

Losing Jesus

Theme: Sometimes we get so busy that we lose Jesus - First Sunday after Christmas (Year C)

Object: None

Scripture: When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" Luke 2:48-49 (NIV)

A family was doing some last-minute Christmas shopping in the mall. Suddenly, in the midst of all the fun and excitement, someone noticed that little three year-old Matthew was gone. Terror immediately gripped his parents. They had heard stories about little children being kidnapped in malls, never to be seen again.

They split up, each member of the family taking an assigned area of the mall to search for the child. As each one completed the search of their assigned area, they returned to the place where they had agreed to meet. No one, it seems, had been able to find the missing child. Then the boy's grandfather appeared, holding little Matthew by the hand.

When they asked the grandfather where he had found the boy, he answered, "He was at the candy counter. You should have seen him -- his eyes came just about as high as the candy. He was standing with his little hands behind his back and moving his head back and forth, surveying all the delicious candy."

Matthew didn't look lost. He didn't even know he was lost -- and he certainly didn't think he was in any danger. After all, he was right where they left him!

When Jesus was a young boy, his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. After the feast was over, as Mary and Joseph were traveling back to their home, they began to look for Jesus, but he was nowhere to be found. When they could not find him, they turned around and went back to Jerusalem to look for him.

Do you know where they found Jesus? He was in the temple. Do you think Jesus was worried or frightened? No way! When his parents found him, he said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

Sometimes you and I lose Jesus. We get so busy in our daily routine that we never give him a thought. Then, one day we wake up and realize that he is gone out of our lives. Do you know what we need to do when that happens? We need to go back to the place we left him. That is where we will find him, right there waiting for us!

Dear Jesus, when we have lost your presence in our daily life, help us to remember that you are still there...waiting for us to come back to you. Amen.

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26

Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy wearing a linen ephod. His mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the Lord repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the Lord"; and then they would return to their home.

Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with the people.

Luke 2:41-52

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

Let us pray...Amen.

Can you imagine the panic in Joseph and Mary? A full day's worth of traveling from Jerusalem, and they realized that their son Jesus wasn't with them?

Can you imagine the conversation they might have had on the way back? 'I thought you were watching him!' 'Well, I thought *you* were watching him!' It couldn't have been very comfortable for the day long journey back, that's for sure!

We can all identify with what the Holy Family must have been feeling before discovering Jesus in the temple. Fear, anger, dread, guilt....

We don't have to be parents to imagine how a heart gripped with fear for one's child might feel like.

Actually, we are all very similar to Mary and Joseph. Probably more similar than we would like to admit. Not in the way we approach our own family, but in the way we approach Jesus.

Mary and Joseph lost track of their son, and assumed that he was with the group of travelers that had joined them.

Many of us lose track of Jesus too. We're too busy, we're too sad, we're too lonely, we're too distraught over a loss, we're too focused on ourselves. There are many reasons we lose track of Jesus in our lives, and when we do, we assume he is in the crowd nearby us. Just like Joseph and Mary assumed he was nearby.

And the interesting thing about this metaphor is that when Mary and Joseph found Jesus safe in the temple, guess who they blamed? Jesus! When they found him, they asked, 'Why have you treated us this way?' The parents of a 12 year-old boy leave him in a city and travel a whole day before realizing he is not with them, and then blame *him* for going missing.

We lose track of Jesus for a whole host of reasons, and then when we realize he isn't near, we blame him! My prayers weren't answered, I didn't feel him in worship, a really sad thing happened to me that he could have prevented, a really

bad thing happened that he might have prevented and we say (probably not literally) how could you do this to me?

Of course, when Jesus answered his mother, he answered us as well: Mary knew where to find Jesus if she had thought about it, and we do as well. In our scripture reading, Jesus is found in the temple, his father's house as he calls it. But that too is a metaphor for where Jesus can be found in our own lives. Nobody can tell us where he is, we have to care enough to look for him. To look in our hearts, to look in the hearts of others, to look in the sanctuary during our worship, to look in the voices of those pray and sing.

We lose track of Jesus, and then when we notice he is missing from our lives, we blame him for being absent. We forget to take him with us on our journey, and then want to chastise him when we become aware of his absence. We want him to be responsible for our anxiety and worry while we scramble to find him, and he simply tells us that we have known where he would be all along. And he is right.

Jesus is not far away. He's not even a day's journey away from us. But in our haste to live our lives, in our efforts to get through our days, in the daily grind of busyness and worry, we forget to bring him along. We forget to look for him before we leave. We assume he is nearby, and we're right. But he doesn't just follow us wherever we go, we have to actually go and get him and bring him with us on our journey, don't we?

In the Gospel according to Luke, we have this story of Jesus being found in the temple, studying with the Rabbis, missing from his family travels home. The next story in the Gospel is about John the Baptist, and Jesus, and Jesus is 30 years old! The Gospel is missing 18 years of Jesus' life! Now, if you've ever been a teenager, or if you've ever raised a teenager, you know that these are probably good years to drop out of any story! The years between 12 and 30 are often fraught with turmoil, disagreement, and struggle, as the newly emerging adult tries to figure out who they are, and what they are to do in the world.

My guess is that Jesus was no different. I have to admit, I kind of chuckled a little bit, imagining Jesus as an awkward teenager, sullen, perhaps a bit rude to his mom and dad, maybe even his relatives.

Can you imagine his early attempts at turning water into wine? First try, grape juice! Second try, vinegar!

Or his attempt to resurrect the family pet that had passed away...or practicing walking on water...Obviously, the author of the Gospel of Luke decided that those years weren't important enough to include, so all we have is our imagination of what might have gone on in that Holy Family.

As part of the Trinity, Jesus is the son of God. He is our Savior, the one who sacrificed his life for the forgiveness of our sins. He is quite powerful when it comes to forgiveness, and acceptance, and encouraging us to love each other as he loves us. But he can't stop bad things from happening to us. He can't alter the course of human events so that only good things happen. He can't prevent us from making bad decisions, or prevent others from making bad decisions. He isn't that kind of powerful.

He can comfort us in our sorrow, he can lift us up when we are down, but he can't prevent us from experiencing the difficulties and challenges that are bound to assail us on our own life journeys. And when we suddenly realize that he is missing from lives, and we go back and find him, and try to blame him for his absence, he simply tells it like it is: you know where I am, you can find me anytime you want to.

And he is right. The difficult truth is that sometimes, we really don't want to, do we? We don't want to seek him, to bring him along. He might serve as a reminder that we might have to change what we are doing, give up some of the things that distract us, forego some of the things that we have grown accustomed to. If we bring him along on our journey home, we might have to give up too much. How much easier to just say, 'how could you do this to me?', and leave him in the temple?

But we can't. We aren't called to abandon Jesus in the temple, we are called to go back and get him, and bring him along on our journey. Just like Mary and Joseph. Just like the Holy Family needed to bring him back home and nurture him, and help him grow into the Savior he was destined to be, we need to bring him back home and nurture him and help him grow into the Savior he is destined to be for

you and for me. We know where he is, and we can't just assume that he will travel with the crowd as we move on.

This is the challenge: we leave Jesus in the temple all the time. This isn't just a one-time thing, we're always moving on to something new whether we know it or not. And more often than not, we're forgetting to bring Jesus along. We're just assuming that he is coming along with the crowd. And when he does not, we want to blame him for being absent.

Let's not do that anymore. Let's resolve to find ways to remember to bring Jesus along on our journey. Let's resolve to look for Jesus in the places where we know he will be. Let's resolve not to blame Jesus when we sense his absence. We know why he seems distant, it's because we didn't bring him along.

Of course, Jesus is not a 12 year-old anymore, but we still need to be the ones that go and get him, and actually insist that he come with us.

We need to bring him with us when we go to our lonely places, to our sad places, to our painful places. We need to bring him when we go to the places that are so deep in our hearts, that we hardly know how to speak about them. Of course, it's always easier to bring him with us when we're going to the joyful places, that's not a challenge. It's the places of pain that cause us to forget about him and to travel a day's journey before we even realize he is not with us.

The good news from today's scripture is that if we have forgotten to get Jesus and take him on our journey, all is not lost. Whenever we discover that Jesus is missing from our journey, we can always go back and get him. Always. He can always be found, if we look for him.

Of course, if we choose to continue our journey without him, that's on us, right? We can no longer ask him, 'Why have you treated me like this?' We know now that it's more about how *we* have treated *him*.

There are so many dimensions in our lives in which we are journeying and changing, so many ways in which we can easily forget about Jesus, so many ways in which we can wake up one day and realize that he is missing.

And we can give thanks that when we do that, we still have the ability to go back and find him, and take him with us. Take him with you. The journey begins now.

Amen.

