



Luke 2:41-52
The Path of Jesus
Home Alone

Rev. Brian North
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Last week Rev. Jannie kicked off our new sermon series titled, “The Path of Jesus’ Life” when she preached on Simeon and Anna’s encounter with Jesus when Mary and Joseph brought him to the temple for his circumcision on the 8th day of his life.

Today’s passage comes right after it, and at this point Jesus is 12 years old. And if we pay careful attention to this passage, we learn some things about his life, and the family he grew up in, there are some interesting parallels with other events in the early years of his life, and some interesting parallels with events at the end of his earthly life. And through them all, not only will we learn something about the path that Jesus walked, but we’ll learn something about the path he leads us down. So this morning’s passage is **Luke 2:41-52** (p. 1592, pew Bibles).

I think for many parents, this is one of the more memorable passages of Scripture, because isn’t it one of every parent’s worst nightmares, that they leave a child somewhere and don’t realize it until some time later? In fact, you can imagine, after a full day of traveling away from Jerusalem toward Nazareth, that in the moment Mary and Joseph realized that Jesus wasn’t with them, their response was a bit like this: **Video Clip Here**. If you’re reading online, you can watch it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4DgbUBoxa48>

And so this passage is really good news for parents because if you have ever left your child, or if in the future you ever do leave your child somewhere, you’re in really good company, right? I mean, the parents of *Jesus*, the parents who learned they were expecting a child because of God’s work in their lives through the Holy Spirit, who learned of this through *angelic visits*, and who had a birth celebration that included *foreign dignitaries* bringing valuable gifts...*these parents lost the savior of the world*, lost God in the flesh...So this passage is good news for parents and we parents should never forget it: **You don’t need to worry about being a perfect parent**. If Jesus’ parents weren’t perfect and were still able to raise him up well, you can

adequately raise up the children that God has given you.

So, before we throw Mary and Joseph under the bus for losing Jesus, we need to remember that this isn't a family vacation to the big city for a big holiday as you and I think of it. **This is more like a whole town vacation to Jerusalem.** The estimates of historians and archaeologists about the population of Nazareth at the time vary anywhere between 500 to 2,000. Most all of them would make the journey to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. Along the way they'd pass through other towns and villages where undoubtedly people would join in the caravan. So when they turn around to go home, you're talking about several thousand people at the start of the journey, caravanning by foot to head north out of Jerusalem. So this isn't an isolated family taking a stroll from one town to another. Yes, Nazareth is to the north – about 90 miles; when the passage says that they headed up to Jerusalem in verse 42 and in verse 51 that they went “down to Nazareth” to return home, it's referring to the fact that Jerusalem is about 2500 feet above sea level, and Nazareth is about 1000 feet above sea level. The point is, there are a lot of people heading north out of Jerusalem.

Then there's also a cultural issue that a child was not only the child of his parents but also the child of his extended family and even his neighbors and others who called Nazareth home – and they were probably traveling with other family and friends who lived in other villages and town along the way. The idea that “it takes a village to raise a child” was how things really were for them. So as they're traveling in this large group, everyone's kind of looking out for everyone else. It would be easy for Jesus' parents to presume that He was with them somewhere in this train of people, being watched by someone else.

On top of that, it was even traditional for the women to travel together toward the front of this slow-moving train, and the men to travel together in the latter half of it (my recent experiences at an Ethiopian Orthodox Church - similar), and so it's entirely possible that Mary and Joseph each thought that Jesus was with the other parent...let alone maybe being watched by somebody else from their village.

So when we read that they didn't notice Jesus was missing until the end of the first day's travel, it's not like they're inept parents. They probably began the journey with him near one of them, he wandered off to be with others, and eventually slipped away and he “stayed behind in Jerusalem.” In fact, it’s probable that He hardly got out of Jerusalem to begin with.

So after a day’s travel they realize he’s not with them, and after going back to Jerusalem and searching for three days, they find him. And of course, they probably said something along the lines of a variation of “Amazing Grace:” “You once were lost, but now you’re found...” Theologically and spiritually speaking, it’s weird thing to sing to Jesus, right? I mean, Jesus is the one who finds us! But it fits the real world reality of what was going on.

Now, the text tells us that Jesus is 12. It’s easy to gloss over, but this is significant, theologically speaking. **In Jewish culture, when a male turns 13, he is considered old enough to think and reason and make decisions like an adult, and is responsible for living rightly.** So it is at age 13 that a boy is essentially considered a man. This is when they become known as “bar mitzvah” which means, “son of Commandment.” In other words, at age 13 they’re now under the commandments of God about holy living. This is interesting, because if you ask me, Jesus didn’t really keep up his end of the caravan bargain to make sure he stuck with the gang on this road trip. He disobeyed his parents. I’ve had friends bring this up, in fact, and ask about it in light of the fact that we believe Jesus lived without sin: isn’t this a sin, that he didn’t obey his parents?

And yet, by Jewish religious practice, at age 12 he would not have been considered old enough to be responsible for his own behavior. Interestingly, the age for girls and their “bat mitzvah” (daughter of Commandment) is 12. So if you think that the maturity level differences between boys and girls is a product of the last 25 years or so and the advent of video games and their impact on the maturity level of our boys, the answer is “no.” 2,000 years ago, and even long before that, the people recognized that girls are more mature at an earlier age. By the way, the parties that are thrown for those occasions are a more recent development in the last few centuries; but the idea that boys and girls become sons and daughters of the commandments at this age, is not

new. And Luke clearly tells us that Jesus was 12, below the bar mitzvah age of 13. By the way, can we all agree that we won't tell all of this to any of my kids, or anyone else's kids, who are under these ages? I can't speak for the other parents here of kids under 12 and 13, but I don't want mine thinking there's any excuse for bad behavior.

The last observation I want to note here has to do with some parallels we see in other times of Jesus' life, and it is that: **Jesus, clearly, is comfortable, and confident in his faith and religious understanding here in the Temple.** He's been there for three days, undoubtedly cared for by others in terms of food and a place to sleep. But during the daytime, he's been there, hanging out with the religious teachers. We see that same theme later when Jesus is in the wilderness and tempted by the devil, another significant event in the life of Jesus that we won't be looking at in this series but have previously. Jesus is comfortable and confident in his faith in that experience. He is confident in his Heavenly Father, and that He will take care of him. And that understanding of the Jewish faith and confidence in his Heavenly Father had to have come from only one place, and that is his parents. Mary and Joseph clearly brought Jesus up in the Jewish faith, participating regularly in worship. Luke tells us as much when he writes: "Every year his parents went up to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover." And then additionally, when they finally find him in the Temple with the religious teachers, we're told that the teachers were amazed at his understanding.

That doesn't happen accidentally; It started with his parents intentionally raising him up in the faith. And I think to say, "well, Jesus was God in the flesh so of course he knows everything" is a bit of a cop-out. Jesus was fully divine, but also fully human. In fact, Philippians 2:7 says that Jesus, in coming from eternity to live as a human "made himself nothing." The Greek literally reads, "emptied himself/made himself void." This helps us to understand things like when Jesus says later on that he's *dependent* on his heavenly father; that He only does what His father tells him to do, and so forth. The point is, his parents had influence on him in his humanity, and that includes his religious understanding and devotion...and the grownup teachers were amazed at his teaching. The point is, Jesus has clearly been taught well.

And that doesn't happen by going to church a few times a year, or only at major holidays like Christmas and Easter. As the sign in front of our church says right now, "Church also open between Christmas and Easter." This confidence and understanding that he has doesn't happen by ignoring the faith in the home. It doesn't happen when we count on the church professionals and the Sunday school teachers to teach our kids so we parents don't have to. It doesn't happen when parents say one thing and do another in regards to their faith. It happens when parents are actively involved in teaching their kids about the faith, encouraging prayer, encouraging Bible reading, encouraging them to live it out every day, go to church regularly, and model all of that themselves as well. Clearly, a big part of the path of Jesus' life is that he was brought up in the way of the Jewish faith. **His parents put into practice Proverbs 22:6, "Train a child up in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not stray from it."**

We know Joseph and Mary were faithful and trusting. We know that from the birth narratives and their responses to the news that God was going to bring the Messiah forth through them. We see their trust and confident faith when, according to Matthew, they left Israel for a time and went down into Egypt until Herod had gotten over his jealous pursuit of this newborn King. So they model faithful living. They model a bold trust and strong faith in God and what He is doing, even when they can't see the whole picture.

And we can do the same with our kids – whether that's the kids in our home, the kids in our extended family, the kids in our neighborhood, or the kids in our church. We grown-ups – parents first and foremost, but others, too – we have influence over the children with whom we come in contact. And if we're going to influence them toward a strong and robust faith that means something to them, and shines brightly in the world through them, it starts with our own faith – developing it, strengthening it, living it out, having alignment between what we say and what we do, along with encouraging kids in their faith development. So we see this strong faith, and trust in His heavenly father in the lives of his parents, and in Jesus' own life, long before his public ministry.

And then we see this also at the end of Jesus' life. It's a continuation of this

pattern of living out his faith that's been established. Do you remember what Festival was being celebrated when Jesus was crucified? The Passover – the same one as in this morning's reading. Do you remember what city Jesus went to in order to celebrate the Passover? Jerusalem – same as this morning. Do you remember where Jesus went for a good portion of his time during the Passover celebration? The Temple – the same as this morning. On the 8th day of his life, he was brought to the temple by his parents for his circumcision. Every year they came to the temple – a 90 mile walk from Nazareth – for Passover. They certainly attended their local synagogue regularly as well. And in his early 30's, Jesus is still traveling to Jerusalem for the Passover. He's still going to the temple. Ironically, where the teachers were amazed at his teaching when he was 12, a few days before his crucifixion he's doubted and questioned on where he gets his authority. I've often wondered if some of those guys who were amazed at his teaching 20 years earlier were the same ones who questioned him shortly before his death.

You see: **The path of Jesus' life was wrapped tightly around his faith.**

From his upbringing right to his death and his resurrection. And that path is the path that he calls us on as well. We walk along the path not by sight, but by faith, as we follow where Jesus leads us. He's like a shepherd calling his sheep, prodding them along, pulling them occasionally with the crook of the staff. He doesn't forget us. He doesn't leave us home alone to fend for ourselves while he takes off on a vacation. He doesn't leave us wandering in the dark, or off the path, or down the wrong path.

And as the path of faith continues here in 2017, **I pray that we would all be listening to Jesus' voice calling us, and sensitive to where he's leading us, and open to his gentle prodding – and helping others to be trained up in the faith just as Jesus' parents did.** He's there for you. He'll never leave you or forsake you. When the path of life is dark and treacherous, he lights the way, and he leads us by the hand. When it's a path of safety and ease, he lovingly, even if firmly some times, pushes us challenges us so as to strengthen and sharpen us. When we get off onto the wrong path, he seeks to bring us back to the path he has marked out for us. This is true for us individually, and it's true for us together as a church. And I pray first of all that in 2017 we would be on the path with Jesus, following Him. And I pray

second of all that our lives, like Jesus' parents' lives, like Jesus' life, would influence others to live by faith and trust in our heavenly father, so that as today's passage says about Jesus: that we and others too, would grow in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and people. Let's Pray...Amen.