

Christmas 1C 2018, December 30, 2018, Luke 2:41-52, Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Lancaster, PA, Kurt S. Strause

Do you remember what it was like to be twelve years old? I do. What I remember the most was how awkward I felt. That was the year I went from elementary school to high school. We didn't have a separate junior high school then. As seventh graders we were lumped into the same building with seniors. I can remember walking down the halls just hoping I wouldn't get run over. This was the time of painfully shy attempts to ask a girl to the junior high dance; my first pimple breaking out on my face; my voice cracking as it started to change.

This morning we hear of Jesus at this same age. It's why I want you to think of your own experience as a twelve year old. Because that's how old he is. It's the only time in the entire Bible we hear of Jesus at an age other than just an infant or an adult.

Luke presents a story of a devout Jewish family who travels 150 miles each year from Nazareth to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast. I think the first remarkable thing about this story is how ordinary it really is. Mary and Joseph and Jesus belong to a large family where everyone looks out for each other. That's why Mary and Joseph were perfectly happy to set off for home without checking on the young boy. That tells a lot about the kind of world they lived in. Extended, close knit families were close and trusted one another. It reminds us that Jesus belonged to such a family. He didn't grow up in isolation, but within the ordinary and loving relationships of family and friends.

When Mary and Joseph notice he is missing, however, they grow anxious and concerned. Here I think any parent can relate to the panic these young parents must have felt. The thought of losing one's child is just about the worst feeling that anyone can ever have. So they return to Jerusalem and find young Jesus in the Temple, listening to the wise teachers of the Torah and engaging them in questions and conversations. His calm response contrasts sharply to the agony and accusation tinged with guilt which any parent will recognize. "What do you mean you were looking for me? I was here all along. Didn't you know it was necessary for me to be in my father's house?"

It's the kind of statement any parent might write down in a notebook to recall it later. I imagine Mary and Joseph must have wondered what Jesus was talking about. The story of Jesus in the Temple at age twelve begins to show the emerging tension between Jesus' realization of his divine mission and the reaction of his family. You will recall that at a later time, when Jesus is fully grown, his family will think of him as possessed and not fully in his right mind. But for now they must have simply wondered what he could possibly mean.

The way Luke the gospel writer tells his story will remind us of another couple who also thought they lost Jesus only to find him in a surprising way. These two men were traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus sharing their anguish over the three days that elapsed since Jesus' death. Jesus meets them and explains how "it was necessary that these things had to happen." Here is another couple, coming back to Jerusalem, finding after three days the Jesus they thought they had lost, and having him explain that it was necessary that I had to be busy at my father's work." So we have, at the beginning and the ending of Luke's gospel two stories about Finding the Jesus You Thought You Had Lost. I think Luke is trying to tell us, on one level at least, that finding Jesus often involves some kind of surprise and the unexpected.

Jesus doesn't do the expected. Mary and Joseph didn't expect to find Jesus in the Temple listening intently to the teachers of the law. It would sort of like finding your own missing child reading in the library or sitting in a lecture hall at college listening to a professor. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus didn't expect to find Jesus, they thought they were leaving his lifeless body behind in Jerusalem. Finding Jesus will most often involve some kind of surprise. It was true for his family and friends and it will be true for us as well. Every time we relax and think we've really understood him, he will be up ahead of us, or perhaps staying behind while we go on without thinking. Discipleship always involves the unexpected.

Sometimes it may seem that we have lost Jesus or possibly taken him from granted. After all, his parents took it for granted that he was right there among them and their family traveling home to Nazareth. When they went looking for him they found him, there in the Temple, doing his father's business of living deeply in the Torah, the Word of God. The disciples on the road to Emmaus thought they had lost Jesus too. But they found him also, in the Word of God opened up to them and in the breaking of bread.

Sometimes we travel a road in life and wake up someday and realize that we haven't always been walking with God along the way. We have been going about our own daily business, taken up with the cares of our lives, focusing on what we believe is necessary for us to get along and get ahead. But then realize something is missing and we are aware of this void and we realize the void is God.

The gospel promise Luke makes to us is that God is found here in this infant whose birth we celebrate, in the young boy doing his father's work in the Temple, in the crucified and risen companion who indeed walks with us on our Emmaus walk. He is found where he promises he is, living in the Word of God, in prayer, in worship, in sacrament. He is not lost. And neither are we. But in finding each other he will not always say or do what we expect. He must be busy with father's work. And so must we. Amen.