

Have You Found Jesus?

Luke 2:41-52

Every year when I put up my Christmas tree, I watch the movie “New in Town.” The movie stars Renee Zellweger as a career-driven executive from Miami named Lucy who gets sent to a small town in Minnesota in the middle of winter to re-structure a food manufacturing plant. Lucy is greeted in New Ulm by her assistant – a middle-aged Minnesotan mom named Blanche.

As they drive to Lucy’s home Blanche immediately pulls out a scrap book and starts showing a rather incredulous Lucy pictures of her dead cat, and their mailman named Merle, peppering Lucy with questions about her personal life. Then Blanche asks Lucy what she admits to be a personal question.

“Have you found Jesus?”

Lucy, taken aback by this question, quips back with a laugh, “Well...I didn’t know he was missing!”

Blanche doesn’t laugh.

“It was just a joke,” says Lucy.

Blanche still doesn’t laugh.

“Normally we don’t joke about Jesus around here.

But I can see how you’d think that was sort of funny.

Imagine Jesus gone missing.

Imagine.”

Well imagine no more. Mary and Joseph have lost Jesus.

Now, a lot of people make a big deal about this. Parents around the world read this passage and think to themselves, “I would NEVER leave a place without making quite sure my child was with me.”

But if the McCallisters can leave Kevin home alone in New York City, then it’s even more possible for Mary and Joseph to leave Jesus in Jerusalem. Because Jerusalem during Passover is a place of total chaos.

Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph went up to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover every year. They were good, faithful Jews in this sense. And they are not the only good, faithful Jews in Israel making this trip every year. At the time this story takes place, it’s estimated that the population of those living in Jerusalem was 80-100,000 people. During Passover, however, it’s estimated that those present in the city of Jerusalem to celebrate the festival numbered close to 3 million people. That’s a 3000% increase in people. That’s a lot of people.

Luke also tells us that Mary and Joseph and Jesus weren’t travelling on their own. They were with relatives and friends, a whole group of people. Mary has other children, younger than Jesus, that she’s herding along on the journey. It’s not unreasonable to think that Mary thought Jesus was with his cousins, under the watchful eye of Aunt Sarah. After all, he must have started out on the trip with them. Jesus was a good, obedient, oldest child. So Jesus wouldn’t just...stay behind.

But this is exactly what Jesus did. And only at the end of the day, when they’re setting up camp and settling in for the night, do Mary and Joseph realize that their twelve-year old son isn’t with them.

I think if we’re honest with ourselves, most of us could admit that this is something that might happen to us. We’re paying attention to a million different things, we’re thinking about where we’re going, we’re going over a conversation we just had and thinking we maybe could have said

something differently, we're trying to keep our coffee from spilling, and we walk out of the store, or church, or the beach, and we've left a kid behind.

But what I want to get into today isn't our commonality with Mary when it comes to losing a kid.

It's our commonality with Mary when it comes to losing *Jesus*.

I wonder, this morning, if someone asked us the question, "Have you found Jesus," how many of us could honestly answer by saying, "Yes."

Sure, we know about Jesus. We have asked Jesus into our hearts, we try to follow Jesus' teaching, we believe in Jesus. In that sense we have "found Jesus."

But what if I asked the question differently, asked it in the negative. What if I said, "Is Jesus missing from your life?"

I wonder if, for many of us, that would be a more challenging, and perhaps convicting question, to answer.

Do we find ourselves like Mary – caught up in the busy ordinariness of life,

getting from one place to another,

responding to the needs of people in our lives,

thinking about whatever is next on our to-do list,

finally flopping down on the couch at the end of the day,

seeking a restorative dopamine hit by scrolling through Instagram or playing a game on our phone while watching re-runs of our favourite show – only to realize, after a while, that Jesus is absent from our lives? That we feel spiritually dry? That our relationship with God has been

reduced to a few lines from a hurried morning devotional and an hour of worship on Sunday mornings?

Does Jesus feel...absent from our lives?

The Catholic priest and author Ronald Rolheiser writes in his book, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality*:

Today, a number of historical circumstances are blindly flowing together and accidentally conspiring to produce a climate within which it is difficult not just to think about God or to pray, but simply to have any interior depth whatsoever...

We, for every kind of reason, good and bad, are distracting ourselves into spiritual oblivion.

It is not that we have anything against God, depth, and spirit, we would like these, it is just that we are habitually too preoccupied to have any of these show up on our radar screens. We are more busy than bad, more distracted than nonspiritual, and more interested in the movie theater, the sports stadium and the shopping mall, and the fantasy life they produce in us than we are in church. Pathological busyness, distraction, and restlessness are major blocks today within our spiritual lives.

We're on the go, all day long. And then when we're not on the go, we're on our phones. A 2015 survey by Microsoft found that 77 percent of young adults answered "yes" when asked, 'When nothing is occupying my attention, the first thing I do is reach for my phone.' That number is surely higher today.

Our lives are full. Full of obligations, full of distractions, full of noise. Even when we have a minute of quiet in our day, we grab our phones to keep our minds from being still.

And yet stillness is often where Jesus shows up.

It's in silence and solitude where we can hear the voice of God speaking into our lives.

It's when we take the time to ponder, to reflect, and to contemplate that we begin to see signs of God's revelation in our lives.

When Mary and Joseph find Jesus in the temple, they are understandably annoyed. The English translation in the NIV softens their emotions a bit, with Mary telling Jesus they had been "anxiously searching" for him. The Greek adjective is more closely translated, "tortuous, causing anguish and intense pain." They are beside themselves. It's been three days after all.

And Jesus simply says, "Why were you searching? I've been right where I'm supposed to be, where you should have known that I would be, in my Father's house."

Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph didn't understand this. But then Luke says something interesting. He says that Mary "treasured all these things in her heart."

This is a call back to verse 19, when the shepherds show up at the stable to worship Mary's newborn son. Then, too, Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

And I love how Chelsea Harmon, another pastor in the CRC, interprets this "treasuring." Mary, writes Harmon, is just an ordinary mom. She goes about the business of raising Jesus just like she raises the rest of

her children. She isn't raising him to be the Messiah. She doesn't really understand what it means that he *is* the Messiah, according to Luke.

But there are these moments that disrupt her ordinary life. Moments when shepherds arrive and worship her child. Moments when that child sits amongst rabbis and teachers amazing them with his knowledge and insight. These moments, says Harmon, are reminders that amidst the ordinariness of life, Jesus is something more than an ordinary child. These moments are signs for Mary that when she said "yes" to the angel Gabriel, she was saying "yes" to something that was actually true.

And so, writes, Harmon, Mary's story "captures the human faith condition quite well. We are so into the ordinary business of living, that every once and a while, we get awakened (sometimes a little harshly) by reminders that the story of God is always at work, that God is keeping his promises, whether we acknowledge it or not. Whereas Jesus grows in wisdom and favour, Mary grows in faith."

Mary pays attention. Pondering things, treasuring them in her heart, spending time with these events, these signs. The preacher Karoline Lewis says, "Mary invites us into a contemplative space, a space that is not so as to obtain answers, but a space to ponder God's place in and purpose for our lives. Mary summons us to sit and wonder." In these moments she treasures in her hearts, Mary is reminded of her identity, her calling, and God's faithfulness to her in that calling.

So, friends, the question for us today is whether we will heed Mary's invitation. Will we take the time to sit and wonder? Will we interrupt our busy, ordinary lives, interrupt the noise and the chaos and find moments of silence and solitude, where we can be still, can quiet ourselves enough to hear the voice of God, can soften our gaze enough

so we see how God has been present to us, can unburden our heart enough to let it be filled with the identity-shaping love of God?

After all, it isn't just Mary inviting us into this space of silence, of wonder, of contemplation.

It's Jesus.

Jesus interrupts the ordinary business of his life to sit and spend time with God. He knows that the most important place for him to be on that day is in the temple, listening to the teachers, asking them questions, answering *their* questions, growing in the wisdom of God. Jesus takes time to grow in his relationship to the Father.

And he keeps doing this throughout his ministry. As soon as he begins his ministry, after just a day on the job, he heads into the wilderness to fast and pray for forty days. He returns, does another day of healing and teaching, and retreats again to a solitary place.

When the disciples grow exhausted after a few weeks on the job of being Jesus' apprentices, Jesus says, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." The larger the crowds, the more the demand for Jesus' time and miraculous powers, the more Jesus got away, withdrawing to quiet, solitary places to pray.

Jesus needed silence and solitude. So he could hear the voice of his Father, reminding him who he is, reminding him of his mission, reminding him that he is loved.

And Jesus says to us, "You need this too."

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Jesus – like the teachers he studied with in the temple courts when he was twelve years old – would have been considered a rabbi by his disciples and followers. And like all rabbis of this day, he had what was called a yoke, which was a rabbi's set of teaching on how to be human, how to shoulder the weight of life.

So when Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me," he's saying, "Come live as I live." He isn't dumping on us another set of burdens and obligations, but giving us the tools to shoulder the burdens we already carry.

And if we discover these tools by looking at how Jesus lived, then one of those tools is...rest. Taking the time to be still before God, so we can be reminded, in the midst of all the chaos and busyness of life, of who God is, and who we are, and what God has called us into.

So what would it look like for you to take some time, to sit and contemplate and treasure in your heart the ways in which God is showing up in your life, reminding you of his faithfulness?

If the idea of taking time out of your day to sit in silence is totally overwhelming...start small.

Maybe you wake up 20 minutes before your kids do and spend just ten minutes journaling over a cup of coffee.

Maybe you don't check social media on Wednesday evenings between 7-10.

Maybe you go for a walk, and instead of listening to a podcast, you just listen to the birds and pay attention to your own thoughts.

If you have capacity for more, maybe it's taking a full social-media sabbath on Sundays. Maybe even a phone sabbath.

Or increasing your morning solitude from 10 minutes to 20.

And if you're looking at me and saying, "Look, Laura, I spend most of my day on my own...I don't need more solitude," then ask yourself, "Am I being intentional with that solitude? Do I have practices that allow me to hear the voice of God? Or am I busy trying to distract myself from my aloneness?"

John Mark Comer, in his book *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, writes, "So many people live without a sense of God's presence through the day. We talk about his absence as if it's this great question of theodicy. And I get that: I've been through the dark night of the soul. But could it be that, with a few said exceptions, we're the ones who are absent, not God? We sit around sucked into our phones or TV or to-do lists, oblivious to the God who is around us, with us, *in us*, even more desirous than we are for relationship."

God is even more desirous than we are for relationship.

Will we take the time to cultivate that relationship?

Will we go looking for Jesus?

Let's pray.

And so God, help us to be silent and still before you.

Open our ears that we might hear your voice.

Open our eyes that we might see your presence in our lives.

Open our hearts that we might receive your love,

and be reminded that we are your children,

you are our Father,

and you long to be in relationship with us.

May we seek that relationship above all else.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.