

Rev. Matthew Versemann
Trinity Lutheran Church
Decatur, Illinois
2nd Sunday @ Christmas
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“Lost And Found”

God’s PEACE is ALWAYS YOURS in Jesus.

Hear the Word of God from Luke 2,

“Every year His parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When He was 12 years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while His parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking He was in their company, they traveled for a day. Then they began looking for Him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find Him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for Him. 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 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.’

‘Why were you searching for Me?’ (Jesus) asked. ‘Didn’t you know that I had to be in My Father’s house?’ But they did not understand what He was saying.

Then He went down to Nazareth with them, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured up all these things in her heart, and Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST,

In today’s sin-crazed world of child abductions, and America’s Most Wanted; many parents have experienced – at one time or another – that momentary panic of losing your child, or thinking you lost them. Elizabeth and I will never forget losing Anna at Myrtle Beach, SC – with an ocean in front of us, strangers around us, and hotels behind us – only to find out that Anna had walked back to our hotel to go down the froggy-slide in the kiddie pool, while Elizabeth and I were panicking.

Now can you imagine how Mary and Joseph were panic-stricken when they not only lost their 12 year old child, Jesus; but THEY lost “*The Savior of the World.*” You can almost imagine them filling out the police report. Okay, who’s the missing person? The Son of God. Let me get this right: you lost the Son of God? Yes, that’s correct, officer, we lost the Son of God. How do you lose the Son of God. I don’t know officer, but somehow we managed to do it. So can you help us or not? As the story goes, the worried parents hurried back to Jerusalem and searched the by-ways and allies, calling out His name, and asking people for help. For 2 frantic days they looked, no doubt ‘fearing the worst’. But on the third day, they found Jesus safe and sound in the temple courts learning God’s Word, and teaching it to the teachers.

So the first thing that Mary does after finding Jesus in the temple is she ‘chews Him out’. **‘How could you do this to us? Your father and I have been looking all over for you.’** It’s a typical, panicked-parents’ reaction. Yet, even though Jesus is being admonished for doing nothing wrong; nevertheless, Jesus is still gentle and respectful with His mother. **‘Why did you look all over for me? Didn’t you know that I had to be doing the will of My Father, and that I had to be in My father’s house?’**

Notice, Jesus was obedient to His heavenly Father first, which is critical – so that WE could be counted as ‘obedient’ to God in Jesus’ obedience. The Bible says in Acts 5:29, **‘We must obey God rather than men.’** Although parents are God’s representatives and caretakers, God remains the final authority. Parents, you need to know that in confirmation class - when I teach the 4th command: ‘Honor your Father and your Mother’ - I teach the confirmands there is only **one time** that they have God’s permission to not obey their parents. And parents, if you don’t like this, you’re just gonna have to sue me. But the one time that even God gives permission to kids to disobey their parents, is if the parents are insisting that their child do something that is a ‘sin’ against God. In other words, when a parent gets between a child and their Savior Jesus, or between a child and God’s Word, then it is God – and not the parent – that must be obeyed. ***Now let me be clear to the kids, even when your parents sin, and they will sin, you are still to honor and obey them. It is only if they tell you to sin, that you have permission to disobey them, as God’s Word says in Acts 5: ‘we must obey God rather than men.’***

When parents don’t bring their child to Baptism or the hearing of God’s Word – to church and Sunday School – then it’s the child who must bring his or her parents, or they would literally have God’s permission to come to church, even without their parents’ permission. To put it another way: *“Children, don’t let your parents sleep in on Sunday mornings and keep you from worshiping.* Sorry parents, but it’s finally God’s Word that must prevail, when a parent gets between a child and Jesus. **Pg. 2**

However, children, just like Jesus did with His mother and father; your parents and other authorities, are due honor and respect, even when they make mistakes and sin. Although Jesus was right to stay at the temple, and do the will of His heavenly Father, He still honors his parents. He respectfully reminds them that His ultimate Father is God, and that the will of His heavenly Father, super-ceded the will of His earthly parents.

For a brief moment of motherly panic, Mary forgot Who Jesus' was – God in the Flesh, sent to save us - and when she forgot that, she looked for Jesus in all the wrong places. And if that can happen that easily to the mother of our Lord, it can happen to us also. When we panic, when our life is in disarray, when our children are sick, when our marriage is on the rocks, when our job is in jeopardy, or when we can't meet our bills, like Mary and Joseph we forget Who this Jesus REALLY is, and Who our Father REALLY is. And so, the last person we often times go to to find answers is our heavenly father; and the last place we often go to for help, is where Jesus can be found. Which is where? God's house. But that's precisely the place you will find your Savior, when He's missing in your life. Like Mary and Joseph, we often look for 'saviors' other than the One our Heavenly Father gave us – Emmanuel: God With Us - Who will work all things together for good to those who love Him, and Who alone rules over all things for the sake of His church.

We forget that Mary's little baby boy, Mary's 40-day old infant in Simeon's arms, and Mary's 12-year old adolescent teaching in the temple, is none other than the Lord of all Creation, the all-knowing and all-powerful Savior of the world. This Jesus, our Jesus, is THE God, Who can create the whole universe with just the power of His word, heals the sick, walks on water, shuts the mouths of demons, calms storms, opens graves, and raises the dead with just a word. Yet, we frantically search all the wrong places, for all the wrong saviors: in our heads, our hearts our feelings, our money, stuff and pleasures, when in all honesty the only Jesus there is, the only Jesus we need, is found here: in God's house, in His Word, and supper; doing the will of His father: forgiving sins, raising the dead, and restoring lives.

The fact that Jesus is lost to Mary and Joseph, or is lost in our lives, is not due to Jesus' getting lost or losing us; it's due to Mary, Joseph, and each of us taking our eyes off of Jesus, and losing track of Him. But he's still in the exact GPS location where God said He would be: in God's house, God's Word and the Lord's Supper. Like Mary and Joseph, we need to be reminded that the church is Jesus' temple, the place where His glory dwells. Jesus is right here, under our noses, even if we think we lost Him, and He's still doing the will of His Father to rescue and save us. Pg 3

Jesus will often appear to us like a 12-year old kid, sitting among PhD's. Surely, Mary's baby boy can't solve 'my problems', and so we blow Him off, and turn to anyone and everything to solve our problems, except Jesus. But don't be fooled by appearances. Out of the mouth of this 12-year old boy came words that utterly amazed, and dumb-founded the experts. So don't YOU be fooled by Jesus' humble appearances either: the plainness of God's Word, the simplicity of Baptism, or the ordinariness of the Lord's Supper. These are where you will find your Savior, Who is missing in your life, and the answers you need in your life. There's no need to search far and wide for Jesus. He's right here, where's He always been, doing what He's always done: getting in the way of anyone and everything that would rob you of your salvation, and providing grace and mercy to help you in your time of need.

Luke 2 tells us that after Mary, Joseph, and Jesus returned to Nazareth, Jesus was 'continually obedient to His parents.' And Matthew adds, "He always did what was pleasing to His Father." This is actually comforting. You see, Jesus was the perfect child of His parents, not only because it was the right thing to do, but also in order to cover all of our imperfections with His righteousness. Jesus didn't do everything right, so that He could rub our sins in, He did it so that He could rub our sins out. And now that Jesus was always pleasing to His earthly parents, and to His heavenly Father, You and I are reckoned 'good' in Jesus' 'goodness'. It's sort of like having an big brother who never did anything wrong, who then takes the blame for all the bad things His little brothers and sisters did; but then gives us all the credit for the good things He did: where we got life wrong Jesus got life right for us

For three days Mary felt the sword that Simeon said would pierce her soul. For 3 very painful days Mary felt the loss of her Son, while He was doing His Father's business in His Father's house. And even though she probably didn't understand it then, no doubt Mary remembered this episode - where she lost her **12-year** old Son- 21 years later, when she stood at the foot of her Son's cross, and lost her son again, this time to death and the grave. But just as Mary found her **12-year** old son, Jesus, alive and well on the 3rd day, outside the temple when he was 12 years old; she also found her Son alive and well again, risen from the dead on the 3rd day, outside the grave. And once again, Jesus was doing His Father's will: forgiving our sins, raising the dead, and giving us new life.

In closing, just as Jesus was unfairly scolded by his mother in the temple when He was twelve, for a sin He had never done. He was innocent. He was simply doing His Father's Will – all part of God's perfect plan to save us. So also, on the cross, Jesus was unfairly punished by His father, for sins that were not His own. But this too was the Father's will: that His sinless Son should become your sin, so that: **“being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross,”** in payment to God for the debt that we owed. And in return, you are reckoned as ‘perfectly obedient’ in Jesus’ ‘obedience’, and ‘perfectly righteous’ in Jesus’ ‘righteousness’ before God, which is then your access into the Father's family, the Father's home, and the Father's inheritance. That folks is a game-changer, a life-changer, and an eternity-changer. Go figure that kind of love and grace that God and Jesus have for you.

You may have thought you lost Jesus too, but you haven't lost Him at all. We're the ones who went AWOL. He's never been missing. He still is, where He's always been: faithful for you under the law, dead for you on the cross, risen for you from the grave, present in His Father's house to give you righteousness, forgiveness, life, and salvation. And what His obedience means is that we - as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, teenagers and kids, pastors and people – should stop looking for Jesus, or answers to life's questions, in all the wrong places. If you're looking for the Jesus you lost, He's right here, in His temple, dwelling with you graciously in God's house, speaking to you relevantly in His Word, still welding you to Himself in Baptism, and still feeding you with Himself in the Lord's Supper, to give you what you would otherwise not know, or too soon forget, that your eternal life, and the answers to life's greatest needs, rests not in our own obedience and faithfulness to God, it rests in Jesus' perfect obedience and faithfulness to God for you. Amen.