

Luke 2:40-52

Those would have been three long days and three sleepless nights for Mary and Joseph. Jesus was nowhere to be found. Their imaginations would have been running wild. What could have happened to Him? Where do you find a twelve-year-old boy in a city full of people? They were in distress. Had there been Amber Alerts back in those days, one surely would have been issued.

When they found Him, sitting in the temple, Mary and Joseph would have had mixed emotions. Relief, but also shock. How could He be so calm sitting there? How could He have put them through such an ordeal? And why hadn't He been doing something to look for them? They were to the point of exhaustion in their search for Him!

The three-day ordeal that Mary and Joseph went through is one that many people endure through their entire life. They're searching. They're seeking the answer to the meaning of life. They're looking for truth. They're trying desperately to find peace, to find salvation. They're wanting relief from the burden of their sin and guilt. Whether they know it or not, they're looking for Jesus. But they can't find Him, and they won't find Him, because like Mary and Joseph, they are looking in all the wrong places.

We may be thinking that Jesus was a little harsh in His answer when Mary and Joseph finally found Him. "*Why have you treated us so?*" they cried, "*We have been searching for you in great distress!*" "*(But) why,*" said Jesus, "*were you looking for Me? Did you not know that I must be in My Father's house?*"

He makes a good point; in fact, a great point. And one that we would be wise to consider. Jesus' words were directed at Mary and Joseph, but in truth, they are for all people. Had Mary and Joseph gone first to the temple, they would have found Jesus immediately. No long search. No distress. No panic. "He must be in God's House...we'll go there to find Him."

The same is true for us. Jesus speaks to Mary and Joseph in a way that tells us not only was He in His Father's house then, but always is He there for us. "*I must be in My Father's house...*" This is always where I must be found." But people search. People become distressed. People panic. Because they look everywhere except where Jesus wants to be found.

There is a television commercial which ends with only two words on the screen..."Receive Jesus." But how does a person do this? Had Mary and Joseph seen this commercial in their search, they would not have been helped at all. "Yes, we're trying to receive Jesus! We're trying to find Him. We're looking high and low for Him. But we are having no success."

Just telling someone to receive Jesus does not make it happen. If we want Jesus; if we want to be His Christians; if we want the peace, and comfort, and salvation that He gives; if we want to belong to Him, then we need to hear what Jesus says: "*I must be in My Father's house.*"

So then, the reverse is also true. If we do not want Jesus; if we can get along without Him, then we do not need to be in the Father's house. But we should realize, as Mary and Joseph teach us, that this will cause great distress.

I have heard faithful Christians say that when they have to miss church on Sunday, their whole week is thrown off kilter. It's unsettling. And they cannot wait for church the next Sunday so their life can get back on track.

You and I were created by God to live our lives in connection with Him. How distressed our first parents were when their sin cut them off from God! But how wonderful to hear God's promise to bring them back together with Him through the Savior who would be born!

What we see in Mary and Joseph--in their panic, and their desperate ordeal in the search for Jesus--is similar to what Adam and Eve endured. Mary and Joseph thought Jesus was lost, but in truth, they were. And so were our first parents in the Garden. But God found them. And just so, God found Mary and Joseph, for they didn't just stumble into the temple after three days. It was God who led them there; who led them and drew them to where Jesus was.

No one just happens to find Jesus. "*I came to seek and to save the lost,*" He says. It seems like such a simple thing--to come to God's house. But it's not. Even for Mary and Joseph, it was the last thing on their minds.

You are in the Father's house today, and you should know that this is no accident. You did not just stumble in here. God drew you because Jesus is here for you. Here in your Father's house, God gives us His gifts. He gives us Holy Baptism for the forgiveness of our sins. He gives us the Sacrament on the altar to nourish us with Christ's body and blood. He gives us His words of life to sustain us in our faith. He gives us music and singing through which His Gospel comes to us. He gives us the gift of family--fellow Christians in the faith--to encourage us and care for us.

You are never lost when you are in the Father's house. Your life may be a wreck. You may feel like your life has lost any meaning. Your sins may be bothering you. Your guilt may be overwhelming you. But all is not lost. You are not lost here in your Father's house. Jesus is here for you. When Mary and Joseph came to the Father's house, they were no longer lost. They were together with Jesus once more. And so with you. This is why God draws you to His house. He puts your life back in order. He gives real meaning to your life. He removes your guilt. He forgives your sin.

This is the first Sunday of the new year. It would be good for all of us to resolve--with God's help, His strength, and by His grace--to be faithful throughout the year in coming to our Father's house. Come to learn, come to grow, come to receive Jesus, for here He receives you. Your life, and mine, will be truly blessed. Our congregation will be strengthened. There is nothing better that we can do for ourselves and for each other.

Friends, your God loves you. He gave His Son, Jesus, to the cross to die for you. He forgives you. Each one of you is forgiven of all your sin. And He blesses you in this way...by drawing you to His house again and again so that you are never lost, but are always together with Jesus. Amen.