

Luke 2:41-52

“Packing Up and Going Home”

By, Rev. Mat Taylor

This morning's text is unusual. It is the only story of Jesus located between his birth and his baptism in the river Jordan by John. Mark and John don't bother to tell us anything about Jesus' life before his baptism. Matthew tells us of his birth, the visit of the magi and the escape to Egypt, then skips some 30 years of his life to pick the story up again with baptism and the beginning of his ministry.

The Gospels do give us hints however. We know that Jesus lived in Nazareth. We image that he continued in his father's trade as a carpenter. But even about this we are a little unsure. The Greek word is *techtone* which may be translated stonecutter. Five or six miles from Nazareth there was a little, bustling city called Sepharais. Could it be that Jesus and Joseph traveled to the city to work as stonecutters? We simple don't know.

The silence of Scripture has led to some rather wild speculations on the part of some. Some imagined that Jesus traveled extensively throughout the know world, visiting Egypt and the Far East. Others image that he may have even may have once been married and was now a widower. Such wild speculations are just that, wild speculations. It's best to pay little attention to theories that have no support or justification.

We have but one little story from the life of Jesus during this time. It's our story this morning from the Gospel of Luke. While no other Gospel writer shares with us this story, it is found in The Infancy Gospel of Thomas, a non-canonical early Christian writing that purports to tell the story of Jesus Childhood. It includes rather wild and silly tales of a boy Jesus who has trouble reigning in his super powers. It was excluded from the Bible for very good reasons. But, the author of this book was familiar with Luke's story and included it word for word. Let us now listen for God's Word....

--The lectionary text is now read--

When it comes to Christmas, most folks enjoy decorating for the season, decking the halls with garland and lights, hanging ornaments on the tree, making Christmas cheer. Around here in the church, it's easy to get a whole bunch of folks to come out and decorate the sanctuary for Christmas.

Packing it all back up is another matter, however. That's not something that any of us much enjoy. It seems people fall into to camps:

There are the procrastinators. They so loath the thought of packing it all back up that they choose to leave it out till February. This is especially tempting if one has an artificial tree. I've heard of some folks who just redecorate the same tree for every new holiday—there's the Mardi Gras tree, the Easter Tree, and the 4th of July Tree.

Then there are the folks who want to pack it all up the day after Christmas. My mother fell into this camp. And the older we got the more all pervasive this impulse became. By the time I was a teenager, I'd wake up the day after Christmas to find it all packed away and swept clean with hardly a trace of Christmas left anywhere.

It was almost as if she waited till midnight and December 26th to arrive to sweep it all away before the sun rose on a new day.

I remember as a kid wishing that Christmas lasted more than just one day. How surprised was I to discover that Christmas actually does last for more than a single day. According to the church calendar, it's actually a 12 day affair. Hence the song, the 12 Days of Christmas.

It seems that we actually celebrate Christmas during Advent, and once the big day has come and gone, we are ready to pack it all away for next year. We ought to call it an Advent tree and Advent lights and Advent Decorations.

Last night I noticed that none of my neighbors even bothered to turn on their Christmas lights, even though Christmas had just technically begun.

Strangely, our text this morning is set in Jerusalem just after the Passover celebration has come and gone. I image there were mammas all over the Holy City who were putting away their Passover trees and the Passover lights and the Passover decorations. The streets were being swept clean. The merry travelers were packing up and heading home. It was time to go back to business as usual.

In the midst of all this we find the boy Jesus. The Scriptures give us no hint as to the reason for him being left behind, but I image that it was accidental.

Young Jesus, just at the doorstep of manhood, would have no doubt been enamored with great Jerusalem. Can't you imagine him rushing through the streets absorbing the sights and sounds and smells of the great city? There are colorful banners, and street vendors selling food; there is music playing and people yelling and laughing. Throngs of people are packing up to leave.

There are heartbreaking scenes as well: orphaned children crying in the street; old men broken and tired begging on the side of the road. The blind the crippled and the lame. Young Jesus sees them as well, and no doubt his heart breaks for the pain that exists in this world.

Perhaps he realizes that Jerusalem is his destiny. Despite the fact that he will return to Nazareth to pick up his father's trade, perhaps he senses that he must go to Jerusalem. He must confront it, challenge it, save it.

It's now dusk. He's been walking the streets for hours. He runs back to the camp to join his family, but he's too late. They have already left.

Mary and Joseph were not being bad parents. It's not as if they had packed the family station wagon and forgot to wait on their son. They would not have been traveling as a little, single nuclear family. They would have been traveling as a village. The people of Nazareth who'd made the journey would travel together. Mary and Joseph would have assumed that their boy was with the other boys his age and that their mothers and fathers were watching him.

It was perhaps that first night that panic grew in their hearts when their boy did not show. They asked all their kin and their neighbors and when no one reporting having seen the boy, no doubt they were filled with terror and dread. In the morning they headed back toward Jerusalem, asking anyone along the way if they had seen their son.

Meanwhile Jesus, now alone, wandered back to the Temple. I doubt very seriously that he just walked in and sat right down among the teachers and scribes and told them a thing or two. He probably stood off for a while and listened to what was being said. He may have heard debates between Pharisees and Sadducees. At some point he just couldn't help himself, he spoke before he could hold back his tongue.

It would have been tempting for the learned men of Jerusalem to have no interest in the thoughts of a poor boy from the country. But Jesus must have said something that impressed the men. He asked them questions and shared with them his own thoughts.

Before long they were discussing and debating with him as if he were a grown man, full of wisdom and insight. They were amazed by him.

When Mary does finally find her son, there's no doubt a mixture of both deep and profound relief as well as a little anger. She probably first embraced him and then she scolds him: Why have you treated us like this!

Mary's response reminds me of my own mother's response once when I went missing. I was a much younger child. Probably 5 years old. We were in Atlanta and the new mall had just opened. It was billed to be one of the biggest malls in the country at the time. Sure enough, I disappeared in that mall. My mother and father panicked. They looked all over for me; my mother was filled with dread, terrified that someone had walked off with her young son.

Finally, they found me. I was as cool as a cucumber, totally unfazed by my predicament. I was calmly sitting on a bench, swinging my little legs, just waiting patiently for

someone to find me. My mother scooped me up and hugged me, then she spanked me, then she hugged me, then she spanked me.

Such is a mother's love.

When Mary's scolds Jesus with those words "why have you treated us like this," the accusation is a more serious one than it might first appear. The fifth commandment states that we must honor our mother and father. Mary is saying to her son, "Why have you disrespected and dishonored us like this?"

Young Jesus' response may seem a bit flippant: There's no "I'm sorry" or "I apologize." It's a typical teenage response, a petulant recrimination: "You guys should have known I'd be here in my father's house."

It sounds a bit sassy, but Luke goes on to tell us that he returned to Nazareth with his parents and was obedient to them in all things, and Luke adds that his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

It's a tender story. It's a simple story. It's a very human story. In it we find both the humanity of Jesus and the divine authority of Jesus.

Even as a boy, people are amazed by his words. They are amazed by his wisdom and by his authority.

My fear is that we do not listen closely enough to his words to be amazed.
We don't allow ourselves to be challenged by his authority.
We ignore the difficult demands of faith in Christ.

We domesticate Jesus; cast him as one of us.
We assume that our opinions are his and that his opinions are ours.
We assume that he'd vote the way we vote.
That he'd think the way we think.
That he'd live like we live.

But no, my friends. Jesus amazed everyone in his day. He confronted them. He challenged them. He confused them.

We have not heard Jesus, if we are not amazed and terrified by what we hear.

As we clean up after Christmas, as we pack up the decorations, travel back home, and resume ordinary life, let us not fail to give ear to the wisdom and authority of Christ, And be amazed by what we hear:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹"Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ²²"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you,

and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. ²⁴“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. ²⁵“Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. “Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. ²⁶“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

²⁷“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you. ³²“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

(Luke 6:20-36 NRSV)

AMEN