

About Whose Business Was He?
Luke 2:41-52

Dr. J. Howard Olds
December 28, 2003

The thing I like most about working in a church is the opportunity to connect with people of all ages and stages of life. We baptize babies and conduct funerals. We celebrate weddings and visit hospitals. Confirmation begins in a few weeks for our 6th graders and the PEP Club meets monthly for our seniors. Faith is important at every phase of life.

So it is that Luke's gospel includes a few childhood stories of Jesus ignored by Matthew, Mark and John. On the 8th day after his birth, Jesus is circumcised according to Jewish tradition. Six weeks after his birth Jesus is presented in the temple for dedication by the old prophet, Simeon, according to Jewish tradition. When Jesus was 12 years old, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem for the annual Passover feast, according to Jewish tradition. What Luke gives us is a touching story about parents who care, a church that listens, and a boy that is growing in his faith. While I am not suggesting we are holy families raising a little Jesus, I do believe we can learn something from this story about the boy, Jesus, and his parents that might help us as children and parents and as a church. Come let us look a little closer at this boyhood story of Jesus.

It is a Story about Parents Who Care

According to Jewish law all Jewish males had to attend a Jerusalem Passover at least once in their lifetime. Women were not required to attend at all. Our story begins with the words "*Every year His parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover.*" They went **every** year.

This was a three day walk of about 25 miles a day from Nazareth. The roads were infested with robbers so people traveled in caravans of a 100 or more for reasons of safety and security.

When it came to religious devotion Joseph and Mary were maximalists, not minimalists. They did not see how little they could get by with and then do as little as possible. They maximized their opportunities to pass on the faith to their children. No wonder Jesus grew up teaching people to turn the other cheek and go the second mile. He had learned from his mother and father how to live in the fullness of the faith, to go all the way. Maybe there is a lesson there, as well, for us in our own parenting process.

According to the Barna Research Group, 9 out of 10 parents believe they are primarily responsible for the spiritual development of their children. The problem is that most have no plan of action and few spend time interacting with their youngsters about religious matters. 81% of mothers and 78% of fathers say they eventually want to send their children to Sunday school. But a much smaller percentage actually get around to doing it on a regular basis.

But mark this truth. What you don't teach them someone else will and you may not like the lessons. If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn. If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight. If he lives with pity, he learns to feel sorry for himself. But if a child lives with acceptance, he learns to love. If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate. If a child lives with faith, he learns to believe. You have to practice the faith when you don't want to in order to have it when you need it. *"When he was 12 years old they went up to the feast according to custom."* It was a regular thing they did because they practiced their religion to the max.

On the way home, Jesus gets lost. Parenting is a little like bungee jumping; you don't know what will happen until you reach the end of your rope. It was one of those "he thought-she thought" family misunderstandings. You have been there. Men walked on the outside of the caravan for safety purposes. Women walked in the middle. Children played back and forth, as children do, so nobody really noticed that Jesus was not with them until an entire day had passed. It is just one of those things. They went a whole day without realizing he was left behind.

We can only imagine the emotions Joseph and Mary experienced. Panic! Is he all right? What if he were kidnapped? Maybe he was hurt and we didn't know. Panic turns to anger. Why did he do this to us? Wait till I get my hands on him; I'll teach him a thing or two. Anger gives way to guilt. Where did we go wrong? What are people going to think of us? All of you who have lost children, even for a little while, know the gamut of these feelings Mary and Joseph must have felt on this particular day.

There is a lesson in the lostness for us. If you are going to lose your teens during the cave years when you seldom see them and their only communication is a grunt, then do your best to lose them in a safe place like church. I will always be grateful for the youth groups, Sunday school teachers, and special friends, who provided a place for our boys to run to when staying at home was too difficult to bear.

It is a Story About a Church that Listened

"After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers."

When it comes to ministry with children and youth, what happens after the meeting is just as important as what takes place during the meeting. The Rabbis could have said the Passover is over, I have been here seven days, and I am going home. Instead they stayed to listen to a young boy and his questions of faith.

One thing you can do is stop and acknowledge the children among us. Say hello. Learn their names. Ask about school, sports and special interests. It could make all the difference.

A new pastor visited an elementary Sunday school class and the teacher announced, "This morning we are studying Joshua." "That's wonderful" said the pastor. "Who tore down the walls of Jericho?" Johnny responded shyly, "Pastor, I didn't do it." "Come on now," insisted the pastor, "who tore down the walls of Jericho?" The teacher replied, "Pastor, Johnny's a good boy, if he says he didn't tear down the walls of Jericho, I believe he didn't do it." The pastor left dismayed. He took his case to the Sunday School Superintendent who said, "I've never had a problem with Johnny before, but I will speak to his parents." Completely flustered the pastor approached the subject at the Church Council. A white-haired gentleman on the council spoke up and said, "Well, Pastor, I move we take the money from the general fund and pay for the walls and leave it at that." Just in case you do not remember, Joshua fought the battle of Jericho when the walls came tumbling down!

Church is a place to accept, not a place to accuse. Church is a place to be loved, not a place to be left alone. Church is a place to learn, not a place to be ridiculed.

Sometimes more is happening than meets the eye. Author, speaker, sociology professor, Tony Compolo, says: I decided to look up my church membership records while doing some research for my denomination. I had joined a declining Philadelphia congregation when I was nine years old along with two other kids. Dick White was one of them. He went on to be a missionary. Bert Newman was the other. He is a professor of theology in an African seminary. I searched through the records of that long since abandoned church and found this note in the year end report. "It has not been a good year for our church. We have lost 27 members, 3 joined and they were only children." We must never underestimate the power of God in the life of a child.

It is the Story About a Boy Who Grew in His Faith

"Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you. Why were you searching for me, he asked? Didn't you know I had to be about my Father's business?"

Sam Southard states every child needs two fathers. One with feet of clay and one who is here to stay. When you outgrow the restrictive boundaries of earthly parents, you need a heavenly Parent to show you the way.

The Father's business is to seek and save the lost. Could his parents' concern for their lost son be a spark that causes Jesus' deep interest in lost and found? In Luke's gospel he tells the stories:

- 1) God is like a good shepherd who goes in search of the one lost sheep. For there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who do not need to repent.
- 2) God is like a woman who having lost a precious coin calls in her neighbors on a search-and-find mission, sweeps the house until that which is lost is found and then throws a great party.
- 3) God is like a prodigal father, who waits for his wandering child to come home. When he returns he kills the fatted calf and calls for a celebration, for this son of mine was lost and is found.
- 4) The lost matter to God and they need to matter to us.

His Father's business is to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey everything, I have commanded you. *"He went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and people."*

Faith is more than saying yes to certain foundational questions, as important as that may be. Faith is more than accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, as important as that may be. Faith is more than supporting your church with your prayers, presence, gifts and service, as important as that may be. Faith is a lifetime of growing in wisdom and favor with God and people. It is the constant discernment of God's will and the courage to follow it. We are in the disciple-making business.

So let me leave you with a New Year's resolution. Determine today to "Grow in wisdom and favor with God and people" throughout the New Year. You will be a better person if you do.

Amen.