

“Priorities”

Luke 2:41-52; Colossians 3:12-17

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When our oldest son, Austin, was little, he loved to play with our nativity set. The characters in the nativity – especially the Holy Family – had many adventures with Austin that were not recorded in the Bible.

Mary, Joseph and Jesus often took trips with Austin. He would load them up in his play school bus and off they’d go. One day I asked how the trip went. He reported that Mary and Jesus (perhaps Joseph was implicated, too) had to be put in “time out” because they didn’t stay in their seats.

Austin’s adventures with Holy Family raised a number of questions for me, among them: “What was it like ‘growing up Jesus?’”

We don’t know much from the Bible. We learn of Jesus’ birth. We read of his parents presenting him at the temple as an infant. The wise men visited Jesus, and some scholars believe it may have around the time Jesus was two years old when they actually visited. Beyond that, we know nothing else of Jesus’ childhood except what Luke tells us in today’s lesson.

Luke gives us a glimpse of the 12-year-old Jesus. The text tells us that Jesus and his family traveled to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover when he was 12. This was their annual tradition. They, along with many, many other Jewish families traveled to Jerusalem to remember God’s deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt centuries before.

As Jesus’ family journeys home, they realize that Jesus is missing. I can imagine Mary and Joseph doing what many parents end up doing: “I thought you had him. No, I thought you had him.” A teacher friend of mine told of a child left behind after a parent-teacher conference. The teacher called the parents at home

and asked how their daughter was. They said she was fine and was upstairs playing in her room. The teacher said: “Are you sure?” In that moment, the parents did the: “I thought you had her. I thought you had her.” The teacher then let the parents know their daughter was safely with her!

For Mary and Joseph the time after discovering Jesus was not with his cousins or the group of travelers with whom they had come and gone to Jerusalem was undoubtedly filled with sheer panic.

Every parent has experienced this. The horrible knot in the stomach when your little child disappears for even a moment in the grocery store. The horrible feeling every parent of a teenager has when the big kid doesn't show up all night and “forgets” to call.

Just as aside, let me share that some excuses from our teens are just lame! For example: “My phone died.” Give me a break! I've seen teens forget to eat, forget to bathe, forget to take the trash out, but seldom forget to charge their phones. And, guess what? There are always other people with phones! Kids, don't try this one on your parents!

Seriously, when a kid is missing you fear the worst. You waver between fearing they are dead and planning how you might kill them if they are alive and have scared you to death.

Mary and Joseph find Jesus after three days in the Temple. All in all, it's a really good place of find your missing kid. Still, Jesus has scared his parents.

I'm convinced that Luke did some editing out of some of Mary's comments upon finding Jesus. I cannot imagine any mother in her right mind after having a child missing for three days simply saying: “You have made us anxious!” I have a feeling even Mary had some more choice words for Jesus.

It's reassuring to all parents to realize that even Mary and Joseph did not understand their adolescent.

Jesus responds that the temple is where he belongs. Jesus is having an emerging sense of his identity and mission – something Mary and Joseph weren't quite ready for despite their earlier

encounters with angels telling them about their son. How much did Mary really know? We're just not sure.

Jesus knew that he had to do God's work. Although wise beyond his years, Jesus was apparently still growing in his understanding of what exactly this work would be. Yet, his priority in life was clear. He was to be about His Father's business.

Amy Pagliarella (pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Lake Forest, Illinois) writes in her sermon titled "Seeking a Son, Finding a Savior": "While it is anti-climatic that Jesus has to figure out his purpose in life, just like everyone else, it's part of being human. If God wanted a divine superhero, God would have dropped Jesus down from heaven as an adult, pre-programmed to do exactly what God needed. But that wasn't God's plan. God wanted Jesus to experience everything about being human, and so Jesus, like us, had to discern his call in life.

"And so God rarely communicates in a Mission Impossible Style message – a mysteriously delivered recording that announces, 'your purpose in life, should you choose to accept it ...' followed by a demand that we make a choice before our mission self-destructs. We too are called to be about our Father's interests." (Pagliarella)

And, what about us? What is our priority in life? What business will we be about? Whose business will we be about? What will our priorities be? What is the work God would have us do? What is our calling – individually? – as a church?

We may not always be clear on the specifics of our call. We are always in the process of discerning our callings – individually and as a church. But, I believe we can be clear on some things that constitute what it means to be about our Father's business – about our Father's interests.

Colossians 3:12-17, which was read earlier, helps us establish our priorities. I will read it again for you – this time from Eugene Peterson's *The Message*.

"So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility,

quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.

“Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ – the Message – have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives – words, actions, whatever – be done in the name of the Master Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.”

As we embark on a New Year, let us consider our priorities. What is our calling? Whose work will we be about in 2010?