

Dec. 26, 2021 - Message: "The Fear of Home"

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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you O God... For you are our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Is anyone here today tired? I know I am...

I wonder if part of the reason we are a little thin in the crowd today is people recovering from the activity of Christmas? Do you think?

Many of us have a tendency to pack a lot in this time of year, don't we? So many people are celebrating in so many ways, and we want to attend all the concerts and support all the programs. Or sometimes, we are exhausted because we have spent a lot of effort NOT doing all the stuff... and just trying to protect ourselves from being overwhelmed can be exhausting...

Especially in this strange time we've been in the past couple of years. There can be a lot of pressure. **We have good intentions** of how we spend our energy, but it doesn't always pan out for the best... especially not long term.

Actually, when we think about it, we need to pace ourselves anyway, right? Christmas just began... Christmastide is 12 days and it goes on until January 6, when we celebrate Epiphany, and the arrival of the Magi... Maybe we just need to slow our roll? Have we fully extracted what our hearts need from Christmas?

Regardless, here we are today, the day after Christmas, and in our scripture, Jesus is already a tween... It's a shock, isn't it? Yesterday a sweet baby, today what seems like a mouthy middle-schooler... Do we have any twelve-year olds here today? I know sometimes it seems like they do grow up overnight, but really...

One of the interesting things about the reading for today is how it points out, “Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.” As far as we can tell, many families didn’t make it a point to go every year. Some people put going to Jerusalem for Passover on their list of things to do ONCE in a lifetime... But it was part of the Mosaic law. Going every year was a sign that the family was very devoted to God.

But it makes sense then that if they did it EVERY year, they probably had a normal group they caravanned with... That was customary for trips like this. In that culture, families would split up... Men led in one group, women followed in another group. You can imagine all the older kids walking behind, and playing together and running back and forth between groups. After doing it every year, you can imagine a comfort setting in with both parents, that especially if they’re separated, even if they didn’t see Jesus for a while, they would both assume, “of course he’s here somewhere.”

Have any of you ever lost a child? Left someone or something important behind? For three days? We left our younger son, Dylan, home alone by accident when he was about three. We called and had a neighbor come and check on him while we were driving back home. He was probably alone for 20-25 minutes. Heartstopping. I cannot imagine three days.

So you can imagine the three days of anxiety mixed with relief when they find him, that gets that scolding revved up in Mary... Our translation today, saying, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."

Shame was a large part of the culture and society there and then, just as it can be here for us today... I bet there are a few of us who have had a similar talk with God about the pandemic or other hard issues the past couple of years... "Lord, what were you thinking? We have been worried sick!"

But let's look instead at Samuel and his mother in the Old Testament reading. Samuel hasn't been LOST at the temple. His mother had committed him there for service, so she knew what he was doing. She had even provided his special wardrobe for it. She would go and visit once a year to make sure he had a new robe that fit his growing body. And each time, as the boy grew in size and in his relationship with God, the priest, Eli would bless her for her commitment, and ask God to repay her by giving her more children.

Granted it was a different situation. Samuel's mother had prayed and prayed for years, unable to conceive. Praying so hard, in front of the priest, Eli, she was accused by him of being drunk at church. She had begged God for a son, desperate to have her barrenness taken away. She had promised God in her prayers that if he delivered her from that situation, she would give the child back in service to God. And when he was three years old, she did just that, returning him to serve in the Lord's

House, with the Priest, Eli. Then returning each year with the new robe she had made for him and his service, checking in on him and recommitting him to God. She had zero guilt and shame of her own. She had not lost her son. She HAD perhaps, lost herself... Giving up her OWN identity, in trust to God.

Mary, of course, on the other hand, had still been an unmarried maiden, probably not much older than Jesus in our scripture today, when that angel showed up to her and said (basically), “Don’t freak out! But you’re going to be a mom... and that human baby is also going to be God in human form, the savior of the world!” So no pressure...

I think about those three days searching as Mary and Joseph... What they both might have been praying, thinking about the angels that had appeared to them years earlier... That amazing task they had been given they had both agreed to, 12 years later, and now here they had lost the child.... Aggh! The

incredible sense of shame and guilt THEY must have had while they had been looking... But also I imagine, a sense of, “He MUST be okay,” right??? He is God’s promise... God wouldn’t just change God’s mind?

Funny the difference it can sometimes make when it seems like it starts out as OUR idea, and we ask for something to happen, as opposed to when it’s God’s idea that kind of lands in our lap. With eyes as big as saucers - as I imagine Mary and Josephs were with those angels - there’s a big gulp and an intake of breath.... “Wow, that’s a lot of responsibility, but OK God!”

And now here, years later as his earthly parents try to continue to execute that responsibility, the young man, Jesus, Son of God, speaks such words of clarity, “Why were you searching for me? Didn’t you know I must be in my Father’s house?”

The second question is the one we usually hear the most about. The original language is a little vague, so translating it to English is messy. It doesn't really say, "in my Father's house." You might read in other versions as, "about my Father's business," but the literal translation COULD be read as "I must be in **the** of my Father" - which points to the idea of being "about my Father's things." Which makes a lot of sense, doesn't it? That Jesus would always be about the will of the Father. Even if it made his earthly mother and father stress out!

It reminds me how, in another part of the New Testament, Mark 3, we read of how Mary worries about Jesus after his ministry takes off. She drags his brothers and sisters with her to check on him, because he's surrounded by people and can't even make time for meals... She gets a bad rap for that. I feel like we should remember she was charged with an incredible project before he was even born. She was committed to the end, doing her best to take care of the Son she had been given.

How about us? Why are we searching for him? Why have we been watching and waiting for Jesus expectantly these past weeks, with hope, peace, joy and love? What do we want from him as we week?

Are we simply executing our responsibility? This is the job we accepted, so here we are, doing it?

Do we seek him because we want him to just stop our current state of anxiety?

Or do we search for him... so we can be WITH him?

Do we search for him... so we can ALSO be in his Father's House—OUR Father's House—and about our Father's business?

What is driving us? What is our motivation?

Whose things are we most concerned about this Christmastide?

Is it the distractions of the world? All the stuff? Maybe things we've grabbed onto—like grief or worry—that we really need to give UP to God? **Are WE lost?**

Or are we ABOUT God's things? The things God cares about and wants to move forward? Are we putting our continued energy into what God is calling forth?

Let it be so. Let us allow ourselves to be Lost in God and with God... And be all about making God's business realized in this world. **AMEN and AMEN.**