

Has Anyone Seen Jesus? Where Did He Go?
The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
Rev. Jennifer Gingras
December 26, 2021

Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52

Has anyone seen Jesus?
I've seen all the other kids, but where is Jesus?
I can't find him anywhere.
Honey, is he with you?
Elizabeth, have you seen him?
John, have you and Jesus been out playing?
Where is that boy?

It can be so hard to keep track of him with all these little ones under foot. He's twelve now, and I expect him to be more responsible. Jesus thinks he's so grown up, but he's still a kid though. He should be where we can find him. We are easily more than a day away from Jerusalem now.

What do you mean he's not anywhere in the caravan? Have you checked with everyone? Oh, no. We must have left him back in the city. Oh, no. He could be anywhere by now. We have to go back to get him!

I imagine that's what it sounded like at the moment when Mary and Joseph realized that he wasn't with them on the caravan back to Nazareth. I bet that they were terrified. Even though their parenting style was probably more free-range than your average American family, and even though their kids were not quite as protected as they are in our culture, Jesus was still cherished and beloved.

How awful it must have been for them to realize they left their son in a large, busy city that was more than a day and a half walk away! There were no cell-phones to call ahead so that people can be looking for him, no amber alerts to let the community know he was gone, and no cars or trains that will help you move faster, just a borrowed camel or donkey... if you were lucky!

So you walk as fast as you can and you pray as much as you can. Dear God, let us find him safe and sound before anything bad happens.

By the time you and your spouse get to Jerusalem, it has been three days since you have last seen your son. Your emotions keep shifting back and forth from terror to rage to hope. There are so many people in the city right now! And with a bigger crowd, there are more than the average number of thieves and soldiers around. You know in the pit of your stomach that your son, your boy, would not be safe in either of their hands.

But, you're also angry at him for running off. You have said it more than once, if he's not dead yet, you might have to kill him yourself.

And then, just as quickly, you switch back to hope...

you hope that he has eaten...

that he has found somewhere safe to sleep...

that some kind stranger saw their own child in his wide brown eyes and took him in.

You remember that you have this in your favor... it's the Passover festival and people feel more generous at the holidays. Hopefully, someone is watching out for him.

You try to remember where you saw him last, and then, it all comes flooding back... you look at your spouse and you both say at the same time, *"The temple."* Your entire family had traveled there to make the necessary sacrifices for the festival. You smile when you remember how fascinated he was by the large, white cornerstone in the outside courtyard, and you have a hunch that's where he will be.

So, you run in that direction, as fast as your legs will take you. Nearly out of breath, you scramble up the steps and there he is...

This is how poet Stephanie Crumpton describes the scene:

"Determined not to be moved

Not from the moment, nor the matter at hand

He sits cross-legged

Beneath the old wrinkled toes of the "Old Men"

The Priests, Sadducees, and Big Brothers

The Pharisees, Uncles, and Fathers

His 12 years to their eons

Unaffected by the dissonance and distortions of age

His young voice (new, but full)

Wise (knowing, but seeking)

Moved with compassion, he asks the keepers of the Torah...

*"Where has the love gone?"
With no answer to offer his suckling young mind
The sound of their own silence is asphyxiating
They, too, have missed it
They know that law only lives where love abides...
Their greying eyes fill with tears
Jesus (12 years old)
Moved by their tenderness
Empowered by their trust
Finds home
In the House of the Fathers
At this, they sit astounded
Silenced
And weeping...
The silence is interrupted
Panicky footsteps (Mary & Joseph) trample sacred ground
They scold
There is danger in being young
Wise
Outspoken and
Unaccounted for*

Thank God, Jesus here you are! Boy, where have you been? Can't you just do what you're told and stay with the rest of the family? Don't you know that we have been worried sick? We haven't seen you for three days! Three days! You could have been lying somewhere dead in a ditch. We might never had been able to have found you. Why on earth didn't you stay with us when we left the city? Why have you treated us like this?

Oh, this boy, you think, thank God he is safe... this boy just looks up at you with the kind of wisdom and confidence that only a 12 year-old can dare to muster, and he says to you, *"Why were you all looking so hard? Where else would I be? Obviously I'm going to be in God's house."*

And you, his parent, at that moment, have no idea what he is talking about. There is nothing obvious about this. What kind of normal kid hides out at the temple and talks about the Torah with the scholars? No.

No. Obvious would have been him playing with his cousin John as we walked back home. Come on, now. We are three days behind. Let's get home.

You know how lucky you were that the adults who saw him in the temple protected him, even as he misbehaved. You go home. You don't forget that first act of rebellion, though. You wonder if it won't be his last.

The only reason that Jesus was able to go home safely with his parents was because the adults around him, strangers who did not know him, took care of him. They saw him as a child to be protected.

We have a responsibility to do that for the kids around us, too.

I've been increasingly concerned about the rising mental health needs of the young people in our community. We're hearing stories about threats of violence and actual violence playing itself out in their schools and homes. But I'm also encouraged to hear more of the young people that I know in my circle talk about the help they are getting from therapists, parents, coaches and this church's Junior and Senior PF. I think as we step into the future, we'll see that need continue to grow, and we need to be ready to help meet it.

Let's do right by all the kids we encounter. After all, we never know what they will grow up to teach us if we just give them the chance. Amen.