

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
305 EAST MAIN STREET
DURHAM, NC 27701
PHONE: (919) 682-5511



“Lost and Found”
A sermon by Matthew Floding

First Sunday after Christmas (Year C)
December 27, 2015
1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52

This Sunday is quietly nestled between two big days in the church’s calendar, Christmas and Epiphany.

This story of Jesus also sits quietly between two important observations made by Luke.

The first comes after his parents bring baby Jesus to the Temple for dedication, the second as youthful Jesus brings his parents to the Temple.

Jesus matured, growing up in both body and spirit, blessed by both God and people.

We have one story of Jesus’ childhood to treasure in our hearts, like Mary. This is it. What are we to make of it?

- It’s probably not what we expected to hear.

Mary and Joseph are clearly devoted and faithful believers. Verse 41 tells us that they traveled yearly—nearly a three-day walking journey—to celebrate the great salvation Festival of Passover.

Jesus is 12 years old, just one year shy of being reckoned as an adult which would happen at his bar mitzvah at 13.

Joseph and Mary are not irresponsible. As they journeyed, his parents assume that he is hanging out with cousins or friends from Nazareth in the group. No worries. Until it becomes clear that he's not with them, nor anywhere to be found. They've lost Jesus!

Mary and Joseph have several days ahead of them to be anxiously looking for Jesus.

Kids, can you recall a time when you broke free from your parents and ran into a parking lot? Maybe darted out between cars? My guess is your parents were upset, maybe angry with you. Here's what happened.

The most precious thing in the world to them was suddenly in danger—their anxiety spiked and when they finally were sure you were safe, the relief and all the other feelings caught up with them, and it came out as anger. If you were lucky, you just got the relief part.

Mary and Joseph had several days to be anxious. When they finally found Jesus, Mary said, **“Young man, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been half out of our minds looking for you!”**

Imagine losing Jesus!

It's actually pretty easy to do. We lose Jesus all the time.

Our lives place a lot of demands on us. I confess: It's complicated. Family, school, work and other commitments—things like busy holidays—leave Jesus nestled in the quiet places. Maybe even unnoticed.

Where do you look for Jesus when he seems to be missing?

Remember this: God loves you unconditionally, generously and forever! He won't lose us! Ever!

It's just a little embarrassing to have to admit as a follower of Jesus when we lose track of him.

Jesus' response to his mother is important. **“Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that I had to be here, dealing with the things of my Father?”**

This is how we find Jesus again. Be where Jesus has to be!

Let me name three places our story suggests.

1. Jesus can never be separated from the community of love called the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- a. Whenever we lose sight of Jesus, we're sure to find him on the trail that leads to God. Unlike Hansel and Gretel, we have trail markers that can't be snatched away by the birds of busy-ness, much-ness, many-ness—even waywardness.
 - i. **See the font**—Pastor Sarah usually announces our forgiveness there. Remember your baptism! You are claimed in the Spirit and water as Christ's forever.
 - ii. **See the table**—Pastor Marilyn breaks the bread and blesses the cup there. Jesus meets us there and feeds us his body and blood and nurtures us on gospel promise for our faith journey together.
 - iii. **You can't miss this pulpit!** It reminds us that God has provided a trustworthy witness in His word. The bible, the word—small “w”—bears witness to the Word—capital “W”—as in “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” The Spirit will be our teacher—personally, but especially when we hear it and read it together.

When the community of God gathers around the pulpit, font and table—Jesus promises to be with us—wherever 2 or 3 are gathered, Jesus keeps this promise. *You* can always find Jesus here. We can always find Jesus here.

2. **Advent has reminded us through the prophets, especially Moses, Isaiah and Micah where God’s heart is. Micah summarizes: “Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God.”** This is where we can find Jesus.

Jesus paints a portrait of this in the Beatitudes, but he personalizes it, puts a face on it in Matthew 25.

- a. I was hungry and you gave me food,
- b. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
- c. I was a stranger, an immigrant, and you welcomed me,
- d. I was naked and you gave me clothing,
- e. I was sick and you took care of me,
- f. I was in prison and you visited me.’

We should not be surprised then to hear Jesus say, **“Blessed of my Father, whenever you’ve cared in this way, you’ve cared for me.”**

The prophets, including Jesus, move us from just experiencing the *Community of God* to participating in the *Mission of God*. Jesus is there!

3. **We can join Mary, who held these things dearly, deep within herself.**

This is the third time in his gospel, *a trinity*, that Luke describes Mary pondering and treasuring the actions of God in her heart. Mary calls us by her example to be a reflective people.

We can be reflectors while we are in action. Some of us do our best reflecting while we’re doing. Mother Teresa captures this when she writes: “Seeking the face of God in everything, everyone, all the time... **This is what it means to be contemplative in the heart of the world.** Seeing and adoring the presence of Jesus, especially in the lowly appearance of bread, and in the distressing disguise of the poor.”

But we can also make time, time to come apart—as Mary evidently did—to reflect on the Law and the prophets, the character and teaching of Jesus—to know them and be transformed by them. This reflection formed Mary to be able to announce:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior—
he has scattered the proud in their conceit;
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
And has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things...

Jesus meets us in our reflection time—even in our silence.

Reflection with the resources that God gives our community **builds the community of God, which participates more passionately in the mission of God, which grows more deeply in love with God.**

In other words, we can get better at seeing Jesus and join him in each one of our worlds.

We can be hopeful. I think that's why this lone story of Jesus as a boy is bookended by: **Jesus matured, growing up in both body and spirit, blessed by both God and people.**

We can too!

*Matthew Floding is director of ministerial formation and field education at the Duke Divinity School. He is an editor of the recently released book, **Brimming with God: Reflecting Theologically on Cases in Ministry.** Matthew has served as pastor in Illinois, college chaplain in Iowa and director of formation for ministry at a seminary of the Reformed Church in America in Michigan. He also volunteers with a non-profit, **Friendship House Partners USA**, which works with persons with intellectual disabilities and their families to secure safe, affordable and community-oriented housing in partnership with divinity schools and seminaries. He is passionate about encouraging leadership development for ministry and vocational discernment.*

*Matthew is an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament in the Reformed Church in America. He has a B.A. from Bethel University, an M.A. from Wheaton College, an M.Div. from McCormick Theological Seminary and a D.Min. from Western Theological Seminary. He and his wife, **Marcia**, are parents to **Geoffrey, Kathryn, and Greta.***

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