

Advent's Unusual Suspects: The Younger Years Part 2

Luke 2:41-52

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When it comes to the fears of children one of the greatest ones I remember is being forgotten. Now this never happened to me, but Nikki's Aunt Julie and Uncle Rudy have a great story they tell about this happening to their kids:

They had 6 kids, and when they were young were driving home to Kamloops from Vancouver in their station wagon. They had taken a couple of the kids' cousins on the trip as well so the car was absolutely packed.

In Merritt they pulled over for a quick bathroom break and some fuel. Uncle Rudy told all the kids they had 5 minutes to get any snacks they wanted and get back to the car. 5 minutes later, they piled back in, did a quick head count and it looked about right – certainly the noise level was right – and took off.

30 minutes later one of the kids piped up "Hey, where's Paul and Lorain?" Paul was nine and his little sister was four and a half.

Horrified, they realized they had left 2 kids at the service station. Immediately they did a U-turn and headed back to Merritt only to find the two kids, a couple kilometers out of town attempting to hitch-hike home. Now given this was a long time ago... but still you can imagine their consternation and relief.

Have you ever been lost, or lost a kid?

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Today is the final sermon in our Unusual Suspects series. And today we are looking in at an unusual event that happened to Jesus' parents and can happen to us as well. We are looking at the fact that good believers can inadvertently forget Jesus – we can leave Him behind. So if you have your Bibles please open them up to Luke chapter 2 and we will be picking up our story in verse 41.

As you turn there would you pray with me?

[Pray]

Now last week we said that we know virtually nothing about Jesus' childhood. There are only three stories recorded in Scripture from this time and two of them are about Jesus being an infant, so really the story we are looking at today is the only account of Jesus' childhood, and it's a story about Him being left behind.

Now the scarcity of information on Jesus' childhood has intrigued a lot of people, and actually this curiosity stretches right back to the beginning. As a result as early as the second century people started writing stories about Jesus as a child

to fill in this gap. Now these stories claim to be from oral tradition, but as you study them you realize that the Jesus presented in their accounts is a young god who is trying to figure out how to harness his power very similar to the TV show Heroes and nothing like the Jesus presented in Luke.

So here are a couple examples taken from the Infancy Gospel of Thomas which is a Gnostic document written in about 150 AD.

When Jesus was just 5 he and some other children were playing by a brook... making birds out of clay. And Jesus brought them to life.

And a certain Jew saw what Jesus did and went and told Joseph: Your child is at the brook, and he has fashioned twelve little birds out of clay, and has polluted the Sabbath day – for it was the Sabbath when this happened. Joseph went and found Jesus and said: Why are you doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? But Jesus clapped his hands together and said “Go!” to the sparrows and they took flight and went away chirping. And when the Jews saw it they were amazed, and went and told the chief priest what Jesus had done.¹

After that again [Jesus] went through the village, and a child ran and bumped into him. And Jesus was provoked and said to him: You shall not finish your course. And immediately the child fell down and died. When the people who were standing nearby saw what had happened they said: Where did this child come from, for every word he speaks comes to pass? And the parents of the dead child went to Joseph, and blamed him, saying... teach your child to bless and not curse, for he kills our children.²

And there are lots of stories like these but they were quickly recognized by the early church leaders as not being genuine and so were excluded from scripture.

In contrast Luke got his facts from Mary³ and tells a story that doesn't attempt to overplay Jesus' uniqueness – it isn't nearly as spectacular as the others. And instead it has profound implication for the way we live. So let's dig into this story beginning in verse 41:

[Read Luke 2:41-42]

The story picks up with Mary and Joseph heading up to Jerusalem for Passover. Now the Passover celebration was the most important celebration in the Jewish calendar and lasted 7 days. During this time Jerusalem would swell to many

¹ The Infancy Gospel of Thomas <http://gnosis.org/library/inftoma.htm> (Accessed December 31st, 2015) (Story 2-3)

² The Infancy Gospel of Thomas <http://gnosis.org/library/inftoma.htm> (Accessed December 31st, 2015) (Story 4)

³ See Luke 2:19 and 51

times its normal population and families from all over would celebrate together. And devout Jews would never miss out on this ritual. And so verse 41 tells us that every year Mary and Joseph traveled to Jerusalem – so they were devout in their religious practice.

And so this is likely Jesus' 12th time in the temple for Passover. And 12 is a significant year for Jewish boys because they are just on the cusp of manhood. They aren't really a child anymore, but they aren't yet a man. It would be this next year that they would all go through Bar Mitzvah and be recognized as men responsible for their own actions.

And it's Jesus' age that sets up the problem that is about to ensue. Let's continue with verse 43:

[Read Luke 2:43-44a]

Mary and Joseph lost Jesus, they lost the Son of God! And they didn't even notice for 12 hours!⁴

Now at first we might think, my goodness, what terrible parents! 30 minutes is pretty bad, but who could travel a whole day without realizing there were missing their oldest kid! And especially God's kid!

But before we are too hard on them we need to understand how intercity travel happened in first century Israel. Remember there are no minivans or station wagons in the first century – everyone was walking. And since bandits were a real threat people traveled in caravans for safety. And tradition states that because women and children were generally slower travelers than men they would head out together first, and then the men would come later and catch up at the agreed meeting point where they would spend the night.

Now however bad an idea you might think that is, it gives some insight into how this possible happened. Mary would have been thinking "well Jesus is almost a man, so He is probably with His dad and the other men." And Joseph would have been thinking the same thing – Jesus must be with Mary and the other kids. And so it isn't until they all get together in the evening that they realize Jesus is missing. And by then it is too late to do anything about it for that day. You couldn't travel at night.

Now imagine the terror? A few months back I was mowing the lawn and left the gate open and Jaxon decided to run out and hide in the neighbours' yard. He was only lost about 3 minutes, but Nikki was frantic.

⁴ Outline for remainder of sermon adapted from Pastor David Elvery "Leaving Jesus Behind"
<http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/leaving-jesus-behind-david-elvery-sermon-on-jesus-life-85539.asp?Page=4> (Accessed December 31, 2015)

And so imagine Mary and Joseph, running back to Jerusalem the next day. Mary would have been hysterical and wondering what happened to her kid! And I can picture Joseph going through scenarios of how he was going to explain this to Celestial Child Services. And both of them wondering “How did this happen? How did we manage to leave Jesus behind?”

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So how did it happen? Think about what Mary and Joseph had been doing. Nothing but good things. They had been at the temple. They had been worshipping. They had been obeying the law. They were religious people doing religious, God-honouring things, but in the process they had grown distracted. They had put their priority – in this case getting home – in front of Jesus’ priority.

Does this ever happen to you? Isn’t it easy to get caught up doing good things and miss what God is up to? Or let me ask it like this: Have you ever found yourself setting out to do something, and asking for God’s blessing? “Lord, we are buying a new house, help us find the right one.” Or “Lord, we are building a new church, bless this endeavor we pray.”

Do you ever feel it is easier to ask God to go along with what we are planning than to figure out what His plans are and go along with them? When we do this we inadvertently leave Jesus behind.

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So what is God up to? What is He doing that we are supposed to partner with? What is God’s will for our lives and the life of our church in 2016? These are questions every Christian and every church has to face as we make our plans for the future. The reality is there are lots of good things to do, but only God’s priorities are important.

Now whenever we start talking about God’s will usually a cloud of despair settles over us and we think, it’s impossible to know God’s mind – how can we know what His will for us, the best we can do is guess, right? But this notion comes from a mistaken idea about God’s will.

Here’s the mistake: Many people think God’s will is like the bull’s eye on a target. Now that might be hard enough, but we also think this target is shrouded by clouds of mystery so we can only guess at what God wants and so the likelihood of actually hitting it is like finding a needle in a haystack.

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When you think of God’s will like this you are prone to do one of two things. Probably the most likely action is to do nothing at all. To avoid making any plans for the future and just keep bumbling along because what’s the point! All we are going to do is miss what God wants anyway. And there are lots of Christians and churches that end up doing this.

Or second, if you are a little less defeatist you might decide just to do something, anything, after all God can’t turn a stationary ship right? And so you

give yourself to good busywork. And there are many Christians and churches that do this as well. But both these options end up leaving Jesus behind.

If you've found yourself here and been frustrated by the idea of finding God's will I have good news for you. God's will isn't like this.

In fact God's will is incredibly easy to find – the Scriptures are absolutely packed full of what God's will for our lives is – it is obeying it that is difficult.

So just for starters Jesus said:

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20)

So God's will is to increase His glory and expand His kingdom in Prince George, in Canada and to the ends of the earth and He expects us to do the work of going and making disciples to that end. Friends, if you want to know what God's will is for your life or for this church – that's it right there. There isn't any mystery about it. The only question is will we do what God wills, or will we find some other good things to busy ourselves with in order to avoid it.

Our job then isn't to try to figure out what God's will is – we know it – our job is to determine what it looks like in our lives and act it out, and it is the job of the Deacons here at Fort George to determine what this looks like for our church and then to set us running in that direction. And the way we set out obeying this is by stating it clearly – God's will is that we go and make disciples, so what can we do that will make this happen? And then do that.

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Here's another one. Hebrews says:

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
(Hebrews 10:23-25)

So God's will is that we persevere to the end by intentionally putting ourselves in places where we are able to stimulate each other in our faith. This is God's will for your life and for our church. Again there is no mystery about this, the only question is are you interested in obeying, or are you too busy?

So I want to encourage you here – this isn't guilt, this is encouragement. Our next semester of Care Groups is about to start up. They will be beginning the third week in January. We are going to be studying the book of James together.

I'm going to be preaching through it, and then in our groups we are going to be working to apply the text to our lives.

And the book of James is all about working out our salvation – and this is God's will for our lives. James says:

What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?... faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (James 2:14-17)

So God's will for your life and for our church is that we put our beliefs to work. Again this is painfully straight forward; the difficulty is not finding out God's will, it is doing it. And that's why we need each other.

So I encourage you to consider whether God is calling you to put yourself in a setting where you can spur yourself and your brothers and sisters on towards love and good deeds. And if He is – and the Bible says He is – then look for the Blue sign up sheet in the foyer and sign your spouse up, and sign yourself up, and make 2016 the year you quit pretending you don't know God's will and quit making excuses for why God's will doesn't apply to you, and start doing it. I don't think I can say that any stronger.

Friends, the fact is its easy for all of us to get carried away doing all sorts of good things and find out later that actually we've left Jesus behind because our priority was doing our will instead of His,

And this is what had happened to Mary and Joseph. They had been busy doing great things and were moving on to the next thing, when by grace they realized they weren't part of what Jesus was doing.

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And then Mary and Joseph snap to and they start looking for Jesus. So look at verse 44.

[Read Luke 2:44b-48]

So notice here where Mary and Joseph start looking for Jesus. The first place is among those who are doing what they are doing – their relatives and friends. Now this is a natural thing to do when you lose a kid. But this is also what we tend to do when we lose Jesus. We say "I'm a good person who loves Jesus, so Jesus must be right here somewhere." And so we stay where we are, and keep doing what we are doing and just hope Jesus will turn up. But as many people have said, the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different result. The fact is if you want to find Jesus you need to look in the places He hangs out. So turn again to the Scripture to find out what God is up to. Elsewhere James says:

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. (James 1:27)

Again pretty easy to understand right? It's the doing that is difficult. And so Mary and Joseph head off to the last place they saw Jesus – the temple in Jerusalem.

Now today many people argue that you don't have to go to church to be a Christian, and to a point they are right. There is no rule in the Bible that you need to go and sit on pews for an hour and a half every week in order to encounter God. But there are lots of references to the importance of meeting together with other believers in order to worship and spur each other on.

And we saw this in the One Another series we went through in the fall. There are over 50 commands in the New Testament that call us to live out our faith with each other. Again God's will is crystal clear, if you want to have a vibrant and real faith then you need to find every way possible to meet together with other people who love Jesus – Christianity is a team sport.

And so in case you missed it I'll say it again: If you haven't made it a practice to surround yourself with Christians who know you and are able to speak into your life and spur you on then change your practice. Join a Care Group and find what you were missing and find Jesus.

After 3 days Mary and Joseph finally end up in the temple and find Jesus. As you can imagine at this point they would have been exasperated and relieved, and probably a bit angry.

And the text gives us their response. Now Joseph is a classic man and so he adds his regular contribution to the conversation – nothing at all. But Mary can't help herself. "Why did you do this to us Jesus? We've been looking everywhere!" And here, since Luke gets his story from her I suspect she may have edited out a few of the other things she said – I know the conversation would have been a bit longer if it occurred in my house.

But the irony here is that if this was any other kid it would be warranted, but this is Jesus! And Jesus hadn't wandered off. He hadn't left. It had been Mary and Joseph who got caught up in their plans and left Him behind. He was exactly where they left Him. And isn't this always the way it is with us as well. When Jesus feels distant it is us who have moved away not Him. And He is always there waiting for us when we turn around and come back. Right?

So where are you in relation to Jesus right now? Is He close? Do you feel Him? Does He lead you? Do you know His will for your life, and are you doing it?

If not, could it be that you've been pursuing your own plans instead of His? Could it be that you've inadvertently left Jesus behind?

If yes, then get Him back. Or rather, go back to Him. He's still where He was the last time you were with Him. And the amazing thing about Jesus is if we will repent and go back He will always receive us.

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Verse 49 is where we find the first recorded words that Jesus spoke. He says:

[Read Luke 2:49]

Didn't you know? Isn't God's will obvious? What was the point of searching? Of course I'd be in My Father's House, or some translations read "I'd be about My Father's business."

This is the climax of the passage. It's here where Jesus draws a line in the sand and affiliates Himself not with His step-dad Joseph, but with His Heavenly Father. I belong to Him. I find out what He is doing and I partner with Him in His plans. Didn't you know that?

And this is the response we are all called to make as well. We are to say "I don't know about you world or friends or family, but I'm about my Father's business, and our church is about our Father's business too." And we live in a way that makes this obvious... Are you living in a way that makes your allegiance obvious?

Now as individuals there is a way that Jesus has asked us to show this commitment. And that is in the waters of baptism. It is in the water that we say "I've shifted my allegiance, I don't serve the world and the North American Dream, I don't even serve my family, my mom and dad, or my Christian tradition. I belong to my Father and I'm about His business."

Now let me be clear young people – this isn't permission to write your parents off as out of touch and unnecessary. Generally speaking if your parents are Christians then your decision to follow God is going to bring them joy. And we see this in the text as well. Look at verse 50.

[Read Luke 2:50-52]

So even though Jesus firmly establishes Himself as God's Son, and in spite of the fact that His earthly parents really were clueless, He still submits and returns to their home. And that's because honouring our parents is part of God's will. But ultimately when you start making decisions about who you will be as an adult and how you will live your life, it must be God's will that you seek rather than mom and dad's. And getting baptized is the biblical way we make this statement.

Now this is a serious step. Baptism is not something to be taken lightly. But I want to encourage you, if you are in your mid to late teens, and certainly if you are older than that – maybe you are 40 or 70 – and you haven't made it obvious where your allegiance lies then do what Jesus says. Make it clear that you are about your Heavenly Father's business. Especially if you are older disconnect yourself from your mom and dad's tradition, and join God's. The Scriptures are clear that when we believe we are to show it by getting baptized. When the people in Jerusalem wanted to follow God they asked Peter "what do we do?" And Peter responded:

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. (Acts 2:38)

So God's will is clear, after you repent be baptized. The question is not "what is God's will?" It is "have you obeyed?"

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Alright, that brings us to the end of the text. So I want to conclude by summing up what we have been today. This text warns that that good, religious, temple-going, church-attending people can inadvertently leave Jesus behind. That might sound surprising, but in fact it is likely, the reality is our default is to get caught up in the cares of the world and pursuing our own desires and in the process lose connection with God's will and God's priority. So all of us are constantly losing Jesus. And it's only by intentionally choosing to do God's will – which is clear – that we can get back to where He is.

And so congregation, let's make 2016 a year devoted to not leaving Jesus behind – doesn't that sound like a good plan? But how do we do it?

First, brothers and sisters, declare your allegiance to Jesus by getting baptized. If you haven't done this yet, or you were baptized as an infant and want to follow Jesus' command and pledge your allegiance for yourself, then come and talk with me and we will set something up. Nothing is more important than doing what Jesus wants.

And second, make it a practice to talk about God's will for your life with your family. Talk about this on the way home today. Ask yourselves, "How can we do God's will this year?" We know what it is, how can we do it?

And finally deacons, your job is to lead us towards this as a church. God's will is clear; we just need a plan for acting it out. So lead to that end.

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Finally brothers and sisters, where are you at in relation to Jesus? Is He directing your steps and guiding you deeper into the Father's will, or have you been caught up in your own will and wandered off? Have you lost Jesus? Or perhaps have you never found Him in the first place? If no, quickly find Him today. Elevate Him to the throne of your life and bring your priorities in line with His. It is only as we constantly do this that we can avoid leaving Jesus behind.