



St Catherine's North Vancouver: March 19, 2017

Luke 2:41-52

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. 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. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When 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." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

We find God in the rhythms and in the structure and in the expectations of domestic life. And our God can and does call us to move beyond these very things to follow Jesus.

The little vignette we just heard from the 2nd chapter of Luke's Gospel is the one and only story we have in the canonical Gospels about Jesus as a boy. In it, during one of the devout little family's annual trips to Jerusalem for the Passover, Jesus wanders apart while his parents along with others make their way back home to Nazareth. Two days into the trip, Mary and Joseph discover that their son is not among the group. Anxious and afraid, they travel back to look for him and find him in the temple, listening to and asking questions of the teachers there.

Mary says to him, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.” And Jesus replies: “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be (about) my Father’s (business)?”

They, however, as Luke tells us, “did not understand what he said to them.”

After this, Jesus returns to Nazareth with his parents and goes back to being the obedient son he typically was as he “increased in wisdom and years, and in divine and human favour.”

What is this story about?

One of the things this story seems to suggest is that there is an interplay, one might even say a tension, between Jesus’ upbringing in a devout Jewish household with all its clearly defined rhythms and structure and expectations and Jesus’ growing awareness that he was called to a life in God that would take him beyond the normal parental and Jewish domestic expectations of the day.

And what’s interesting here is that neither of the two poles of this tension are depicted as negative or bad in Luke’s Gospel. Jesus’ solid Jewish background, his obedient relationship to his parents, Mary and Joseph, his keeping of the Jewish Holy Days with them: all are seen as nothing but good in this story—for these are the very things that bring him to Jerusalem in the first place, these are the very things that enable him to converse with teachers in the temple, these are the very things he returns to in order to finish growing up. And at the same time, Jesus’ moving beyond his parents’ expectations in ways that scare them a bit, that give them pause and cause them to wonder who this son of theirs really belongs to—this is seen as good too, and, I would say, within Luke’s Gospel, as inevitable.

And so it is with us—we live in a kind of tension between the goodness of the things that support and contain our lives, that provide our lives with a kind of domestic rhythm and structure, we live in a tension between these things and our call to live as a child of the Most High, an identity that at times can move us beyond those very things that nurture and give our lives structure.

Likewise, so it is in our churches—we live in a kind of tension between the predictable domestic rhythms of being church and the efforts to keep things humming, we live in a kind of tension between these things and finding ways to hear and respond to our call to live as a community that follows Jesus—follows in directions that are not always neat and tidy, and, yes, that can lead us into direct tension or even conflict with the impulse to keep things going along in an orderly way.

When I think back on parishes I have served in, working on having healthy and functioning committees and on their roles in making decisions, working on the norms for how we would treat each other—working on the rhythm of the year and all that we did—working on these things was essential to our health. But without making the room for God to speak to us in prayer and silence, in listening processes within groups and in the parish as a whole—without doing these we would never have discerned what it was to follow Jesus, what it was like to engage in the activity that all the committee structures, all the norms for behaviour, all the rhythm of the year was, in fact, supposed to point to and to serve.

And so I wonder: where in your life are you being invited to strengthen the structure and the rhythms of your life that nurture your sense of self at the most basic level? What norms, what relationships, what practices are you being called to undertake and settle into?

And right along with it I wonder, where in your life are you allowing space for the Spirit to speak to you, to call you to follow Jesus more deeply? To follow Jesus in ways that may disrupt the very things that nurture and support you? To follow Jesus in ways that lead you more deeply into who you are as a son or a daughter of the Most High?

Likewise, where is this parish being invited to continue to strengthen its day by day, week by week domestic life? Where is the parish being invited to strengthen the ways that it operates, the way that its people treat each other, the way it lives out the rhythms of its life?

And likewise, how is this parish continuing to make room for the movement of Spirit on the big questions and issues ahead? Where is the parish listening to its people, to the Scriptures that are meant to sustain it and to the community in which it lives? Where is the parish actively discerning what God's call is next in following the path of Jesus?

Today, of course, we have transferred the Feast of St. Joseph to this Sunday as a way to mark and celebrate his life. He, you might have noticed, is strangely silent in our Gospel for today, making space, as Luke loves to do, for Mary to do all the talking. However, in this passage as well as in the passages from the Gospel of Matthew about Joseph, we find that the story of Joseph is the story of a person whose role was to nurture and protect his family within the context of their day to day domestic life. But this is not all his story is about. For his story is also the story of a person who is asked over and over again to expand his role and his approach to make room for the bigger story in which he found himself and the bigger God he yearned to serve.

We find God in the rhythms and in the structure and in the expectations of domestic life. And our God can and does call us to move beyond these very things to follow Jesus.

Today you are asked to be Joseph. Today I am asked to be Joseph. Today we as a parish are asked to be Joseph.