

The Park Road Pulpit

Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church

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Stopping by the Church to Find Our Way Home

Luke 2.41-52

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It's the only glimpse we get of Jesus as a child. I really hate that. Most of the stories we have portray Jesus as someone we could only hope to be. He always seems to know just what to say. He always asks just the right questions. He always seems aware and alert to the needs of folks around him. He always knew just the right story to tell for any given situation. And he seemed to live such a balanced life. Given what we know about Jesus it is easy to shrug off our calling to be like him – for we know that we could never live up to the life he lived. We too often speak out of turn, say the wrong thing, or say nothing at all. We presume we know all the answers and don't like to be bothered with the questions. We are sometimes oblivious to what's going on around us because we are so consumed with ourselves – or at best we are simply too preoccupied with our own lives to tend to the needs of others. Most of the time we simply are not good storytellers. And most of us cannot boast of a balanced life of rest and work - tending to our own souls and caring for others. And so we find that in truth, we don't have that much in common with what we think we know of Jesus.

As we take a look this fall at many of the ways that we know Jesus, today, on this Children's Sabbath we consider Jesus as One of Us. I can think of no better passage that represents this than from Luke's gospel telling of Jesus getting separated – LOST – from his parents when he was twelve years old. It is a parent's worst nightmare. And for any of you who have ever been there – from the parent's point of view or from a child's

perspective – then you know the surge of adrenaline that rushes through your body – you know the fear that gives way to panic in the course of only a few seconds. And you know the joy of hearing your child’s name – *would the parents of Bennett Dean please report to Guest Services of the Knights Baseball Stadium.* Yes – it has happened to us. Don’t you know that Mary and Joseph would have loved to hear an announcement like that: *would the parents of Jesus of Nazareth please make your way back to Jerusalem – you have left your boy there.* Traveling in mass – a great caravan of spiritual pilgrims making their way on the 4-5 day trek from Nazareth to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. Surely the men set the pace, followed by the women who knew their place behind the men, and then the children bringing up the rear – skipping, stopping to pick up and throw every rock on the trail. Surely the children ran a few foot races along the way. Surely they played a game or two per day of tag. Surely they played a little catch to pass the time. This would have been a grand family excursion with lots of distractions. And the parents must have trusted the group with their children – knowing that together they would make their way to Jerusalem and back. Safe and sound. All accounted for.

Luke is the only gospel writer to give us this story and it’s all we get about the childhood of Jesus. But in this one vignette, we see that Jesus really was One of Us – living a regular family life where boys are easily distracted and separated from their parents and where mothers, upon finding their son, hug him and chew him out in the same moment. This is a glimpse into the real life of Jesus of Nazareth where things don’t always go as planned and where boys scare their parents to death. This story reminds us that life is not perfect – and of course we already know that, but this story tells us that Jesus knew it too.

I think we like to think of this story as Jesus – the wise beyond his years – man/child. I think we like to picture the series of events not as if Jesus could possibly ever get lost but that he willingly chose to separate himself out and head on over to the Temple to teach those old guys some new stuff. And of course, if his mother lost it when she found him missing, then he would simply set her straight about who he really was. And then we picture Jesus waxing eloquent in the Temple – the teachers and rabbis hanging on his every word saying things like: “I never thought about it that way before” or “This boy is really onto something – tell us more, Jesus – we’re all ears.” If that’s your picture of this scene, then Jesus wasn’t One of Us at all.

Jesus got separated and lost from his family’s caravan of pilgrims. And being in a big city and not knowing where else to go – he went to a place that was familiar and safe, he went to a place he had been to before where he was loved and accepted. And I’m guessing he tried to think – when my parents notice me missing and try to find me, where’s the first place they will look? The last place they had been, of course. The Temple. It was smack dab in the center of city – a city set high on a hill. It was the most obvious place to go to find the way home.

And there Jesus waited to be found. And while he waited, the text says that he listened to the teachers and he asked good questions. And they were impressed with him – how much he knew and what he seemed to understand. And when Mary and Joseph found him they headed back to Nazareth where it says that Jesus obeyed them. And then it’s about 18 years before we hear anything about him again.

I want to be the kind of church that helps folks find their way home. I want to be the kind of church that when folks are lost they come here to a place that is familiar and

safe. I want to be the kind of church where folks meet up with one another without shame or retribution but rather reconciliation and acceptance and love. I want to be the kind of church where folks can come to listen and ask good questions. I want The Church – this church – to be a place that is a stopping by place that helps us to find our way home. And I want that for all the children – young children and grown up children. I want that for Emma Grace King and for Bennett Dean. I want that Ray Honeycutt and for Molly Caldwell. I want that for the Kellett family and for the Colon family. I want that for myself.

So on this Children's Sabbath, may we commit our lives to stopping by this place in order that we might find our way home. May it be so.