor perhaps be willing to go ourselves. Sure, a theological discussion in the temple might not be so frightening, although it would be pretty daunting to the average twelve year old, but the image there of the pre-teen Jesus being in his Father’s house doing his Father’s business is leading up to the later story.

At this point, it is important to note some Hebrew cultural history. It is that the temple was not always considered the normal place for theological discussions – (instead *the synagogue was*). The temple was primarily the place of sacrifice, so it is not the place you want to be (as the 33 year old Jesus was) when a hostile mob has joined forces with the religious and military power brokers and turned their anger on you and decided that you are the one who is going to be the temple “sacrifice”. And so ,with this temple imagery, the “twelve-year-old” story anticipates the later scenario where for Jesus to go about his Father’s business and it indeed meant walking into the fires of hatred and hostility and offering himself to appease the wrath of an angry violent humanity and so expose the ultimate religious lie that it is God who demands that blood must be shed.....so, so not true.

Both Mary and Joseph, and the couple on the Emmaus Road, thought that Jesus was lost because they didn’t understand what “being about his Father’s business” actually entailed. His

parents anticipated him to simply fit in with the family business, which at this point was all about going home and getting back down to their ordinary day to day carpentry life. And even the disciples , after his death, thought that he had been lost because they couldn't comprehend that going about his Father's business could mean surrendering himself into the violent hands of the angry mob. They expected him to fight fire with fire walking in and confronting the powers that be. They expected him to overthrow the Roman occupation forces and reestablish the throne of David, a throne which of course would be established by this man Jesus, a descendent of David and who the crowds lauded in the streets with cries of "Saul has slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands." That's the kind of king they were hoping for and expecting of, Jesus. So when the powers strike first and he is killed, that's it then. Jesus has lost, and his friends have lost Jesus. But three days later, there he is, discussing scripture again, and still trying to get them to comprehend that his Father's business does not involve matching the world's violence, but absorbing its full force and giving it back transformed into love and forgiveness and extravagant grace.

But even in the far less earth-shattering losing of Jesus in the twelve-year-old story, there is an important message for us about our expectations of him and where we will find him. If even Mary and Joseph could take Jesus for granted, and just expect him to be going along with whatever they were doing and wherever they were going, then you can be pretty sure that we, ourselves are very much in danger of doing the same thing. How often do we just head off on our own business, unquestioningly doing whatever we have always been doing or even whatever social injustice (in the name of Jesus if course) that we have decided we should be fighting against, and just assumed that Jesus would be with us, as we literally become lost in our own version of what is right? Jesus may well have said, "I will be with you, even to the end of the age", but he wasn't saying "Anything you choose to do is fine with me, I'll just come along and bless whatever you decide and how you've decided to do it." No, he has called us to follow him, and to do as he does: as our reading from Colossians put it, to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and above all love, and to forgive each other; as he has forgiven us. (Col 3:12-14).

That is a very inspirational message, which I think we would all agree is often difficult to follow. Especially these days we where we are severely challenged to express compassion, kindness, patience etc. because we've all experienced the overwhelming disappointment ,confusion, sadness

and fear of all that's going on around us the last few years, particularly Covid and the tough personal life changes that have resulted from it. It seems that Jesus is lost to us, YES....it is so hard when we've lost all sense of normalcy; a normal that we can't even remember what was like, walking on a path in a journey where we do not know if or when the end will come. And to add insult to injury it is not just three days of feeling "lost", it is now going on..... three years!

Being in this state of "lost-ness" is unsettling and disheartening, but there is a promise and blessing that Jesus has given us through his actions. The promise is that the blessing is found in following Jesus, doing as he does and trusting his actions, even when it means following him into the fires of hostility, unknown-ness and unpredictability, clothed only in love, compassion and forgiveness. And then there is the hope that at the end of our three years of being lost is we will experience a resurrection like Jesus did.

And in doing so, remember this: we can't take it for granted that Jesus will be where we want to go, or be; for his ways often go contrary to ours but, our call is to follow and trust him.

Thankfully, we can trust that he carries a light of love and compassion that we can depend on and keeps our path clear .

So, take it from the twelve-year-old, and take it for a fact: it is not him that is lost, it is us. But the good news is that if we follow and trust him, Jesus will lead us to where we need to be. Even if we sometimes get lost in a mess of our own doing or more so importantly, from the chaos that the world has inflicted upon us making us feel like we've been left behind ,.....Jesus, Jesus.. he will come back and get us – just like Kevin's parents did!

Thanks be to God -AMEN.