

“ON OUR WAY...EVEN JUST A LITTLE BIT”

Luke 2:41-52

Intro

The following passage is a strange one. It's not odd because of what it says. Rather, it is peculiar because of when it is said. It was only six days ago, on Christmas Eve, that we were celebrating the birth of Jesus.

Now, here we are on the 30th and the infant has grown into a 12-year-old. In a lot of ways this jump feels much like the modern day sitcom where a baby is born in the season finally of one year and then when the premier of the next TV season rolls around, that baby is able to deliver a line as well as the adult actors and it's not because the infant is that intellectually advanced; it's because they're now four and have been acting since they were two, with a resume so long that they need an agent.

However, you need not feel that you have missed a whole lot of the story, because you haven't. In Luke the only action that separates where we left off on Christmas Eve with the shepherds heading back to the fields and today with a pre-teen Jesus sitting and listening to the teachers in Jerusalem is a description of a purification and sanctification ritual that traditionally took place about six weeks after the birth of a child. It is during these ceremonies that a holy man named Simeon and a prophet named Anna proclaim that this child is the Messiah who had been foretold of so long ago. We are then given the wonderful line which is to act as a bridge between the time of infancy and adolescence: "The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him."

It's not much, but it's what we've got.

This leads us up to our passage where Jesus and his family have journeyed south from Nazareth to Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover and the feast of the Unleavened Bread. When put together these two events last about seven days. The story picks up at the end of this week as Mary, Joseph, and much of their extended family are making their way back home.

The problem is, Jesus isn't in that group. He has stayed behind in Jerusalem and is taking part in a different kind of journey. What I would like you to think about as we hear these words is this: which was the more important voyage, the one that Mary and Joseph were taking to get back home, or the one that Jesus was taking in the temple?

Then to make it a little bit more personal: would you make that same choice in your own life? The scripture reads this way.

Luke 2:41-52

⁴¹ Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. ⁴³ When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. ⁴⁴ Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

⁴⁸ When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." ⁴⁹ He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he said to them. ⁵¹ Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

"On Our Way...Even Just a Little Bit"

My family is not able to travel a lot and certainly not all that far. There are just too many realities of Austin's diagnosis that regulate what we are able to do, where we are able to go, and when we are able to do it.

But that does not mean that we don't get out: we just do it differently than most folks! Let me provide an example.

On Monday, December 10th, I'm going to put it at around 9 PM, Jen and Amanda began a text exchange that followed up on Amanda letting her Mom know earlier in the day that she had been able to get the next few days off from work. The text exchange boiled down to the following: 'so are we doing this?'

The 'this' is our annual jaunt into New York City to hang out at Bryant Park, see the Rock Center tree, and then the light show on the side of Saks. Too cold? Can't do it. Chance of rain? Won't work. Too busy? No go. Somebody's coming down with a cold? Not going to happen.

So when the window of possibility opens, we tend to dive through it pretty hard.

We made the call that roughly 20 hours later we would see one another in midtown.

The next day, I went to work, Jim and Austin went to school, and Jen got everything ready. When 3:12 rolled around (you know, when Austin's bus pulls up), clothes were laid out, blankets were packed, warm packets for the folks who were forced to beg for money and food were assembled, the gas tank was filled and 33 minutes later, the four of us were pulling out on to 202 headed for the Lincoln Tunnel.

And we were able to see and do the things that we love doing: the skaters at Bryant Park were all moving in a clockwise direction, the star on top of the Rock Center tree was crazy bright (it's new this year...who knew?!), the lights and music on the side of a department store had all of us bopping along in some manner or form, the service and food at the Irish pub was spot on, and then to top it all off...we got to watch the Zamboni clean the ice rink at the end of the night (simple pleasures!). We were home by 11...I think. I don't know, I was pretty tired. As were all the other residents of the parsonage.

But we were also extremely satisfied because what could have been a regular Tuesday in the middle of December will be remembered as a great New York City adventure day.

Apparently, there was quite a similar feeling about the family trip that Jesus took when he was twelve to Jerusalem.

After all, of the thirty or so years that Jesus was on this earth between the events of his birth and the beginning of his ministry, this is the only event that Luke deems worthy of putting in his account.

That tells you how much of an adventure it was.

And even if Jesus had not made it so noteworthy by his going missing, it still was a notable period in this young person's life. The reason that his age is mentioned is because Jewish law required that every faithful Jewish man go to Jerusalem three times a year. Jesus did not begin to make this transition to become a "son of the Law", or a man, until he was twelve. By his going to these festivals Jesus is saying, through his actions, that he is taking on the responsibilities of being "a man".

Basically, this would have been a time for Mary and Joseph to rejoice in the fact that their boy is growing up. Their boy is becoming a man, both literally, through his physical and mental stature, and also figuratively, through the eyes of the law.

They were on their way toward a new stage in life.

So think about, here you have a family that is celebrating one of the holiest times of the year in Passover, while their son is reaching a milestone in his personal life. Mary and Joseph had to be on an emotional high, even as they begin to make the journey back to Nazareth.

So imagine their shock when they discover that their son who is becoming a man shows such a lack of maturity and, essentially, runs away: the kind of adventure that is more akin to a nightmare.

Admittedly, from our vantage point, we would like to blame the parents for not making sure that their kid was along with them in the first place.

However, in their context, this was perfectly normal. Mary and Joseph had journeyed to Jerusalem with many family and friends. This method of travel cut down on the amount of individual planning that you had to do because, at the bare minimum, it was an unspoken rule that everyone in the traveling party watched after everyone else.

That meant the kids too.

So the fact that it took them a day to realize that Jesus was missing, is not the problem. The problem is that a young man, to say it mildly, has just shirked his responsibilities in a major way.

Mary and Joseph make their way back to Jerusalem and after not knowing where their son is for two days (one day's journey out, one day's back), they finally find him on the third day, and he just so happens to be in the temple sitting with the teachers of his day, listening, reflecting and then asking questions of them, but we'll get back to that in a minute.

Jesus parents are as you would expect them to be upon finding a child whom they have viewed as lost for the last two days: there is a great sense of relief that he is safe and there is also a whole lot of anger. It's the latter that we hear in Mary's initial comments to Jesus: "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."

Don't you love it how the Bible sugarcoats this question? Lets be honest with each other: they are ticked off and they want to know what the deal is.

What they end up getting is a response that reflects complete surprise, 'Mom, Dad, I'm sorry! Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?'

Jesus is showing in his response that he was on his way to becoming the individual who we know through the accounts of his ministry. He is taking his growth into adulthood seriously, even at twelve, and is beginning to learn that which he would need to know to fulfill his divine purpose.

We can also tell through his parents' reaction that they were not in the same place along the journey.

Even though both of them had been visited by angels foretelling of this child's destiny, had shepherds come to them with stories of angelic choirs, and kings from the east speak of the star that they followed, they were not that far along the way yet. They still wanted to hold on to the child who they had raised instead of letting him grow into the adulthood that he was on the edge of. They got so stuck on who *they* saw him as, that they were unable to recognize who he actually was becoming.

This brings us back to what Jesus was doing during those two plus days that he was apart from his earthly parents.

Did you catch what he was doing?

He wasn't off gallivanting around (No parents! Let's go crazy!!).

Instead, he was preparing for his journey that was yet to come. He was sitting there with teachers, listening to the wisdom that they possessed, and asking questions. Admittedly, the questions he was asking and the answers he was giving were causing quite a stir. For it says that, "all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers."

However, he wasn't there teaching them, as is portrayed in many an artist depiction, but rather searching for himself, through inquiries, as to what was true. He was on his way to having a greater understanding of God, who he already knew as his Father, and how he was related to God. He was on his way to becoming the person who died on a cross for our sakes.

As we take stock of these two examples of people on their way to somewhere, we are struck by the stark contrast.

In the case of Mary and Joseph we have people who are looking back to who their son was, while in Jesus' case we have someone who is looking forward, toward what is on the horizon by listening and asking questions right now. As we look at these two illustrations, which is the one that we should follow? Yes, we all want to be good caregivers for those in our stead. At the same time, if we follow the example of Mary and Joseph we may become stuck in what has been.

Conversely, in the case of Jesus we have someone who is getting ready for that which is to come. This is why, I believe, the example of Jesus, even at the age of twelve, should become a barometer by which we should judge our own lives.

We sometimes become so transfixed on what we feel needs to be done that we miss out on some obvious things. We talked about that on Christmas Eve in regard to just how unbelievable to nativity

story is and we absolutely see it again with Mary and Joseph and how they could not understand why Jesus, with his divine lineage, would want to be in the temple now that he was growing into adulthood.

However, if we take time to listen and ask questions, as Jesus did in the temple, we will be on our way to a greater understanding of God and who we are to God. Especially because we are fast approaching the end of another year, this is a good time to make an honest assessment of where we are in our spiritual journey with the Almighty.

Are we taking the time to listen to what is being said by God (again, how are we using the faith that we have been blessed with, regardless of how small it may feel to us, to see the light of God breaking into the world in both the expected and absolutely unexpected ways?)

Are we listening and then asking the questions that we need to ask?

God wants us to be prepared for that which we are yet to encounter. Take the time this new year to listen and ask questions of God so that as we head on our way, we go with a confidence that is truly of God.

After Sermon Prayer

God, as we approach this New Year, You do want us to get ready for what is to come. Instead of always looking back to what was, help us to listen to where You are now so that as we hear the answers to our questions and concerns, we might be able to display a trust in You that is stronger than we could have mustered on our own. Amen.