

The Second Sunday After Christmas

January 3, 2021

Luke 2:40-52

On Finding the Jesus You Thought You Had Lost

Grace to you and peace from God our Father

and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.



When I was a child I walked to the bus stop every morning, by myself or with my brother. I rode my bicycle around neighbourhoods and stayed out until the streetlights came on in the summer. I never felt unsafe, and my parents never worried about me going missing. Today it seems, at least from my experience, that children are much more sheltered. Parents are worried about all kinds of dangers that might be waiting for them.

Today we hear St. Luke's Gospel account of the boy Jesus in the temple. Perhaps the thing that gets our attention more than anything in this reading is how easily his parents lost him and how long it took for them to realize that he was missing. Mary and Joseph were happy to set off for Galilee with their large group apparently without checking that Jesus was with them. It took them an entire day before they figured out that something was wrong.

Actually this tells us more about the kind of world they lived in than the kind of parents they were. In that time extended families of kinsfolk and friends lived together in close-knit mutual trust. They easily assumed that Jesus was traveling in the group of "relatives and

acquaintances.”¹ By the same token, when Mary and Joseph returned to Jerusalem to find Jesus they did not have the comfort of travelling in the larger group. Now they were on their own in the big city, a place full of dark alleys and strange people, soldiers and traders, not a place where one would be happy to leave a boy of 12 years of age by himself.

The agony of Mary and Joseph, searching for three days, contrasts sharply with the calm response of Jesus when they found him. Mary blurts out an accusation, perhaps a mix of guilt and relief that parents will recognize at once. Instead of saying, “Son, how could I have done this to you, leaving you behind like that?” she says, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.”² Jesus accepts no blame. Indeed He issues a gentle rebuke that speaks volumes about who He is and why He has come: “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”³ Some mothers keep scrapbook of the striking things their children do and say, but Mary “treasured up all these things in her heart.”⁴

Why had they travelled to Jerusalem in the first place? St. Luke tells us that they “went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover,” and in this particular year “they went up according to custom.”⁵ This was no small task, for Jerusalem was about 70 miles from Nazareth and would have required many days walking. Once they got there we know that the Passover celebration involved the liturgical slaying of a lamb at the temple, followed by a family meal of that lamb. The people gathered to commemorate God’s deliverance or exodus

1 Lk 2:44.

2 Lk 2:48–49.

3 Lk 2:49–50.

4 Lk 2:51.

5 Lk 2:41–42.

of his people out of Egypt and the death angel's passing over Israel's firstborn. In this last plague the death angel visited Egypt's firstborn. However, when he came upon the households of Israel, he observed the blood of the Passover lamb smeared on the door lintels and "passed over" those homes.

So Mary and Joseph take Jesus on a journey, a pilgrimage, to the holy city, and right away all these things tell us that there is something much bigger going on here. What St. Luke describes in these details are the first hints that this is no ordinary travel story with an interlude about a lost child. For Jerusalem is a city of destiny for Jesus the Man, and His journey there will comprise the greater part of all the Gospels, as He preaches and teaches and performs miracles with His face set toward the cross.

This Gospel story serves as kind of a large-scale framework around the larger story, which is about to begin. Much of the beginning of the story takes place in the temple. In the first chapter of this Gospel we hear of Zechariah and how it came to pass that he received the angel of the Lord with the news that he will have a son named John. That took place in the temple. The temple is also the place where Simeon and Anna behold the infant Jesus and proclaim that the Lord's Christ has come, "a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel".⁶ Now in today's reading, when Jesus stays behind, where is He found? In the house of His Father, in the temple, asking questions and no doubt stumping the teachers of the law who were there. When the twelve-year old Jesus remains in Jerusalem, the city of God's presence, in the place of God's presence, He has come home to the place where He will accomplish salvation for all. In about another 20 years this same Jesus will be

⁶ Lk 2:32.

back in Jerusalem, and He will be the Paschal Lamb offered on behalf of sinners, He will be nailed to a cross in order to save us from our sins.

One of the best loved moments in St. Luke's Gospel is the story of the road to Emmaus, in which two disciples are talking about their anguish over the death of Jesus. Three days have elapsed since Jesus death, and they are on the road, heading out of Jerusalem after the Passover. They thought they had lost Jesus forever. But Jesus meets them on that road, and while their eyes were kept from recognizing Him at first, they recount all the things that have happened. Then Jesus teaches them about the meaning of everything, saying ““O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”⁷ Today we see another couple, coming back to Jerusalem, finding Jesus after three days, the Jesus they thought they had lost. And here Jesus uses the same word, that it is necessary (the word is the same in Greek). What Mary and Joseph could not understand at that moment was that in those words Jesus was pointing to His future Passion and Resurrection in that holy city. You might call these two stories perfect bookends to the entire Gospel of St. Luke, perhaps you could call them stories about “find the Jesus you thought you had lost.”

We can likewise think of our lives as Christians in terms of a pilgrimage, as we journey from our baptism to death, which is the entrance to the heavenly Jerusalem, under the care of our Leader and Saviour. Along our journey we live under the cross, in Christ, hearing His Holy Word, feeding upon His Holy Food to sustain us on the journey. Along the way we find Jesus where He has promised to be found, where God's presence is made known. But we are not

⁷ Lk 24:25–26.

looking for Him in the temple in Jerusalem, for the righteousness of God has been revealed through His Son, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe, faith which comes by the Holy Spirit in His Word, and poured out in His Sacraments. And along the way there may be times when we feel like we too have lost Jesus. Not because He has deserted us, but out of our own negligence and carelessness. We must consider whether in going about our own business we are taking Jesus for granted. So then we are searching for Jesus again, looking to once again find Him where He may be found. The pilgrimage journey is one of repentance and faith. “For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”⁸

The first words of Jesus from St. Luke are here in this story of the boy Jesus in the temple:

“Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”⁹

They affirm that He is indeed the One promised by the prophets and the Scriptures, for He has come as the Son of God, the Paschal Lamb who lays down His life. But the story ends on a note of misunderstanding, “they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.”¹⁰

This will happen all throughout His ministry, for whenever Jesus tells of His coming passion His disciples will stare back at him without comprehension. Not until that second bookend, on the road to Emmaus, will their eyes be opened when Jesus “interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”¹¹ Then they are back in Jerusalem, the city of God, the pivot point of salvation, where the promises of God were delivered once and for all. For those who seek Him where He promises to be found, in the Scriptures, in prayer, in the

8 Lk 11:10.

9 Lk 2:49.

10 Lk 2:50–51.

11 Lk 24:27.

Sacraments, we will find Him. In our earthly pilgrimage we have this assurance, that our heavenly Father cares for us so much that he sent his only begotten Son to die for us and take away our sins. He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.¹²

And now the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

✠ Soli Deo Gloria

¹² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Pe 1:3–4.