

First Weekend After Christmas (C/RCL)
Luke 2:41-52
December 29-30, 2018
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

I feel like we're in danger of whiplash from the speed with which we've traveled from our Lord Jesus' birth on Christmas to his being 12 years old in today's Gospel. Luke is the only one of the 4 evangelists who tells this story of the boy Jesus in the Temple. If the Child had gone missing **these** days, his parents would have called the police who would have put out an Amber Alert. The story's a familiar one, so maybe some of the emotional trauma Mary & Joseph would have felt is muted, even lost on us. I saw an article in Friday's paper about 2 Hasidic children, 14-year-old Yante Teller and 12-year-old Chaim, who were abducted from their mother's care in Woodridge, NY, on December 8 and found days later in Mexico, en route to Guatemala. Imagining their mother's angst helps me imagine Mary & Joseph's growing panic in the face of **their** Child's absence from the caravan in which they were traveling, and then His continued "unknown whereabouts" for what must have felt like the endless days before He was found.

When they retrace their steps and discover Jesus in the Temple, listening to and talking with the Jewish teachers, the parents are torn between profound relief and understandable anger that Mary can't quite contain. Here's how the scene plays out in *The Message*:

The teachers were all quite taken with [Jesus], impressed with the sharpness of his answers. But his parents were not impressed; they were upset and hurt.

His mother said, "Young man, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been half out of our minds looking for you."

He said, "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that I had to be here, dealing with the things of my Father [Father with a capital "F"]?" But they had no idea what he was talking about. (Luke 2:47-50)

Anyone who's ever parented a preteen or teen can identify with having no idea what their child is talking about. We expect more of Mary & Joseph, though, don't we? After all, there was that visit of Archangel Gabriel to Mary back in Nazareth, way back when, the visit of pregnant Mary to Elizabeth when John the Baptist leaped for joy in her womb, the appearance of angels to shepherds and shepherds to the Holy Family in the stable, the prophecy of Simeon when the Baby was presented in the Temple.... But Mary & Joseph's lack of understanding lets us know that although they were an **exceptional** family, they were **normal** in a lot of ways, too 😊 -- maybe normal enough to be a **little** dysfunctional, at least **occasionally**, like **our** families? -- and although Jesus was fully divine, He was also fully human. His awareness of who He was grew over time. His identity evolved. Like ours. Only moreso.

How do **we** discover who **we** are? Largely from growing up in a family, the one into which we were born or adopted. Jesus grew up in a religiously active family. St. Luke makes sure to let us know Mary & Joseph were woven into the fabric of Judaism. They had their firstborn Son circumcised on the 8th day; they presented Him to the Lord in the Temple when His mother went there to be purified sometime after His birth; they made the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover; and certainly they made sure Jesus made his bar mitzvah, though we don't know if that was before or after the events in today's Gospel.

It makes a difference to grow up in a worshiping family – in which there's not a weekly debate about "Are we or aren't we going to church?" but in which it's a given that we will because it's who we are and what we do. I realize I'm preaching to the choir here! You're in worship the weekend after Christmas, after all 😊. Even if you're here solo, without kids or grandkids, you're letting the AWOL ones and anyone else who knows you

know that the Lord is a priority in your life – that you come often to God’s house to give thanks, to be nourished with the Word and with Holy Communion, to be part of a faith community in which you’re known by name and to be in the company of brothers and sisters who multiply your joys and divide your sorrows.

So Jesus asks His faithful, faith-filled parents:

“Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

Sometimes that’s translated, *“Didn’t you know that I must be about my Father’s business?”*

In other words, Jesus isn’t just talking about his geographic location. At the tender age of 12 He’s already saying that His relationship with His Father in heaven is of **great**, even **greatest** importance to Him. (The Bible scholar William Barclay has a lovely observation about this verse: “See how very gently Jesus takes the name father from Joseph and gives it to God.”¹)

I’ve never lingered too long on this story of the boy Jesus in the Temple. But it’s said that His question,

“Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

is **the** most important verse in Luke’s Gospel up to this point. Because what does the birth point to but the Jesus who speaks His first words in this Gospel right here, connecting the dots between God in heaven and Himself, and letting Mary & Joseph know that His Father in heaven has work for Him to do? He has a holy mission. He doesn’t know the particulars yet, but His identity and His story are more and more entwined with that of His Father in heaven.

If I never paid much mind to this story, I certainly never hovered over Jesus' words, "I must." (*"Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"*) The Greek word means "It is necessary." In the Bible it means that something **must** happen because **God** requires it. It's called "divine necessity." Jesus is saying He must be about the business of His Father in heaven because His Father in heaven **requires** Jesus' God-given mission to be His priority in life. God **wants** it – and that's enough justification to **do** it.

There's "divine necessity" in our lives, too, whether we recognize it or not. God **requires** things of us. Like what? Well, there are 10 commandments. And if those are too hard to remember, Jesus said the "2 greatest" are a summary of them all: 1) Love God above all else. 2) Love our neighbors as ourselves. **We** have a God-given mission in life, too. Every one of us. Like Jesus, prayer can help us figure it out. Like Mary & Joseph and Jesus, living a religiously active life, being part of a faith family, worshiping weekly, helps to shape our identity, to increase our understanding of ourselves as beloved children of God called to make a difference in this world.

Reunited with His parents in the Temple, Jesus returned to Nazareth "*and was obedient to them*" (Luke 2:51). About the next 18 years St. Luke simply reports:

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.
Luke 2:52

May the same be true of each of us in the year of our Lord 2019. Amen

¹William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (rev. ed., Daily Study Bible series, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), p. 30.

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham