

Sermon Reading: Luke 2:41-52

Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. ⁴² When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. ⁴³ After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴ Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

⁴⁹ "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁵¹ Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

Sermon Theme: See What We Can Learn from this Twelve Year Old

Well, we did it. Whether it was a good year or bad year, we've almost made it to the end of 2018. And with the start of 2019, a New Year means new you. You've probably heard different advertisements and suggestions for how to accomplish this new you. And, as you know, it's time again for those resolutions to improve in some shape or form. "I'm going to exercise more...eat healthier...read one new book a month...get more sleep...budget better...etc." If making a New Year's resolution is your thing, I'm not looking to deter you. But the odds don't seem to be in your favor. Some statistics show that 80% of resolutions fail by the second week of February and only 8-9% truly succeed. In fact, some studies show that making a resolution means you are more likely to fail. Sometimes, God's Word and being with God's Word is treated like another New Year's resolution. But then, like so many resolutions, once the novelty has worn off, when life gets busier, when more things start calling for your attention, it's back to the old ways again. It may seem strange to hear it, but there's a lot we can learn from a twelve year old.

We don't know much of anything about Jesus' early life until the start of his public ministry. And as interesting as Jesus' autobiography might be, that's not the purpose of the Bible. But God in his perfect wisdom decided that out of all the experiences of Jesus growing up, this is the one we need. And so we learn that every year Jesus' parents go to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. This may or may not have been Jesus' first

time going to Jerusalem to the temple. In the end it's not that important. But this specific time would have been a little extra special because of Jesus' stage in life. Being twelve years old meant Jesus was ready to make his vow to be a son of God's Law that he would know, live by, and keep God's Law. Think of Jesus making the Old Testament equivalent of confirmation vows today. In preparation for this Jesus would have memorized large sections of the Old Testament—some records show that Jewish children may have been expected to memorize all of the first five books of the Old Testament by this age. So with the Festival this was a big time in the life 12 year old Jesus.

For this Festival of the Passover Jews from all around Israel—families, friends, and neighbors—would come to Jerusalem to celebrate how God freed his people Israel from the land of slavery in Egypt. This was a big event that was looked forward to every year. One can imagine Joseph getting together with his carpenter buddies to get some new ideas. Mary maybe went shopping to pick up some things that might not have been available back in their little town Nazareth. If they were still alive, Mary might have caught up with her relative Elizabeth, mother of the miracle child John, and may be swapped stories. Think of celebrating the Fourth of July only on much grander and larger scale.

But now the festivities were done and it was time to go home. Mary probably thought Jesus was with Joseph wanting to be with the older men now that he was getting more grown up. Joseph probably thought Jesus was with his mother wanting to be with the other kids his age. But after a full day's travel, at the end of the day, they begin looking for Jesus among the relatives and friends. But Jesus is nowhere to be found. Think of how much your heart races when you can't find your wallet. I can't imagine what was going through Mary and Joseph's minds. Maybe they had just become used to Jesus always being there and started taking some things for granted. Maybe it was with all of the excitement of the festival coupled with thoughts of all the work they needed to do when they got home that they weren't thinking straight. Whatever the excuse might be, they lost their son. They lost Jesus.

But before we start shaking our heads at Mary and Joseph and their irresponsibility, think of how easily we can lose Jesus. What I mean by this is that we lose track of and misunderstand the place for God's Word in our lives. Especially during the holiday season we can get caught up with so many different things and instead of feeling the peace of Christmas we are more wore out and tired. We say we need to keep Christ in Christmas, but did you? Or was he the afterthought amidst the presents, the programs, the parties, the yearly traditions? Was Jesus—his Word—lost among the family and friends and constantly added to list of “need-to-do this after the holidays”? After not

finding Jesus, Mary and Joseph rightfully are devastated. Do you feel the same when you are without the Word for a day...two days...a week?

Mary and Joseph turn around and head back to Jerusalem ending up in the temple courts. And who do they see? There's Jesus sitting among the teachers listening to them and asking questions. He is actively engaged with their conversations to the point where people are quite shocked and amazed at his understanding—how he was able to think through different questions piecing things together—and his answers. Think about how absurd this is. Jesus is true Man and true God. The Old Testament is about and centered on him and his work coming to this earth. The Passover feast they just celebrated pointed ahead to this 12 year old who would come to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and frees us from slavery to death and the devil. And here he is the student listening, learning, and probably discussing those large sections of the Old Testament he dutifully memorized.

It's no surprise that when his parents saw him they were astonished. Mary reacts as a mother would react...mama bear comes out. **“Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father I have been anxiously searching for you.”** We could probably add, “We were worried sick! What do you think you were doing?”

But what Mary failed to see at that time was what should have been so obvious, as we see from Jesus' response: **“Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?”** But Mary and Joseph didn't understand what he was saying to them. They were struggling with the same problem they had in the first place and the problem we have as well: we fail to understand God's Word for us in our lives.

Like Mary and Joseph, we tend to make things more difficult for ourselves than they need to be. With our misunderstanding of God's Word, instead of trusting God and his promises, we look in other places to give us comfort and peace. One might look to family to fill a missing hole in life, or they point back to their accomplishments or to the things they can still do to give them reassurance. You might hold onto certain traditions because they give some stability and comfort. But none of it is lasting or as fulfilling.

When seeing the problems and struggles we are currently facing with our church—finances, attendance, attitudes—how often have you thought or said, “I need to trust in God and his Word more.” But then neglect to go to God's Word for that comfort. Or for help and guidance, instead of starting with being and sharing God's Word, it's almost treated as an afterthought. But then we seem to expect there's some silver bullet answer to all of the issues even when we know there isn't.

But it's not just about being in worship more regularly; it's the overall attitude and actions with God's Word. Instead of taking seriously the need to grow in the Word, the

mindset can seem to be, “Jesus love me this I know and that’s all I need to know.” Instead of seeing the responsibility of being connected to the Word starts at home and with you personally, too easily it’s pushed off onto the church. One might say that God’s Word is important to them and their lives, but then by their actions, attitudes, and scheduling where so much else takes precedence over it, they seem to be saying something much different. How serious are you about your relationship with your Father in heaven—being in God’s Word? Or, do you treat that time of listening to his voice in the Word as more of an obligation that you are supposed to and expected to do but your heart is far from it? It can happen here in worship, Bible Study, or in your home.

We could rework the question Jesus asked Mary and Joseph so he is asking you and me, “Why are you searching for me? Why are you making your life more difficult and ignoring my promises? Have you forgotten that as you want your children to grow in maturity and knowledge I want you to continue to grow in your knowledge of my Word? Have you forgotten that I give a peace that goes beyond human understanding? Have you forgotten my promise that I am always with you and will never forsake you? Did you forget that my grace is sufficient for you and that when you are weak I am strong? Don’t you know I’m right where I should be?”

There’s so much for us to learn from this 12 year old. He who is the Word became flesh desires to grow in God’s Word so there is no other place he would rather be. Already Jesus understands that there is a higher mission for him with his special and unique connection to his Father in heaven. But notice how Jesus responds. Jesus doesn’t have an outburst like one might expect from prepubescent child. He doesn’t belittle his parents even when he was right. In a very respectful way he explains he needs to be in his Father’s house. Jesus perfectly submits himself to his Father’s will being in God’s house. And then we see him being perfectly submissive to his earthly parents as well. Luke writes in vv.51-52: **Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.** ⁵² **And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.**

The Word became flesh to submit to God’s will and to follow his Law. He shows us what it means to fear, love, and trust in God above all things, to not despise preaching and God’s Word but to regard it as holy, gladly, hearing, and learning it. With his life he shows what it means to honor your father and mother—both his heavenly Father and Mary and Joseph. But he doesn’t do this to give you a blue-print to follow. We already have that with God’s Law that shows us what God expects and demands you do. No, Jesus shows you it’s already been done perfectly in your place for you. Already at 12 years old Jesus is actively working for your salvation and accomplishing it.

And then what does Jesus do? He forgives you. He doesn't beat you over the head for your easily distracted thoughts. He doesn't scold you and put you down. Instead, he is right where he is supposed to be—in God's Word. He doesn't take himself away from you because you weren't using it. He doesn't get fed up and eventually leave. No, he's still right where he needs to be—in God's Word for you. He speaks to you God's promises reassuring you that his Word is powerful and effective and always carries out its purpose. He assures you that it is useful teaching, rebuking, and training so that the man and woman of God are thoroughly equipped (2 Timothy 3:16). Jesus is right there in the Word with the bread and the wine so that you receive his body and blood given and poured out for you in the Lord's Supper where sin is forgiven and faith is strengthened.

Instead of making being in God's Word a New Year's resolution, may I suggest a different thought? Live each day in God's baptismal grace that your sins are killed and you are made alive with Christ. And in that peace of forgiveness that is yours, continue to grow and learn that Word seeking to gladly hear and learn it. See what you can learn from a 12 year old? Amen.