**12/29/24**

**Choosing to Stay Behind**

**Vicar Vince Piekarski**

**Luke 2:41-52 (NRSVUE)**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSVUE) (2) **Amen.**

Welcome back and Merry Christmas! Alright, now that we have probably opened all of our gifts, now that we have had special meals and probably plenty of baked goods, and now that we have spent time with our family and friends, let me remind you that it is still time to carry on the business of our faith and the church. As you can see our Advent Wreath and Christmas Tree are fully lit, and they will stay lit for another week as we remain in this Christmas Season. The Tree and Wreath are very much a reminder that the Light of Christ is in the World, and is here to stay as well! So, we continue to walk on in this Christmas Season, and we remember the feeling, and we remember it is a time that we continue to rejoice as well. After all, Christmas is not a one day and done event. It for sure is not a time where we discard our faith and belief like we do the very wrapping paper that happened to hide our gifts. We have indeed unwrapped the most significant gift of all, and our Savior has been born unto us! His presence and power have been unwrapped like our presents. We have unwrapped this very gift, and this gift of this child has now all of a sudden morphed into a 12-year-old boy on the cusp of becoming an adult. I know that may seem like a far stretch, and may seem rather awkward to some of you a few short days after Christmas. I know for certain that Pastor Leah absolutely despised the lectionary cycle for this. However, as I reminded her, this is the story that we got for a reason, and this is the story that we needed whether we realized it or not. Unfortunately, this time around she is not here for me to bounce ideas off of, and that is the rough part about the holidays as well, grief and loss are real, but we are thankful for the memories and what we had. Just like this story we manage to find a way to fight through and look towards the true purpose of Christmas and life as we look towards our Triune God.

What I also noticed I am trying not to do today is picture that all too familiar movie mother yelling “Kevin” as she has traveled with her family, and somehow had forgotten her son on more than one occasion. What I do know for certain is that there is a rather distinct difference from those very occurrences in the Home Alone movies. However, let me inform you that there actually is not as well. That is precisely why we are going to dive into things here today. So, bear with me as we unwrap this story and catch some very important points, and even see why this story of searching actually comes up every three years in our lectionary cycle.

Although, before I move on, I want to thank you for returning from your celebrations and family time to join us. It is always a blessing being able to gather and worship together. It is cool seeing all of you heed to that very call to gather and worship. I am also thankful to be able to dig into the message for and with you. For this indeed is the Living Word. We can explore how it pertains to our lives here and now, and moving forward as well. So, again, thank you for joining us here in the pews and on the conference call. It truly is a blessing being with all of you in this very time and space.

With my thank you delivered let me not dig right into our story here as you may expect. Let me first share a rather cool and funny story that I found while doing my research…

“A Rabbi and a Priest were sitting together on a train, and the Rabbi leans over and asks, “So, how high can you go in your organization?”

The Priest says, “If I am lucky, I guess I could become a Bishop.”

“But, could you get any higher than that?” asks the Rabbi.

“I suppose that if my works are seen in a very good light that I might be made an Archbishop,” said the Priest a bit cautiously.

“Is there any way that you might go higher than that?”

“Now, if all the Saints should smile, I guess I could be made a Cardinal,” said the Priest.

“Could you be anything higher than a Cardinal?” probed the Rabbi.

Hesitating just a little bit, the Priest said “I suppose that I could be elected Pope, but the odds there…”

So, the Rabbi interjects, “And could you be anything higher than that? What is there higher than the Pope?”

“What!!! I could be the Messiah himself?!!!”

The Rabbi leaned back, smiled, and said, “Well you know, one of our boys made it!” (10)

Talk about a bit of pride and prestige there for sure!

Alright, funny business aside, let’s dive in here. First off, we have a family following the rules and their customs by taking the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. As I highlighted earlier, the very reason that they pinpoint Jesus being 12 years of age is because that is the point in life where a child begins transitioning into an adult in the Jewish tradition. Jesus can now really take part in these festivities. He can begin studying the Torah, and He can even begin talking about it with the various people that are present at the Festival. So, now we get the turning point in the story. If you actually pay close attention to the very wording we get here, then you actually see and hear that Jesus chose to stay behind, and he actually was not forgotten like some tend to think. Let me say that again, he chose to stay behind, and by doing so he chose to continue on in the learning and discussions that were taking place.

Following the choice that He made to stay we still for some reason look at the all too popular viewpoint or narrative of him actually being forgotten by his parents. So, if we are to do so here, then we need to take in mind that traveling was of course quite a bit different back then. Families and friends actually traveled in large groups together to protect themselves from robbers and dangerous animals, among who knows what else could come at them along their journeys. So, with Jesus being 12 years of age it was very typical for his parents to think that He was just hanging out with another part of the family, you know His cousins and other children of His age in the caravan. Of course, it was an expectation that He would have joined the group when they headed back to Jerusalem, just like He had done several years’ past. His parents actually would not have thought anything different. Well, that is of course until His mother or father had to ask Him something. Then, they found that Jesus did not actually join the group on their way back home. This is of course is where we get that very Home Alone moment that I spoke of earlier, and Jesus’ mom is probably freaking out and yelling for Him. She probably feels guilty that she did not check sooner, or even realize from the very start of their journey that He was not present in the group. She takes this guilt and frustration on her own shoulders, and she does not realize that her son actually made a conscious decision to stay on in the temple like we do.

Now, you may have thought or said to yourself that Mary and Joseph were rather irresponsible parents here. Several of you out there that are parents yourself may have shaken your heads a time or two when you have heard this story in the past. You probably have even said to yourself that you would have never done that. Again, this is precisely where I draw you back to the fact that traveling was different back then. Much less the expectation for Jesus to be in a group He had been in every year was almost like clockwork. So, this was something rather unordinary, and something rather shocking. However, this is also precisely where we come to realize that these parents were trying to parent their child the all too typical way, and they had forgotten that they actually were raising the Messiah here.

So, as the story goes on, we come to hear that as any responsible set of parents would do, they go on back and begin searching for Jesus. Now, why in the world they would just not return to the temple is actually beyond my complete and total understanding. Why they would look high and low for Him for three days in other places than the very place they had went to is beyond me. Did they think he was out exploring and gallivanting? Did they think he was hanging out with other kids throughout the city enjoying life without adults around? Did they possibly think he was kidnapped? Were they searching in rough areas of town to see if they could spot him? We of course do not get those finite details. Regardless though, whatever was running through the very minds of a set of stressed out and concerned parents that had lost their child shows that they were not applying common sense, which we all of course know goes out the window when we begin to panic.

So, when they actually find Him in the temple, they are shocked. Again, hello here! They have forgotten that this is no ordinary child! They have forgotten that they were told who this child was to grow up and be! I guess it is pretty easy to get caught up in parenting, and be in denial that your child is actually growing up quicker than you would like to think or even imagine. I am also pretty sure Mary would have enjoyed keeping her baby boy to herself a little longer, but we all know that is not the case with the Christ child, or any child for a matter of fact. So, as a result, the last place you expect your 12-year-old child to be is the very place you went to in the first place, that of course being the temple.

I am sure the story could have even ended right there, as Jesus is found and He is safe. However, let me remind you that this is no ordinary story, and that this is no ordinary child they were searching for either! They find Jesus in the temple not just taking in information, but he is actually speaking up and challenging the adults and scholars who surrounded Him. We actually hear in verse 48 that his parents were astonished. However, instead of just sitting back and admiring their child continue on I actually picture Mary walking right up to Jesus and grabbing Him by the ear. I imagine Mary giving Him the business as any worried and concerned parent would have done. If any of you picture it any differently then we must really be putting these folks on some kind of pedestal. I imagine that Mary and Joseph were probably at wits’ ends, and despite being happy that Jesus was found and safe, they were going to let Him know the stress, concern, and fear that He had actually put them through.

Again, our story does not end there either! We get Jesus’ first words in the Gospel of Luke. In those very words we kind of get a rather snippy or smart response. Which, by the way, is one that we all should come to expect from any normal pre-teen. Except for the very fact that the second part of his response can be rather confusing to two concerned parents, the crowd in the temple, and even to us who are listening to the story as it unfolds. That of course is for a various number of reasons. First off being that we probably expect Jesus to say He could handle Himself, 12 years old or not. Next, maybe we expect Jesus to say that He was in the Temple where His parents had left him anyways. Then, of course maybe we just expect Jesus to snap back like any other child and throw some other smart remarks out there. However, this is precisely where we come to the very realization that Jesus knows exactly who He is, and whose He is. Jesus tells them that He is of course in His Father’s house. At this exact moment we all experience Jesus really transferring from being a child of his earthly parents to a child of his Heavenly Father. However, instead of Him providing further explanation, continuing to respond in a snippy and smart manner, or even trying to stress out and confuse Mary and Joseph any further, He just choses to be obedient and head back home to Nazareth with them. 12 years old or not, Messiah or not, he knew his earthly momma meant business, and he took his little behind on home with his parents.

So, as we come to the end of all of our calendar years we find ourselves like Mary and Joseph, and we also find ourselves like Jesus. We find ourselves searching inside and out. Whether that be for someone or something, whether that be for understanding and peace, whether that be for goals for our New Year’s Resolutions, or whether that be for health and happiness. We are and always will be searching. Let us remember that “We are invited to see the center of our lives as being about our Father’s business. This is a vastly different perspective than viewing religion as simply something that we do on Sunday. God nudges us to allow the understanding that we are people of God and servants of God to mold and to shape who we are and what we do.” (9) Let our searching be a continued hunger for the Word, for Christ in and through service, and into the heart of our fellow neighbors, as we conduct our Father’s business.

**Amen.**

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**Luke 2:41-52 (NRSVUE)**

Jesus grew up in a family that went to the Passover festival each year. It was in

this environment of faithful adherence to the law that Jesus grew into spiritual

maturity and an understanding of his identity and mission.

41 Now every year [Jesus’s] parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the

Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the

festival. 43 When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus

stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents were unaware of this. 44 Assuming

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. 45 When they did not find him,

they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. 46 After three days they found him

in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them

questions. 47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his

answers. 48 When his parents saw him they were astonished, and his mother

said to him, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have

been anxiously looking for you.” 49 He said to them, “Why were you searching for

me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” 50 But they did not

understand what he said to them. 51 Then he went down with them and came to

Nazareth and was obedient to them, and his mother treasured all these things in

her heart.

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years and in divine and human favor.