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*Mondovi: Our Savior's & Gilmanton United Methodist Churches  
12.29. 2024, First Sunday after Christmas Day, Rev. Hyuntae Kim, Ph.D.*

### *When You Lose Jesus, Luke 2:41-52*

*Let us pray: Father God, thank You for giving us Your Word. As today's message reveals Christ, we desire to meet Him anew. Though He is among us, there are times when He seems lost to our sight. Guide us through Your Word to find Him in You. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

When raising children, all sorts of things can happen. My wife has lost our older child once and our younger child twice. The incident with my older child is similar to the story of the young Jesus going missing, as he disappeared on his own. When we lived near Seoul, Korea, I would go to church early on Sunday mornings, and my wife would take the two children to church by subway. The older one was 8 years old, and the younger one was 6. One day, they were waiting for the subway, and when it arrived, my wife held the younger one's hand and got on. She assumed the older one followed her.

However, my older child was not there. The subway doors closed, and even though she looked in the other cars, she couldn't see him. The platform was disappearing from view, and she couldn't spot our child outside the window either. She was worried and got off at the next station to go back. When she saw him standing behind a pillar, she couldn't express how thankful and relieved she was. When she asked why he didn't get on, he said he was angry at her and pretended to get on, but then hid behind the pillar, knowing she would come back. I can't remember why he was angry. It was a truly shocking moment.

In today's story from Luke, the twelve-year-old Jesus also went missing and worried his parents. My older child hid to play a trick on my wife, but Jesus had something to show and tell future generations through this event. It teaches us that, like Mary and Joseph, there are times when we lose Jesus, and through the process of finding him again, our faith grows.

My wife found our older child in about 30 minutes, but Jesus' parents found him after three days. The journey from Jerusalem to Nazareth, after participating in the Passover, was about 80-90 miles. Since Passover was a significant festival, Jesus' family traveled with relatives and neighbors.

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Jesus likely had a bar mitzvah, that is, a coming-of-age ceremony, at the age of twelve. This assumption is based on the fact that he was discussing scripture with the rabbis in the Jerusalem temple, as only adults could engage in such discussions with scribes and teachers of the law. The women assumed that young Jesus was with a group of men or with children his own age. His father also believed Jesus was somewhere among the group, as he was a child who never caused worry, so his parents didn't think he was missing. It was only after traveling a day's journey, likely when they were about to have dinner, that they realized Jesus was not with them.

In our lives, we, too, may find ourselves in situations where we lose sight of Christ. Just as Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem "according to the custom" (v. 42), we may go about our faith journey following the rhythms of the Christian calendar. Yet, even amidst our spiritual routines, there are moments when it feels as though Jesus has gone missing from our lives. We may then find ourselves searching for him.

Like his parents, we may be so focused on our own paths that we don't realize Jesus has been absent from our lives. His parents traveled a whole day thinking he was with them, making the assumption that he was among their company. Are you also making the vague assumption that you are walking with Jesus? He is in your heart and spirit, but where is he on the journey of your life?

Jesus' parents first looked for him among their relatives and friends but realized he wasn't there. Relatives and friends represent your traditional ways of faith. God also told Abraham to leave his homeland and relatives. Christ is in your habitual faith life, but one day, you can no longer find him there.

This crisis is a blessing for us. Christ hiding is intended to lead us to meet him anew. If Christ is only where we always meet him, there is no progress in faith. So, we lose him to advance our faith and discover Christ in new areas.

Where do we meet this new Christ? Jesus' parents couldn't find him even after asking around, but they eventually found him in the Jerusalem temple. We need to return to where we lost him. Where was he in the temple? Christ was sitting among the rabbis, listening, asking, and answering questions. Those who heard him were amazed at his wisdom and answers, and so were his parents.

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Similarly, we need encounters with Christ that surprise us. This scripture promises that if we seek encounters with Christ, we will meet such a Jesus. How thankful we should be! We must be listeners like the rabbis. We must ask and answer questions with Jesus. Jesus might ask, *“Adam, where are you?” (Genesis 3:9)* or *“Who do you say I am?” (Matthew 16:15)*. Through such questions, we meet a new Christ and take a leap in faith.

When his mother saw Jesus, she said, *“Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you” (v. 48b)*. She referred to Joseph as “your father,” which was true but not entirely accurate, as Jesus knew. So, he replied, *“Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?” (v. 49)*. His parents didn't understand his words, but *“his mother treasured all these things in her heart” (v. 51b)*. Likewise, we cannot understand God's word with our flesh alone. We need the Holy Spirit's help. Even if we don't understand immediately, our spirit should treasure it in our hearts, for there will come a day of understanding.

We find Jesus in the “Father's house.” As Jesus says, *“Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?”* the “Father's house” means “the place or things belonging to the Father.” Jesus leads us into the Father's domain. In John 14:6, Jesus says, *“No one comes to the Father except through me.”* As we know Christ more, we are led deeper to the Father. If you desire to know and meet God the Father more, continue to seek Christ in the scriptures.

Though Jesus' parents didn't understand his words, Jesus returned to Nazareth and was obedient to them, living his daily life. When we read the word of God and don't understand, Jesus is still with us, helping us grow.

Before this event in verse 40, Jesus, born as a baby, *“grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.”* Initially, he is born in us like a baby, and through the church's care and the teachings of the scripture, our knowledge and experience of Jesus grow, and so does our faith. In today's passage, verse 52 says, *“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”* As we experience Jesus anew, he within us continues to grow. In that growth, we, like Jesus, become more pleasing to God and to others.

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Paul says in Ephesians 4:13, *“Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”* This means reaching the full measure of Christ's stature. When Christ in you reaches maturity, you will no longer have a Christ who only ministers to you but will become a Christ who testifies about Jesus and shares life with others.

In verse 40 and verse 52, the word "grew" is different in Greek. The first 'grow' simply means to grow or increase naturally, while the second implies progressing forward or advancing, often suggesting a purposeful development, much like a tree being pruned to grow better. When we meet Christ in the temple and hear the word, the Lord prunes our pride, boasting, and vain things. Meeting and listening to Rabbi Jesus Christ, his word prunes us. It removes anything hindering our growth, be it honor, power, money, or health. Whatever difficulties you face, go before God's word and the place of worship to find the Lord.

As we are pruned and grow, we will discover a new Jesus and see his greater glory. The Lord makes us grow in favor with God and people and works through us. May you go back to your Nazareth daily life with the Jesus you discovered today. Amen.

*Let us pray: Jesus, when we feel as though we have lost You, help us to understand the reason behind Your hiding. Guide us to return to that lost place and meet You in a new realm. Prune us through Your Word so that our faith may grow. May we grow into beautiful trees like Christmas trees, revealing You to the world. Through the name of Jesus Christ, the living Word. Amen.*