

Divine and Human
Menno Mennonite Church
January 5, 2025

Purpose: To relate the evolving sense of God with us to the experience of our human nature as God comes into our reality.

Message: As people of God's kingdom, we are invited to learn at the feet of one who draws us further into the sense of our humanity.

Scripture: Luke 2:41-52 (Sermon Text; I will read); Psalm 119:1-11 (Please read)

Synopsis: We can be quite dual minded in our concepts of Jesus and the life he leads. We are given to either making him what we would rather he would be: wholly human or wholly divine. Seldom do we settle in what we say: that both are equally true. Here in this temple encounter we are given an utterly human encounter. Any of us can empathize and connect with Joseph and Mary's panicked looking for their beloved son (how many of us can say we mislaid the son of God for 3 days). But we also are given a glimpse into the otherness of Jesus: right where he belongs at home with his Father and in the Law. As we encounter the dawning of God's enlightenment we are invited to celebrate the life of God with us that is profoundly human even as it rightly anchors itself in its full home of God's goodness.

Luke 2:41-52 CEB

⁴¹ Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival.

⁴² When he was 12 years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to their custom.

⁴³ After the festival was over, they were returning home, but the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn't know it.

⁴⁴ Supposing that he was among their band of travelers, they journeyed on for a full day while looking for him among their family and friends.

⁴⁵ When they didn't find Jesus, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him.

⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple. He was sitting among the teachers, listening to them and putting questions to them.

⁴⁷ Everyone who heard him was amazed by his understanding and his answers.

⁴⁸ When his parents saw him, they were shocked.

His mother said, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Listen! Your father and I have been worried. We've been looking for you!"

⁴⁹ Jesus replied, "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house?"

⁵⁰ But they didn't understand what he said to them.

⁵¹ Jesus went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. His mother cherished every word in her heart.

⁵² Jesus matured in wisdom and years, and in favor with God and with people.

The old saying goes that we must read the Bible with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. This completes the link between the currency of the Spirit and the demands of the day, or so goes the logic. As helpful as that may be, I think there are other accessories that we also need to employ when coming to the text as well. Patience, curiosity, empathy go a long way to bringing the story to life as we read not only of the happenings of then, but also with the somewhat jaundiced eye of having a far broader scope and awareness of the story and where it is headed than anyone actually in the story. It can be easy to bring our conclusions and decisions to the reading and shake our heads when we get the mistake part of the story. But even more importantly I think we must bring our imaginations to the task too. It takes imagination to take in the burning bush or crossing the Red Sea on foot. We can imagine even in part the workings of the angels in the Christmas Story. We might wish to imagine the sights and sounds of hearing the Master speak truth on the sermon on the mount. Considering the promises of God for where and how all things end up in Revelation demands our imagination to even begin to comprehend. There are large swaths of the story where we are left to our imaginations to conceptualize the why where when and most definitively, the how, of various details of the text.

This really isn't one of those times, however. This story we are given of Jesus and the temple is one that, at least on an emotional level we can imagine all too keenly. Reading the story likely transports us quite clearly into a land of memory. We can empathize with the feeling of losing track of the kids. Even or minute or two can take a while to get the blood pressure back to normal. We know panic, wondering, the fear. Or perhaps we recall our own moments of fear of being lost. This past Halloween we took a day and went to the corn maze place in Moses Lake. I went into the hay bale maze with Luke, ready to breeze right through it. Not only did I promptly lose my bearings as design, I was also concerned for Luke as he was keenly looking around for the friends he had just met there, and wanted to shadow. I could feel my anxiety rising as the dead ends piled up or any time Luke ran that just a little bit too far ahead. There is not a whole lot of large scale imagination we need to bring to this particular story.

It is a bit something that this, ultimately, is how the Christmas story ends. After 2 quite long chapters of narrative and explanation full of glory and angels, pronouncements, declarations, amazement at the birth of the savior of the world, the next story is: and then his parents lost him. We can imagine with Mary and Joseph about losing track of a child (though 3

days on the road is stretching it). But it is rather worse than that: they Lost God's boy along the way home. That really has to be anyone's definition of a bad day. The whole thing is announced by angels and now we have the ancient equivalent to a PA announcement at Walmart.

Even for all of this, we can understand. This was a family trip—really a community trip after all. If this was happening today perhaps they would have all made snazzy matching t-shirts to mark the occasion for the whole synagogue, the whole village going to do what is right at the temple. Assumptions were made, best intentions were trusted, and things were meant to go well enough and then they have this mad dash backwards to figure out what has happened. We empathize with the feeling, the panic, the wondering.

Of course he was in the last place that they looked. Funny that we keep saying that all the time given that when you are looking for something pretty much by definition it will always be found in the last place you look given that then the search is over and you can stop looking. But as is always the case in search protocol, you look where you anticipate finding—the car keys in the pockets, then on the kitchen counter or by the laundry. Then perhaps in the couch cushions on between the car and the house that you perhaps dropped them on your way into the house. Seldom do we look for them in the freezer right away based on the fact that we had an arm load of ice cream to put away from the grocery store. It might be the sensible place to look once you put the whole puzzle together, but we don't go there right away without working through the likely list first.

So too in Luke does Mary and Joseph spend days looking everywhere, perhaps multiple times, before stumbling on the idea that they should check the Temple. It is worth noting here the time frame—3 days. For three days, they did not know where to find Jesus. For three days all they knew was their loss. Sound familiar?

In fairness to them, of all the places to look for a 12 year old in the city, Church is not always the first place to go searching. But they were running out of places and sure enough; there he is. For his part, Jesus was just confused. Why wouldn't they remember that he was rightfully at home where he always belongs? His parents don't understand, however. They are too flush with a combination of intense relief and a little abiding post-traumatic stress to be able to suss it all out just then. They were doing what they needed to do, and all they could understand is that he was found (though imagine too the conversation on the way home).

We welcome this story because it is so utterly appropriate. It is not the nice, neat, stayed and manicured nativity that we so long to keep together, with everything just so. But it is utterly and fully human. When we go looking for the Holy One, we look and search only to find that they were there all the time. The gospel that is filled with angels and amazement is also wrapped up with a story of error, misunderstanding, abject panic, and great relief. And no small puzzlement on the part of the divine. Because through it all, things seem perfectly obvious to Jesus (though one would have hoped that even the Son of God might have wondered what happened to mom and dad along the way in that amount of time). Why didn't they look where it was obvious that he would be and be safe? Why didn't they seek in the most likely place.

The truth is that such is the way when the divine and human meet face to face. There is mishap. There is lack of understanding and comprehension. There is seeking that which from a given perspective was never lost in the first place. We are given to thinking from time to time that not understanding something means that it therefore must not be true. But really the one has nothing to do with the other. There are plenty of things that I simply do not understand or are not part of my reality. But that doesn't mean that they are somehow untrue. But what a gift that is. We may not understand how best to find Jesus or plug into the Spirit of the living God in a way that is fully evident to us at the time. There are times where our lives of the Spirit feel full alive and active, and other times where we might be given to wondering where it all has gone to. Sometimes, when we are feeling those moments of wondering where Jesus might be, we might be too panicked about even the question to be reassured that God is with us all the same. We humans do not always look in the right or the obvious places. We may spend days or seasons or years feeling that absence. But we can rest in the gift that even when we feel most alone, that is not our actual state of being. Losing sight of the divine; wondering where it may be found; searching with ambition and, perhaps worry; that is nothing if not human.

For here is the good news. We need not seek Jesus in the geography of our expectations. Jesus' dwelling is no longer within the strictures of temples or the places we deem sufficiently holy. God cannot be kept out of our world. The same world that we lament and moan about on a nearly daily basis, seeing its brokenness and incompleteness, its lies and conceits, its vanity and politics. All of this and so much more has become the dwelling of the most high, now and forever more. As Paul writes, each one of us is meant to be the living temple of the living God. Our temples are to be houses of prayer to be sure, but we can also rest in the good news that

where God is looked for God will be found. It may not always be in the first, familiar places that we might frequent. But we keep looking and in due time, Jesus is found, known, and welcomes us home in meeting us where we have found him. When we look for him, we need not panic: Emmanuel will never leave or forsake us. In this we have joy and can rejoice always.

Seek the Lord while he may be found sounds the old warning. God with us is our present and always, and in that revelation we can ever rejoice. Amen.