

Searching for Jesus

December 26, 2021 Sermon by Stephen Portner

Luke 2:41-52

41 Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. 42 When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. 43 After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. 44 Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. 45 When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48 When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

49 "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" 50 But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

51 Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

Have you ever been lost? Have you ever lost someone else? I think being lost yourself is one thing. You tell yourself you will just have to figure things out. If all else fails, you might even have to ask directions. But losing someone else takes getting lost to a whole different level. The panic rises very quickly, because the situation is more out of your control. Where did you lose that someone? How do we lose that someone? And how are we going to go about finding that person and getting them back?

The time I remember most vividly (and I'm sure it's the time my wife, Christine, remembers so vividly as well) was when we lost our son, Ben. He was about ten years old at the time. We were at Walt Disney World and we have a tendency to keep pushing ourselves so that we can see and experience everything. There was our family and Christine's parents who were with us. We made a habit of counting everybody numerous times just to make sure we were all together. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7. All here. Good. We were standing in line for the "it's a Small World" and were just about ready to step into one of the boats. 1-2-3-4-5-6. Wait. 1-2-3-4-5-6. One of us is missing. Who's missing? Ben's not here. Where's Ben? Ben was nowhere to be seen. Parents and

grandparents start going into panic mode. Finally, we look up at where the beginning of the line to “It’s a Small World” and there’s Ben. He was so exhausted, he had leaned on the railing and fallen asleep. We yell out, “Ben! Ben!” He startled awake and then made his way down to us to the front of the line. But it had traumatized us to the point that for the rest of our trip (and long afterward), we kept whirling around and asking, “Where’s Ben? Where’s Ben?” Losing someone, even for a moment is traumatizing. I can only imagine what Mary and Joseph felt like after not finding Jesus until three days after they had lost him.

At age twelve, Jesus was considered almost an adult, so he probably didn’t spend a lot of time with his parents during the feast. Those who attended these feasts usually traveled in caravans for protection from robbers along the Palestine roads. It was customary for the women and children to travel at the front of the caravan, with the men bringing up the rear. A twelve-year-old boy conceivably could have been in either group, and both Mary and Joseph assumed Jesus was with the other one. Their caravan probably included a large number of people. So it was not until they had gone *a day’s journey* and were ready to strike camp that Mary and Joseph checked for Jesus among all their *relatives and friends*, only to discover that he was not in the crowd but had *stayed behind in Jerusalem*.¹

When Mary and Joseph discovered that Jesus was not among the travelers, *they returned to Jerusalem to search for him*. The *three days* that elapsed probably involves one day in travel away from the city, one day for them to return, then finding him on the third day. Certainly to their great relief, *they found him in the temple*.

The temple courts were famous throughout Judea as places of learning. The apostle Paul studied in Jerusalem, perhaps in the temple courts, under Gamaliel, one of its foremost teachers (Acts 22:3). At the time of the Passover, the greatest rabbis of the land would assemble to teach and to discuss great truths among themselves. The coming Messiah would no doubt have been a popular discussion topic, for everyone was expecting him. Jesus would have been eager to listen and to ask probing questions. It was not his youth, but the depth of his wisdom, that *amazed* these teachers.²

Mary and Joseph knew the true identity of their son, yet that did not keep them from being typical concerned parents. Their son had been gone from them for three days, yet that seems not to have bothered him at all. Jesus was absorbed in discussions at the temple and did not seem to have wondered about his parents or his connection with the caravan back to Nazareth. Mary was worried, anxious, and overwhelmed by what had happened and her frustrating search for Jesus. Mary’s words indicate a hint of scolding:

¹ Barton, B. B., Veerman, D., Taylor, L. C., & Osborne, G. R. (1997). [Luke](#) (pp. 56–57). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

² Barton, B. B., Veerman, D., Taylor, L. C., & Osborne, G. R. (1997). [Luke](#) (p. 57). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Why have you done this to us? She explained that they had been *frantic* ever since he turned up missing, *searching* through the city to find him. They did not understand how Jesus could have treated them so casually.³

Jesus couldn't understand why Mary and Joseph got so frantic in their search for him. He surely felt bad that he had caused them distress, but it made perfect sense to him that he would be in his *Father's house*, that is, in the temple. This is the first mention of Jesus' awareness that he was God's Son (he called God "my Father") and that he had special work to do (he said I "must" be here). His relationship with his Father in heaven superseded his human family and even his human home. While he probably went to school and studied along with other boys in the synagogue in Nazareth, to be in the temple with many learned teachers was a great opportunity for Jesus. He took full advantage of his time there, and it seems that he thought his parents would know where he would be.

Jesus' parents *did not understand* what he meant about his Father's house. They didn't realize that he was making a distinction between his earthly father and his heavenly Father. Jesus knew that he had a unique relationship with God. Although Mary and Joseph knew he was God's Son, they didn't understand what his mission would involve. Besides, they had to rear him, along with his brothers and sisters (Matthew 13:55–56), as a normal child. They knew Jesus was unique, but they did not know what was going on in his mind. They had to learn and observe the complex out workings of Jesus' special identity and calling even as he lived in their family.⁴

So back to my original question: "Have you ever been lost?" The short answer to that question is "Yes." There may or may not be a time when you were physically lost, but there was definitely a time in which you were spiritually lost. Even if you grew up in a Christian household like I was, there was a time when you were lost: lost until you personally accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. It's one thing to think that Jesus is the Savior for everyone else. Or that you think that you know a lot about Jesus. It's quite another thing to realize that if you were the only one here on earth, Jesus would have gone to the cross to die for you.

The problem is that when we are lost, we may not even realize we are lost. Or we may not want to admit that we are lost. I remember a cartoon that depicted a man pushing a shopping cart out in the desert and which had a caption something like, "The man of the family refused to ask for directions, no matter what." Some people even get offended if you attempt to point out that they may be lost. In seminary we were to refer to people as "unchurched" rather than "lost," because people don't want to have it implied that they may not be in control.

³ Barton, B. B., Veerman, D., Taylor, L. C., & Osborne, G. R. (1997). [Luke](#) (pp. 57–58). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

⁴ Barton, B. B., Veerman, D., Taylor, L. C., & Osborne, G. R. (1997). [Luke](#) (p. 58). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

When you do accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, it changes your whole perspective on life. It's as if you are looking at life through a different set of lenses. You no longer look at people as objects to be fixed, but as fellow travelers on this road of life who may occasionally lose their way, just like you. And since they are just like you, you tend to have more compassion for them when they make mistakes or wake up grumpy or have "one of those days," because you recall so clearly that you have been through the same thing too.

Yet people who are lost, even though they may not admit it, are people who are looking for answers or looking for solace in all the wrong places. They may try to find what they are looking for in a bar room, in a large crowd, in a sexual relationship, in taking drugs, or a multitude of other places. What they are really looking for is Jesus. Jesus is the only one who can help them cope with whatever ails them in life. Jesus is the only one who gives abundant life, here and now. Jesus is the only one who gives eternal life and hope for the future. Jesus is the only one who can save us from our sins and deliver us to a path of righteousness where we can truly find and then walk beside our Lord and Savior.

There's only one person who ever lived who was never really "lost." Jesus wasn't lost. He knew right where he was. He was in his Father's house. Mary and Joseph should have known that's where he would be. If you are searching for Jesus, you need to look no further than your own heart, if only you will invite Jesus in. Our bodies become a temple for Christ when we invite him in. If you have not accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, there is no time like the present.