

SERMON
“In Our Father’s House”
Luke 2:41-52
Sunday, May 14, 2023

A mother walked in on her six-year-old who was sobbing. “What’s the matter?” she asked.

“I’ve just figured out how to tie my shoes,” he said

“Well, honey, that’s wonderful. You’re growing up!” said the mother, “But why are you crying?”

To which the boy responded, “Because now I’ll have to do it every day for the rest of my life.”

Whether a parent or not most of us know the responsibilities that come with raising kids! Even though some can find it to be very rewarding others can find it to be equally just as frustrating. For the rest of us, however, we find ourselves wavering between the two extremes. As a mom, the Mary of our biblical text for this morning is not much different. Even she must have found it to be a humbling experience to be raising the Son of God, she too must have had found herself wavering between the rewards and frustrations of raising a family. I can imagine her now on the road back to Nazareth from Jerusalem. With the festival of the Passover now over, her mind must be racing ahead to washing ... cleaning ... trash disposal ... gift buying ... keeping of the social calendar ... decorating ... sewing ... mending ... cooking ... negotiating relationships ... caring for the children...

“...Wait a minute...” she says to herself, “thinking of caring for my children I haven’t seen Jesus lately I know he has to be here somewhere?”

Mary doesn’t know it yet, but son Jesus has been left behind alone in Jerusalem. By the time she even notices that Jesus hasn’t been seen the family has already traveled a full day’s journey away from Jerusalem. No wonder Mary panics when she cannot find Jesus among the friends and relatives.

As she and Joseph raced back to the city with hearts pounding like jackhammers Mary must have had felt the burden of guilt and shame sweeping over her:

“How could I have forgotten Jesus?”

“How could I have let God down?”

“How could have I failed to check on him before leaving the city?”

She knows that Jesus is a special-needs child. She knows that she is, as theologians would later call her, the theotokos, the Mother of God. And now God is, missing! How big is that! We think that we have crises. She’s lost God! She has no idea where God is and it is her motherly duty to find him. How could she not know where her 12-year-old son was?

It takes Mary and Joseph three days to find their son, and when they do he is in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Mary is overwhelmed by a mixture of astonishment, relief and anger, and she says to him, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety. Didn’t we raise you to be better than this?”

Sound familiar? Sound like something you would have said to your own 12-year-old son or daughter? It’s backtalk. And you know what happens to those who backtalk, don’t you? They get what’s coming to them: soap in the mouth! I should know! I got soap one too many times in my life for back talking my parents. Yuck! I don’t care if it’s Dove, Irish Spring, or Dial...soap is still soap! Yuck!

Jesus opens his mouth and says, “Why were you searching for me?”

Wait; did he just say what I think he said? Did he just talk back to his mother and father? Why wouldn’t his parents be looking for him? He has been missing for 3 days! And if we think that was too much sass from Mr. Pre-Teen Jesus himself he further adds insult to injury with this question: “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

At first glance, Mary’s words make more sense than the response made by Jesus. We can understand why she snaps at a boy who wanders off from the family, causing them intense anguish. We can relate to her frustration with a kid who sits around the temple for three days, acting as though nothing is wrong, while she and Joseph are overwhelmed by feelings of helplessness, anxiety, and fear. We won’t blame her at all if she says to Jesus, “Why can’t you be more like your younger brother James, and stay close beside us?”

Well, Mary isn't thinking "Lord and Savior" at this particular point. In today's passage, Jesus is not in the temple — he's in the doghouse and she's got him by the ear, herding him back to the ox cart — while James makes faces at Jesus behind her back.

But that's not the end of the story. The real value of today's passage is found in the words of Jesus, not Mary. "Why were you searching for me?" asks Jesus. "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

And this is where the biblical account gets interesting. Why would a 12-year-old Jesus be in the temple doing that which only a 13-year-old boy could do? It was at age 13, not 12 that a boy became a man. Jesus' public ministry does not begin until he is 30, so why does the gospel writer Luke have him in the temple 18 years prior to his journey to the cross? Luke also tells us that Jesus returns home with his parents to Nazareth and fulfills the commandment to honor one's father and mother. We don't hear another word from Jesus until he initiates his ministry. So why at such an early age does he claim his true identity?

It is done for us to remember why he was born to begin with? Luke tells us that after hearing her son speak to her in such a tone Mary ponders (or treasures) all these things in her heart. Twelve years earlier when the shepherds had come to see the infant Jesus born to Joseph and Mary in the manger, Luke tells us that Mary pondered all these things in her heart. I believe Luke tells us Mary ponders these things for a reason. And the reason is for us the reader to ponder these things as well. Luke is clear about why Jesus was born...he was born to be the Son of God: the Redeemer, Sustainer and Answer to our brokenness. Luke will not let us forget what Jesus' purpose is: that's why at age 12 we find Jesus in the temple. It's not just Mary and Joseph who have lost track of their son's purpose...it's you and I (the reader) as well! Luke does not want us to lose sight of who Jesus is. He is in the Father's House because he is the Son of God!

It is Mother's Day today...and even though our mothers; as well as women who are like mothers to us, are important we can never lose sight of who Jesus is in the midst of our human celebrations. As Mary and Joseph were celebrating the birth of their son we are told that Jesus had a purpose. A year before his parents would celebrate his manhood we are once again reminded of what that purpose was. And even on Mother's Day, when we find ourselves in the Father's House celebrating our mothers, we must remember why it is that we are here. Even though it is important to remember our mothers, it is even more important to remember what it means to be in our Father's House! Like Jesus, who was in his Father's house at the age of 12, we must not only ponder what it means to be a part of the family of God; we must ponder whose business we are truly about.