

LOSING JESUS

Dr. L. James (Jim) Bankston

December 27, 2009

10:30 a.m.

(First Sunday after Christmas)



ST. PAUL'S

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Lectionary Texts:

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Psalm 148; Colossians 3:12-17; and Luke 2:41-52

Luke 2:41-52

⁴¹Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴²And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. ⁴³When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. ⁴⁴Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him.

⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."

⁴⁹He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

⁵⁰But they did not understand what he said to them. ⁵¹Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵²And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

My wife and I have a number of crèches, or manger scenes, from various places that we enjoy putting out at Christmas. We have found through the years that our grandchildren have enjoyed playing with the manger people. I think it is a good thing that they really enjoy it, and it helps them connect with the story. However, a few years back one of our grandchildren, who will remain nameless, lost the baby Jesus from one of our manger scenes. We looked everywhere and finally found it and the manger scene was complete again.

In the gospel reading for today, it is Jesus' parents who lose Jesus. He's not a baby, but he is only 12 years old. It is a familiar story. It is the only story we have of

Jesus between infancy and adulthood. Who knows what other stories there might be? Like our manger scene, our story today has a happy ending.

Jesus' parents retrace their steps and find Jesus. He's not really lost. He's doing what he should be doing. The text indicates that this very pious Jewish family went from Nazareth to Jerusalem every year for the Passover Celebration. It perhaps was a usual occurrence. Perhaps this year is remembered because it was unusual in that they lost Jesus. We could speculate as to why that happened, but Luke does not tell us, so why it happened is not the focus of the story. They thought he was with other family or friends from Nazareth or they just forgot. Who knows?

Every parent knows the panic of losing a child, even if it is only temporarily. A moment out of your sight in some settings can be terrifying. We've all followed the saga of David Goldman for years now as he sought to get his child back from step family and authorities in Brazil. Finally, the story has a happy ending. David Goldman and son Shawn are together in New Jersey. There is great joy to get a child back.

Here's why I think the story of Jesus' parents losing him is told in our gospel record. It reveals something about the person of Jesus. So many human emotions are involved – lost, found, panic, joy, negligence, diligence – all in the context of a life of faith. The parents are trying to be faithful as they know how. And Jesus is acting like a 12-year-old. It is largely because of this story that we have Confirmation classes for our young people when they are in the sixth grade, about age 12.

Like most stories in the Gospel, this is about the humanity and the divinity of Jesus, all at the same time. It is both of those realities that we should remember. Jesus, and all of life really, is a mixture of the human and the divine. There he is, a 12-year-old child in a typical Jewish family of the time, doing what they understand to be the requirement of their faith, when a very human if unfortunate thing happens. On the one hand, Jesus is a 12-year-old child separated from his parents, like so many other family scenarios, some less serious, some more so. On the other hand, there is Jesus in the temple, talking with the elders about profound matters and faith. What a wonderful reminder this is for all of us. Jesus is very human and very

divine at the same time. Life as you and I experience it is also a mixture of the mundane and the glorious. A typical family experience can reveal the sacred in the midst of life. So it did for Jesus and his family, so it does for all of us.

Today we baptized a child. Russell and Johanna and their family have done all the things families do to get here today. Get up, get dressed, make sure family members are here, dress their daughter in an appropriate way for the occasion and hope she doesn't cry or worse during the ceremony. All mundane concerns, very real. But in and through every baptism, there is something more. In the midst of the mundane, a little water on the head by someone like me, there is something sacred. Life is a gift. Charlotte Alexandra is a gift. All of you are precious gifts. God loves you all. In the midst of the mundane and sometimes the tragic, the sacred finds us.

Bill Kerley and Sherry Beeman gave me a Christmas present this year that I have instantly connected with. It is a plaque with Latin words on it based on one of the favorite phrases of Psychologist Carl Jung. Here's my best attempt at the Latin, then I'll tell you what it means. "Vocatus, atque non vocatus Deus aderit." That is to say, "Bidden or not bidden, God is present." Invited or acknowledged or not, God is present at all times in all circumstances.

On this the last Sunday in the year, we've read a story about Jesus being lost. He is not really lost, just doing what is his calling to do. Bidden or not bidden, God is present.