

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord, Saviour, and King. The title for today's sermon is "Finding Jesus" and is based on today's Gospel, from Luke chapter 2. Let us pray... . Amen.

One of a parent's worse nightmare's is to lose their child and to not be able to find them. Most parents have stories about temporarily losing one, or more of their children. Common feelings are fear, dread, and helplessness. These feeling can come from something as simple as having your child walk away from you in Co-op, to more seriously, when they disappear, even briefly, in a larger shopping facility or mall. The same can happen at home or on a farm as a younger child decides to go for an unattended walk outside.

I remember hearing the story from a mother of two young boys: one about a five month old and the other was three years old. The mom got up a little later than usual one morning. With her husband at work she was pleasantly surprised that her boys had let her sleep in more than an hour later than usual. Getting up nicely rested, she quietly left her room to her youngest son's room to watch him sleeping in his crib. As she entered his bedroom it was silent and she found the crib empty. As she looked around, she realized her baby boy was not in his room. She started to get worried. Her son could barely sit, never mind crawl, and yet he was gone. The mom quickly went to her three-year-old son's room down the hall. His room was also deathly silent as he too was not in his bed or bedroom.

She called her sons' names. Silence. Starting to panic, she called them again a little louder. And again . . . silence. As dread came over her, she tore down the stairs to the main floor, now desperately shouting their names! She needed to find her boys! As she ran towards the T.V. room, her oldest son popped his head over the couch and calmly asked her, "Why are you looking for us?" The three year old proceeded to tell her he brought his little brother down the stairs to watch T.V. with him so she could sleep in. How a three year old safely and quietly brings a five-month old down as flight of stairs, she still does not know. But there on the couch the two boys safely sat, watching the morning programming.

Losing a child for a couple minutes feels like an eternity. But imagine for a second, losing your child for 3 days.

Today's Gospel reading recounts a little of what Jesus and His parents did at the Passover celebration in Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old. The family had returned from Egypt after King Herod the Great died. Herod was the one who, about a decade earlier, ordered the killing of all the boys, two years old and younger, in Bethlehem and area, in his vain attempt to kill Jesus. When Jesus' family returned they heard King Herod's son, Archelaus was reigning over Judea, and so in fear that he too might try to kill Jesus, they lived in the region of Galilee, outside of his control.

Still, attendance at the Passover celebration was mandatory for all Jewish men. Instead, as a family, they all went to the annual Passover Feast in Jerusalem. They traveled from

Nazareth for the Passover celebration with a larger group. "The celebration involved the liturgical slaying of the lamb at the temple and then a family meal of that lamb after sundown on the 15th day of Nisan. The feast celebrated the greatest redemptive event in the history of Israel, when God delivered the Israelites from the bondage in Egypt. The angel of death killed all the firstborn of the Egyptians, but "passed over" the firstborn of the Israelites because of the blood of a lamb on the lintel and posts of the door." (*Just, Luke 1:1-9:50, CPH, p.129*) Every year the Jews would gather to remember their redemption and salvation from Egypt by the hand of God.

Those who attended were required to stay for at least two of the seven days in Jerusalem during the feast. After finishing their time, the family and friends gathered together and started heading back to Nazareth. It may seem a little strange they would get as far as they did, but it would not have been uncommon to see different members of the group travel at different speeds and then meet at a prearranged location to sleep or eat.

So after a day of walking, Mary and Joseph realized Jesus is not with their group. In the land of Judea, under the rule to Herod's son, their son Jesus was missing. Mary and Joseph quickly returned to Jerusalem, and couldn't find Him. Jesus was absent. They searched the remaining part of that day and nothing. I'm sure they both started to panic little, but thought that the next day they would surely find Jesus. The next day rolled around and Mary and Joseph and who knows who else lent a hand, searched and searched, and likely called and called, but there was no response. They likely started to run around in their frantic search for their son, and nothing. As night fell that second day, still no Jesus. The third day the anxiety and fear likely was really going. Questions were likely going through their minds, "Where is he?", "What has happened to him?", "Did Herod finally, from beyond the grave finish what he started in Bethlehem?", "How could we be so foolish as to leave him unattended in such a dangerous place?" And they searched and searched Jerusalem. Nothing. In a last ditch effort, they went to the temple, to where God promised to be with His. Behold there was a group of teachers talking and discussing matters of God—discussing theology—and in the middle was their son. But Jesus was not just listening, He was talking and asking the deep questions. Everyone who heard Him was amazed at His understanding and answers.

As a parent, I can understand the relief of finding Jesus. It doesn't take much imagination to detect the frustration, fear, fear, and anguish all blended together in Mary's words, as she confronts Jesus while still among the teachers and asked "**Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.**" (*Luke 2:48*) "Your father and I have been scared to death looking for you. Do you have any idea of the trouble you put us through?"

It is at this point that it should be mentioned, the main emphasis of this account of Jesus life is not about Him being lost for three days. It is not about a parent's distress of losing a child for three day. This is not about Jesus being an absent minded 12 year old who seemed to forget what was going on, or the possible trouble He was causing by His absence. Jesus knew exactly

what He was doing. He was putting Mary and Joseph into the position to search in all the wrong places so that when they found Him in the right place, He could reveal far more of who He really is. There in the temple, as Jesus would later teach His disciples, Jesus set up a teaching moment for His earthly parents, and the others present, who He was and why He had come. This is not a morality story, this is a salvation story.

What Simeon foretold to Mary when Jesus was only 40 days old, there in the temple, at twelve years old, Jesus clearly proclaimed for all to hear: He is the Son of God and His destiny is in Jerusalem. Jesus is more than just Mary’s son. There present is Immanuel, Jesus, “**God with us, who will save His people from their sins**”. He is in the flesh asking questions and teaching in His temple. Jesus’ answer to His mother would sound a little sarcastic, or even disrespectful, if He wasn’t God Incarnate, but He is both true man and true God, come for the salvation of Mary, Joseph, and us sinners. As such, Jesus answered His mother in the hearing of the teachers, and said “**Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?**”(Luke 2:48-49) Jesus’ true Father is God, which makes Him God in the Flesh. When the twelve year old Jesus stayed in Jerusalem, the city of God’s presence, God had come home to the place where He will accomplish His promised salvation.

Jesus was in His Father’s house doing His Father’s business. Mary and Joseph needed a good reminded of that, as each of us needs a reminder of that. The Jesus Mary and Joseph were looking for was their flesh and blood boy, not the Incarnate Son of the Most High God. They were looking and searching in all the wrong places for Jesus because they forgot, or never truly recognized who He really was and why He came in the first place.

And we need that same reminder. It is much too easy, and all too common, for us to make of Jesus what we want Him to be, to worship a false Jesus that we can shape into whatever image we desire. I have heard on too many times the line that starts with: ‘My Jesus would never do, or say, ...’ But isn’t it strange how the Jesus we end up with bears such a striking resemblance to ourselves? *Our* Jesus thinks as we do, *our* Jesus acts as we act, and speaks as we speak. *Our* Jesus supports our causes. He cheers on our team. He furthers our dreams. Rather than challenging us, *our* Jesus coddles us. Rather than calling us to repentance, *our* Jesus calls us to enjoy whatever we enjoy. Whatever we are for or against, then *our* Jesus is too. But what’s really going on is we’re making Jesus into what we think He should be instead of what He really is. We need the same thing Mary and Joseph needed: a wake-up call, a reminder of who Jesus really is, of why He was born, and what mission His Father sent Him to fulfill.

When people try to find Jesus apart from His cross, suffering, and death in their place—apart from His Word and Sacrament—the devil loves it. When people try to find the hidden Jesus—apart from where Jesus promises to be and what Scripture has revealed—they simply find themselves snuggled up in bed . . . with Satan. You see, the devil doesn’t care what Jesus you believe in, as long as His cross and His sacrifice for you are absent, for when they are absent, so is your salvation.

You must lose your false Jesus in order that you might find the real Jesus. And the real Jesus won't be thinking or acting or speaking as you do. He won't be where you naturally think He ought to be, doing those things you assume He should be doing. The real Jesus is all about His Father's business. The real Jesus is found where He says He will be: His in Word and Sacrament.

Jesus' cross, His sacrifice for us and all people, His suffering, His bleeding, His dying, and His rising on the third day is exactly why Jesus came. That is what it is all about. Paul told the Corinthians, "**For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.**" (*1 Corinthians 2:2*) That is where Jesus is true found and no where else. On the cross we see Jesus doing His Father's business: namely saving us sinners from the burning eternity we prepared for ourselves. Jesus came to pay the price for our sins. Jesus came to die the death we deserve. Jesus came to bring us peace, comfort, and joy, by the blood of His cross, suffering, death, and resurrection.

When we don't know where to look for Jesus, He asks us: "**Why were you looking for me there? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?**" (*Luke 2:48-49*) Jesus is here in His Word and in His Sacrament for you for the forgiveness of all your sins and to bring you to everlasting life. In Christ your sins are forgiven. In Christ, God made man to redeem us all, we have life in His name. You don't need to worry about losing Jesus, He has already found you, made you His own, and in Him you are saved!

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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