
⁴⁹ Jesus said to them, "Why were you looking for Me?
Did you not know that I must be among the things of My Father?"
Luke 2:49

Grace and peace to you.

This Sunday, the First Sunday after Christmas, is sometimes known as the 'holy family' Sunday. It is an opportunity to reflect upon the family in which Jesus grew up, to reflect on the true nature of Jesus' family, and to reflect on the nature of our own earthly families (and to seek God's blessing for them).

As we come to this account of the family of the twelve-year-old Jesus, we sometimes may have a chuckle in our hearts as we think of many parents who seemingly have 'lost a child' in a large store. Have you ever heard this announcement over the Public Address system at a crowded, holiday shopping mall: "Your Attention Please! We have two lost parents. Would the parents of Bobby and Susie please come to the store office so that your children may find you?" We may chuckle a little, and perhaps nervously, because most of us recognise just how easily it can happen! Has it ever happened to you? It certainly happened to Mary and Joseph! But, how could they be so careless as to lose Jesus? And for several days, at that!

But Jesus' earthly family were a good and faithful family. As it had been their habit for years, along with many other faithful believers, they made the to make the 105 kilometre, four-day journey up to Jerusalem to worship and to celebrate the Passover. (See Exodus, Chapter 12 and Exodus 23: 14-17).

Regarding Jesus' earthly family (Joseph, and Mary, and who knows how many brothers and sisters at this time), they are a very religious and devout family. The story of Jesus at the Temple (and Jesus appearing to be 'lost' to the family along the way) is one that often brings a smile to many parents' heart. Not only does this only story of the child Jesus bring a smile to our hearts, but it seems to say something to all of us about the sometimes-struggles we may experience in families. Not every family always knows what others are doing. When Jesus is lost to them, Joseph and Mary are worried.

However, underneath this story there is a very clear description about the devout and pious nature of Jesus' family. They attended worship. They attended worship regularly. The Bible says that this was their 'custom'. This word for custom in Greek is *ethos*. It is their 'ethic', their 'habit'. It is interesting to me that the Greek word *ethos* is never used in scripture to refer to what we would usually consider ethical or moral behaviours -- like "don't tell lies, don't steal, help other people, don't be immoral, don't hurt or kill other people, be generous."

When *ethos* is used in the New Testament, it almost always refers to religious behaviours -- mostly about attending church! (E.g. Hebrews 10:25: "And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the **habit** of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching"). Another word with the same meaning [*eiiotha*] is used of Jesus when he goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath **as was his custom** (Lu 4:16); and of Paul (Ac 17:2). The noun is used of Jesus in Luke 22:39 where we are told that it was his **custom** (or **habit**) to go to the Mount of Olives. He goes there to pray. (These are good Bible verses to remember when it comes to church-worship attendance...)

On this basis, is it any wonder, then, that Jesus stays at the Temple after the Festival of Passover. Jesus said He **must be** about His Father's business. The little Greek word here (*dei* = "it is necessary" or "I must") is often used by Jesus to indicate his duty to God or in fulfilment of scriptures -- which often runs counter to what others expect him to do.

Luke 4:43 - Crowds want Jesus to stay with them, but he **must** proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities. Luke 9:22: "The Son of Man **must** undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." (See also 13:33; 17:25; 24:7, 26). Jesus **must** stay at Zacchaeus' house (Luke 19:5). Jesus **must** fulfil scriptures (22:37; 24:44).]

Jesus had higher things to be about, namely, as He says, "The Things of My Father." And this gets to the different possibilities of translating this verse, Luke 2:49, from the Greek into English. You may have heard of translations that have "in My Father's house." You may have heard another translation that says "about My Father's business." And both of those translations are okay. But both of them are trying to get across what the Greek actually says, which is, literally, "Did you not know that I must be in (or among) the things of my Father?" "The things of my Father," left undefined. "My Father's business" gets at it. And in this context, for Jesus to be about his Father's business meant being in his Father's house, that is, the temple. However you translate it, Jesus was busy being about the "things" of His Father.

There are many things we may learn as we reflect on this time in Jesus' earthly life, when He was twelve years old. First, we may think that there are many things Jesus could have done while on this earth. He could have become a political leader and gone about trying to fix everything that was wrong with the world. But He didn't do that. He could have gone around healing everybody who was sick. But He didn't do that either. He could have gone around feeding everyone who was hungry and giving money to everyone who was poor. But He didn't do that.

Jesus came to do the will of His Father. Don't get me wrong. These other things are the will of God too. We are supposed to stand up for what is right. And we are supposed to help the sick, feed the hungry, and give money to the poor. But Jesus knew that He was only one man, and one man can only do so much. Jesus knew that He could have gotten side tracked by so many other good things to do, that He would fail to do the one thing God had sent Him to earth to do. Jesus came, according to John 10:10, so that we might have life, and might have it abundantly. That is why Jesus came and that is what He focused on, because that was God's will for His life. Jesus came to be our Saviour (cf. Matthew 1:21).

But there is something important between Luke Chapter 2 and Luke Chapter 3 – when it comes to what happens in the 18 intervening years from the boy Jesus at the Temple, and the 30-year-old Jesus who begins His public ministry at the age when Rabbis begin to teach – and that is biblical silence. The Bible says that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature – but we hear nothing of ministry and mission. Indeed, Nathanael (one day an apostle) who lived only 10 kilometres away from Jesus, had not heard of Jesus until Philip told Him about Him (John 1:43-51). And the beautiful thing about this is that Jesus stayed with His earthly family. We can guess some things that may have happened in this intervening period. Most likely Joseph had died. And Jesus' brothers had trained up also to work as carpenters or the like to also support their mother. There is love and care in this earthly family as Jesus' mother and brothers and sisters also followed Him. And this tells us that Jesus is also with us in our 'every-day-lives'.

We might find ourselves laughing a bit at the folly of Mary and Joseph upset with the Son of God, but is their reaction really any different than the way we handle things when God allows something to happen that breaks the routine in our lives? What do we say all too often if an illness strikes a child or a loved one out of nowhere? When we see the forces of evil at work in the world, and apparently increasing? When Christmas passes and it seems like nothing has really changed after what is supposed to be such a significant event and the loneliness, the sickness, the temptations – they all are still there, seemingly just as they were before?

Like Mary and Joseph, we forget who we are talking to and we say: God, why have You treated us like this? Why don't You do things the way we expect You to? We get so focused on our own routine and our own plans that we push Jesus back into the little box we call religion, and we find ourselves growing frustrated with Him when He doesn't submit to our plans for our lives – forgetting entirely what He showed us at Christmas: that everything He does is done with us in mind! God would have been entirely justified in leaving us to ourselves to die, but in His mercy He doesn't. He sent His Son to be our Saviour, and everything He does is related to that critical mission. And this also means that Jesus IS involved in our everyday lives.

Jesus was never lost. He was exactly where He was supposed to be – in the temple doing His Father’s work. Twenty-plus years later, His disciples thought that He was lost when He died on Calvary. But He wasn’t lost. He was exactly where He needed to be on the cross dying for the sins of the world; and in the tomb sanctifying the graves of believers; then raised from the dead to bring life to all those who believe in Him! Our Heavenly Father agonises when His children go missing. When we were lost in sin and death, it was Jesus who came to find, rescue and save us! Thanks be to God who sent our Saviour as the Good Shepherd in order to “Seek and save the Lost” (Luke 19:10) – you and me.

Jesus says that there is not only another home for us but invites, guides, and grows us up into that home. It is a place He knows well. It is the Father’s home in which we can know ourselves and each other to be His beloved children, re-created in His image and called to be like Him. In the Father’s home our place at the banquet is set. It is a home in which we live in rooms of mercy, forgiveness, joy, beauty, generosity, compassion and love. This time of year is the time to celebrate the birth of God’s Son, our Saviour. And through Jesus, as we know, we belong to a special family, have an eternal home, and live under the love and grace of our heavenly Father.

A New Year is about to begin - filled with new opportunities! The old Latin proverb, "Carpe diem," urged people to "seize the day." Yes, for us too, by grace, "seize the day"! By faith in Christ you are a child of God! Then be about your heavenly Father's business! Rejoice that He has come to find you in your ‘lostness’ and sin. Rejoice that you are a loved child of God, and a member of His heavenly family, now and forever. Amen.