

December 30, 2012 - Sermon

This is a very interesting week in the lectionary. Only 5 days ago we were talking about the birth of Jesus and here we are today talking about a Jesus of 12. Next week we revert to Jesus as a baby, as the lectionary tells the story of 3 wise men arriving at the stable after following the star.

This Gospel story is an interesting story for another reason, not only does it jump 12 years into the future but it also tells the story of Jesus' family coming back from Passover, the celebration commemorating the Jews coming out of Egypt, in Jerusalem and a celebration at the Temple. Luke is the only Gospel that tells this story, the only story in any of the Gospels about the life of Jesus as a young person. Being that Jesus is 12 in the story that would mean that in another year Jesus will officially become a man, which is now celebrated as a Bar Mitzvah.

So, why do we get this story in the lectionary now? Why does this story show up a week after Christmas? The first thing that stands out for me in the Gospel is the concept of being lost.

How many went out shopping this past week? Were the stores busy? I heard a story about a family that had gone shopping around Christmas time and the mall they visited was packed full of people. After sometime shopping the family had agreed to meet at specific place, but when they all got together, the youngest was nowhere to be seen. With that the panic set in. The family agreed to split up and each member took a specific section of the mall to search and proceeded to search for the little one. They met back and still no sign of the youngest, panic was definitely setting in now, when all of a sudden the grandfather comes through the crowd with the little one by the hand. Well the parents were relieved but also a bit angry and asked the youngster why he had wandered off. To which the little one responded, but I did not wander off, I was looking at the toys, just where we had been. So the little one did not wander off, they were right where they were left.

I can only imagine that Jesus' parents felt this same panic when they realized that Jesus was not with them on their journey home. I know that I would be panicked if my child was missing for over a day and when I did find them, boy would they be in trouble. That fear of them missing could easily turn into anger and so I wonder how Mary asked Jesus "Why he did this to them," was her voice raised, was she relieved and calm, we may never know. Yet, Mary, Joseph and Jesus had just been at the Temple, so Jesus was right where they left him.

And so here we are a week after Christmas still in the middle of the holidays with all of their hustle and bustle. All of the presents and the parties, the food and the family, the confusion and the chaos and it is easy to wonder where Jesus is in all of this. Yet, Jesus is right where we left him in the manger, just waiting for us. After all of the excitement all of the building up to Christmas day, we sometime now look around and wonder where is God in our lives and just like this story, God is just where God was left. I know that sometimes not only at Christmas, I feel like I have lost God in my life and then frantically search for God in the world only to come back to that place where I left God.

When we continue to read the Gospel when Mary and Joseph finally find Jesus and Mary asks Jesus why he did this to them, Jesus responds to his mother; "Why were you looking for me?" We know where Jesus is, right where we left him, yet we run around searching and worrying. We have spent this last month building up expectations of what this time of year means and what will happen, actually many of us do that throughout our whole lives and when those expectations are not fulfilled we wonder what happened and we start to question everything and everyone, even God. We question where was our family, where were our friends, where was God. Yet as Jesus asks; "Why were you looking for me?" We need to learn to trust that even during those times when we can't feel God; we know Jesus is right there. When we have trouble letting go of all those expectations, that are shattered, we remember that Jesus is there, right where we left him.

The other thing that stands out for was Jesus response to his parents and I wonder if they really understood what Jesus was saying to them.

I remember when my oldest Josh was just a little guy, probably somewhere around 5 and he came to us with a ball in his hand and holding up the ball asked us what the ball was like. Of course we answered as we would any 5 year old and we answered it was like all his other balls. With a roll of the eyes, Josh said of course it was like his other balls, but what else was it like. We were stumped and did not have a clue where he was going with this question, so we asked him, what was the ball like? Josh took that as a go ahead to teach us that day and proudly stated that the ball in his hand was like the earth hanging in space, to which we immediately agreed. Then Josh asked how we stayed on the ball of earth and then proceeded to inform us that gravity was what kept us on earth and without gravity we would all fly off into space. With that, Josh turned around and walked out; leaving us just a bit confused about what the whole conversation had been about.

In the Gospel we hear that Jesus went with his parents and was obedient but I wonder if his parents really understood what Jesus was saying to them. Much like our conversation with Josh, I wonder if Mary and Joseph were left wondering what the whole conversation had been about. It is a challenge when you are talking to someone who ends up bringing up more questions than answers and I wonder if we ever truly get some of those answers we seek. In the Gospel story, it does not say that Mary accepted and understood exactly what Jesus was saying to them, rather Mary “held these dearly, deeply within herself.” Maybe those unknown things that she did not truly understand, maybe those questions that forever lingered about the true nature of Jesus and Mary was okay with those questions. I wonder if we also need to be okay with those questions that sometimes don’t seem to have an answer.

On this week between Christmas and New Years we are still in the midst of the confusion of the holiday season and we need to know that is okay to have questions and not have all the answers. It is okay for us to be confused by what is going on in our lives and to feel that confusion deep down in our souls, to questions faith and God and life. But we must also remember that when we feel that disconnect from God, God is always right where we left God. We need to

remember that we only need to look for God where God was left and we will find God waiting for us there. During this holiday season let us not forget that baby we have left in the manger, love incarnate born into the world. We don't have to have all of the answers sometimes and we know that there are times when we will have more questions, when people will challenge us in ways that might make us uncomfortable and it is at these times when it is okay to sit with those questions, as Mary sat and pondered those things Jesus said to her and know that God is always there where God was left.