

“Where is Jesus?”
I Samuel 2:18-21, 26
Luke 2:41-52
December 27, 2015
Fort Hill Presbyterian Church

This sermon is presented as Mary, the mother of Jesus, reflecting on the event of Jesus staying at the temple after the festival of Passover when he was 12 years old. Mary is seated in a rocking chair and humming the tune to “Silent Night.”

Hmmm....that certainly was a long time ago...but I’ve been dreaming about another time in Jesus’ life, a time I will never forget. In fact it was one of the days I most feared. Joseph and I had always gone to Jerusalem for the Passover. We lived close enough to make the journey with our neighbors and friends. So every year we went. Jesus loved the journeys. He was always visiting with others, playing games with the boys and girls and always laughing. He brought us such joy.

But it was the year that Jesus was 12 when it happened. The festival was over and we packed our belongings and set out on the caravan home with the others—heading back to Nazareth. It was not unusual for the children to stay together when we caravanned, but after a day neither Joseph nor I had seen Jesus. When we both realized this we began asking our relatives and friends if they had seen Jesus. No one had seen him since Jerusalem so we began the journey back to the Holy City.

All the way there we wondered where he was. Was he okay? Who was he with? Did someone take him? Was he alive? Why hadn’t we kept up with him better? Were we bad parents? What kind of parent would not know where their child was? If anything happened to him, Joseph and I surely would never get over it. We would be racked with guilt. It was a terribly scary time for us, especially since no one knew where Jesus was.

We, of course, feared the worse and hoped for the best. When we made it to Jerusalem we searched everywhere, in the market, along the streets, at the inn, in the court, everywhere. By the fourth day we feared he was dead. We went to the Temple to pray and lo and behold, there he was. Jesus was sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. People all around were amazed at his understanding. He was answering them. We were astonished. I remember walking over to him. “Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have come close to having heart attacks we have been so frantic searching for you.”

Then he looked at me and said, “*Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?*” We didn’t understand what he was saying. That day it was like Jesus grew up, he seemed to be living into those promises that Joseph and I heard from the angels. Do you know what I’m talking about? That the angel Gabriel told me he would be called the “Son of God.”¹ Why would Jesus say he was in his Father’s house if he was not the Son of God? Hearing those words and pondering

on them, I think it was the first time I realized my little boy was truly destined to be God's Son. And that angel, the one that visited Joseph, that angel said Jesus would be "Emmanuel" which means "God with us."ⁱⁱ It is true. I know this to be true.

Like any parent we had dreams for our son, but God had plans for Jesus—that was his calling as Son of God and Emmanuel. These were things far beyond our understanding. Jesus came home with us to Nazareth and he was obedient. He continued to grow into a wise young fellow. It became more and more obvious to us that God blessed him and people adored him too.

I understand that now in your day, people are still asking "Where is Jesus?" "Where is God?" Joseph and I tried our best to raise Jesus to follow the commandments with the first being "you shall have no other gods before me."ⁱⁱⁱ That's what happened that day when Jesus stayed in the temple. We, his parents, did not stand in his way. He followed his heart and honored his Father in heaven. In doing so he honored his father and mother for he did what we taught him to do. He stood first with God and so he is Emmanuel, God with us. In the temple that day God revealed this beloved relationship between Father and Son for the world.

So I ask you: Where is Jesus today in your life? Do you find him in your daily prayers as well as acts of kindness? Do you follow Jesus in your vocation, knowing that your primary calling is as his disciple? If you are a parent, where is Jesus in your parenting? Are you open to being like Hannah with Samuel and turning your child over to what God is calling him or her to do? If you are a young person of 12 or in your teens, where is Jesus in your life? Are you listening to the almighty God or to some idol claiming to be the Almighty when you think about your life in the future? If you haven't asked yourself these questions, I want you to think about them.

(Move to pulpit.)

So where is Jesus today? Jesus is still about his Father's business. It is easy to see Jesus in the temple, in the worship life of the church today. But Jesus is also in the midst of the tragedies of life, bearing forth and giving love and grace, receiving the vile brokenness of hate, evil, and corruption that brings about death. Jesus, God with us, continues to administer justice and kindness in the world, and so we as the church proclaim hope.

Today followers of Jesus can understand these acts of justice and kindness as God's revelation because they bear the fruits of the Spirit. Wisdom accompanies love and grace in this revelation. Without wisdom, we do not come to understanding. Three years ago our nation was mourning the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School. There was chaos and killing, and Jesus was there receiving the sin and sickness of that troubled young man. Yes, Jesus was there bearing forth love and grace in the heroic efforts to sacrifice one's own life so that others might survive. Even afterwards, the witness of justice-seeking parents and communities called forth the memory of the children and teachers by name, and they still do today. And there were churches

witnessing of kindness by ringing bells for the 28 who died that day. All 28 were created in the image of God, loved by God.

Since Sandy Hook there have been more deaths, more lives of school children lost to violence, more, many more. Many more times to ask, "Where is Jesus?"

Where is Jesus? Where is God? When that question is asked in the midst of tragedy or fear, it makes me wonder what has been taught about Jesus to those who are asking. Without a spirit of wisdom, it is hard to see, to hear, to know where God is, but God is here. God reveals to us, opens our eyes and our hearts to see and know that God is with those who suffer, those who fear, those who are lost and confused. God does not leave us alone.

Where was Jesus that day? Jesus was in the temple, yes. We could say he was fulfilling his calling and following through on being a good Jew. We could say he was learning to be the teacher of teachers among the Law. We could say that Jesus was fulfilling the Scriptures and coming into his own as Savior of the world. We could say all of these things about Jesus being in his Father's house, but this phrase in our story is about so much more because Jesus was about his Father's business. His own answer gives a broader understanding of Where Jesus Is. His Father's house has no walls, but people. Just as the house of David was his family, his kingdom, so Jesus' Father's house was and is among his people created in the image of God.

The other wonderful thing about Jesus' answer to his parents was that he **"Must"** be doing this work of his Father because it was in his nature as the divine. Jesus revealed his divinity to his parents in the temple. This is also the place where he revealed his authority to the Jewish teachers and leaders. His command of the Law was a part of that revelation. His divinity is what astonished and amazed those in the temple and his parents. There was something about Jesus that day, and every day, which amazes people like us into believing. It is what Mary pondered in her heart and what we sense in ours every time God incarnate is made real in our daily living. It has to do with recognizing the Holy in our midst. God reveals so that humanity will recognize the divine. God desires to be recognized, worshipped, praised, adored. No revelation is more powerful than Jesus the Christ, and here his own parents experience this astonishment and are in awe. They do not understand it.

Even today as Jesus' disciples, we hope for the Holy moments, for we too must follow and share in our Father's business. When we hear someone ask "Where is Jesus?" we can answer that Jesus is standing in our midst, with us.

In another temple story, this time in Nazareth Jesus is standing in our midst, with us,

- bringing good news to us who are poor in spirit,
- proclaiming release to us who are captive to all kinds of idols,
- recovering sight to our eyes that are blind to truth,
- and setting us free who are oppressed by demons,
- and Jesus is with us so that we can proclaim the year that belongs to our Lord.

That is where Jesus is. In this story Jesus reveals his authority through Scripture and he rolled up the scroll and the Scripture became history when the people heard it.^{iv}

May it be so, even upon our hearing it today!

ⁱ Luke 1:26-38 (35)

ⁱⁱ Matthew 1:18-25 (23)

ⁱⁱⁱ Exodus 20:3

^{iv} Luke 4: 14-22