



APRIL 26, 2020

ST. MICHAELS CHURCH IN THE CITY OF
CHARLESTON

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8
LUKE 2:41-52

PREACHER...THE REV. ALFRED T.K. ZADIG, JR.

*HELP US LORD TO BE SO CONNECTED TO YOU
THAT WE MIGHT BECOME THE SERVANTS OF OTHERS...*

*TAKE OUR LIPS AND SPEAK THROUGH THEM,
OUR MINDS AND THINK THROUGH THEM. AND TAKE OUR HEARTS, AND SET THEM ON FIRE.*

.....

ALLELUIA, CHRIST IS RISEN!

THE LORD IS RISEN INDEED, ALLELUIA!

Okay, there are some stories that need to be told twice. I originally shared this story 10 years ago on Easter, and like lasagna, it gets better as it ages! Some years ago, one of our parishioners, Dr. John Hollingsworth, was driving to his home at the time in Greenwood, South Carolina. This was in the age of the Country Squire – a wood veneer, side-paneled station wagon, complete with those third seats in the way back wheel well. On this particular occasion, he had his two children, ages 4 and 5 and a half, in that third seat in the back. And while they played, John stops for 5 minutes at a quick mart to get milk. He comes back to the car --- he's juggling these 2 large milk bottles between his hands and chin-----puts the jugs in the car and drives home-- going the typical 40-50 miles per hour. The children are having an especially good time laughing and screaming, but because the wheel well is so deep, John really can't see them through his rear-view mirror. So, he arrives home only to find a bicycle is blocking the garage door. Frustrated he stops the car, gets out, moves the bike, turns around, and is absolutely terrified by what he sees. His two children had been riding the entire way home...wait for it...on top of the car, holding on to the luggage rack for dear life!

True story!

Apparently, while John had been getting milk, they climbed to the top of the car and, because he was juggling the milk, he doesn't see the children on top! Of the many things that terrified John was the fact that had that bike not been in the driveway, he would have driven right into the garage, and because of the low roofline, the children could have been killed, not to mention, falling off the car on the highway! I'm pleased to say that the Hollingsworth children are fine and have completed their therapy!

Okay, true confessions. Have you ever done this? Or say, forgot a child in the McDonalds and drove off? Lost them in a department store?

Well, apparently Mary and Joseph, the parents of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ did! Yes, Luke Chapter 2, the amazing story of Mary and Joseph losing Jesus, like really losing a 12 year old for three days! Now, I know what you're thinking. You're probably asking yourself three questions right about now.

1. How could the Virgin Mary, be the Virgin Mary and misplace her son? Good question.
2. Second, why on earth are we reading this story of Jesus as a 12-year old during the great 50 days of Easter?
3. And what on earth does it have to do with my life in quarantine?

Three excellent questions. First...DSS and Mary. Mary was not as negligent as you might think. First...you need to know the context. Mary, Joseph and Jesus live 20 miles away from Jerusalem in Nazareth. As a good Jewish family, they would have obeyed Jewish law that said: "Every adult male living within 25 miles of Jerusalem must attend the Feast of the Passover." Why? Passover was the most important holiday of the year, celebrating the night God delivers the Jews from Pharaoh, and how the angel of death PASSES OVER the homes of the Jews while killing the Egyptian first-borns.

Passover, a big celebration for every Jewish family then and now. This would be the first Passover Jesus had ever attended, it was HIS rite of passage moment! You see, at age 5, Jesus would have begun to read Scripture out loud, and by age 12 made to memorize the Psalms, Hebrew law, and history. So with this first trip to Jerusalem at age 12, Jesus would have been declared a man, known now as A Son of the Law. Therefore, Jesus couldn't wait to road trip to the Passover...and a road trip it was! We think nothing of going 20 miles, like from here to Awendaw; it's nothing. But this was a road trip on foot.

So let me tell you how Jesus gets lost. It wasn't negligence because most of the time, those 20 miles were travelled in caravans of families and neighbors, hundreds walking together, because of the dangers of being kidnapped or mugged along the way. And of course there was no *safe-distancing*; they all walked close together, except for men and women. Men and Women never walked together. Women and children would walk first, followed by the men.

So you can imagine Joseph saying to his walking partner. “I’ll bet Jesus is complaining to his mother right about now that His feet hurt.” And Mary, saying, “I can just hear Jesus complaining to his dad about how tired He is!” The Caravans would then have stopped for the night to set up camp and this is where you have the text book scene. “What Joseph? You lost our son?” “What Mary? How could you lose the Savior of the world!”

This should make John Hollingsworth and all of us who have misplaced children, feel a bit better.

So, Mary and Joseph, sick with worry, return to Jerusalem. Again, context is important. During Passover, it was custom for the Rabbis to have open forums in the outdoor terrace of the Temple discussing Theology, Worship, and the coming Messiah. Mary and Joseph happen by and in a mixture of astonishment, confusion, and great distress, they find Jesus! First they are like, “Thank God you’ve not been kidnapped,” and in the next instant – anger. How could you put your father and me through this? In fact the term in the Greek for Distress is more like “an anxiety attack” - going out of their minds in mental anguish and pain.

That’s a long answer to the first question of how the Virgin Mary could misplace her son. Passover, a crazy packed time with caravans, easy to understand. Second, why on earth are we reading this story of Jesus as a 12-year old during the great 50 days of Easter? Much shorter answer.

We’re using the Gospel Project teaching Series, of going through Scripture in three years, and this is our scheduled reading for today. But more importantly, this Gospel Project reading serves as a flashback to the earlier life of Jesus. In this quarantine, like many of you, we have spent a lot of time with our children. Sometimes I just look at my 21 year old daughter, 19 year old son, and 14 year old youngest son and flashbacks come into my mind constantly about their baby-hood --- that seem to help make sense of their young adulthood.

In the context of Easter, Luke 2 is a flashback to Jesus at age 12, with the purpose of reaffirming that Jesus is the Son of God. You see, when Jesus says to his confused mother, “Didn’t you know I had to be in my “fathers” house? Jesus takes the name father AWAY FROM his earthly father Joseph and gives it to God! For God is His true Father! It was THE Day Jesus DECLARES who He truly IS. This flashback coming a full 18 years before his own baptism makes the definitive case that Jesus is the Son of God. A flashback that helps us realize that Jesus has always been seen as a blasphemous scandal to the world. And even a source of confusion to his own parents! A flashback that helps us make sense of how Jesus could have been:

- Betrayed on Maundy Thursday
- Killed on Good Friday
- And Yet Risen on Easter Sunday!

So, why this reading now? As part of the Gospel project series it serves as a flashback to reaffirm that Jesus is the Resurrected Son of God!

So the third and final question: What difference does it make in my life? Mary and Joseph know at this time that Jesus is God's son. They remember how the angel said, "You will give birth to the Savior of the World." They just don't know how that translates into THEIR everyday life and what the mission of Jesus would involve. Besides they had to raise Jesus along with His brothers and sisters! They know He is the Son of God, they just don't quite know how to parent for that! There was no textbook by Dr. Spock on how to raise the Son of God. There was no What to Expect when you're Expecting the Son of GOD!

Mary knows Jesus is the Son of God, but she is STILL confused by Him. If the mother of the Savior of the World is confused by Jesus, we have permission to be confused at times by Jesus. Our confusion may not stem from misplacing Him in Jerusalem. Our confusion might be..

- Jesus WHY would you need go to the cross instead of just smiting your enemies?
- Or...
 - Lord how could you let a Holocaust happen?
 - An out of control Coronavirus?
 - The loss of my financial savings?
 - A tornado on Easter Monday killing people?
 - A Child that died to young!

You and I are not alone in our confusion about Jesus. If Mary and Joseph were, we can be too! It's okay to admit that our faith journey can be hard and bewildering sometimes. YET, and here is what I need you to remember, this is the part I need you to apply to your life now. Despite Mary's confusion, despite her angst and suffering, the Bible says, Mary went home from Jerusalem, treasuring all these things in her Heart! Mary the mother of Jesus treasures, meaning she had to let go of those things she didn't understand. Mary treasures by letting go of her confusion, just as she would 21 years later, seeing her Son lifted on that Good Friday Cross. Just as she would when reunited with Jesus in His resurrected body! In other words, Mary doesn't wait to understand in order TO believe, She, through the Holy Spirit, believes first, in order to understand.

It reminds me of the person who said, "I don't believe in God because I can't see Him." To which another replies, "You can't see the Coronavirus either but you wear a mask and gloves."

This is Mary. She doesn't understand it all, but she still believes. She treasures Jesus. This was Mary's pattern for life. It was the second time ACTUALLY Mary treasures all these things in her heart. The first was earlier in Luke, when the shepherds came to worship Jesus in the Bethlehem stable. Then as well, Mary confused, still treasures the moment in her heart. It reminds me of one of our often walked by and missed gorgeous monuments in our Narthex: To: Mary, an exemplary Parent! Beloved and Devoted wife of John Freer Blalock.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit I need you to do what the Virgin Mary did. Despite confusion, treasure this time in the pandemic in your heart. Let your angst go. We know we win in the end. In the uncertainty of this Pandemic, don't fight loneliness; treasure the

loneliness by asking Jesus to saturate you in His presence. In your financial anxiety, treasure the time to be transparent and dependent on others: your church, your life group, your family. You are not alone! To young and exhausted parents, isn't it refreshing that Mary was frustrated by HER son? Treasure like never before the time with your kids. What could you do now with them you could never do otherwise?

Don't fight this season. Treasure this season! My friends, you and I know much more than Mary did about the whole story of Jesus! We know who wins in the end, more than Mary did! We know this world is only a layover, and that Jesus has won for us our eternal makeover in Heaven. Therefore we should be pros at treasuring and letting go. We know who wins! Treasure the time by asking Jesus to do something in you that you could never imagine!

It was St. Michaelite Jack Herrmann who sent me a poem that describes this Mary-like-treasuring. A poem written by that French Catholic, Kathleen O'Meara, during the panic of 1869. She writes:

And the People stayed home.

- Read books
- Listened
- Rested
- Exercised
- Made art
- Played games
- Learned new ways of being,
- and were still.
- They listened more deeply.
- Some prayed
- Some danced
- Some met their shadows.
- People began to think differently.
- And the people healed.
- And then the danger passed, and people joined together again
- They grieved their losses
- But Made new choices

TREASURE THE TIME! Do not wish this time away. Do not kill time. So that as you look up, like Mary, you, we would see Jesus, from the flashback at 12 to his resurrected body at work in you in a whole new way.

Finally today I need to take you to India, to a town 6 hours north of Delhi to Punjab, a town about 100 miles south of the Himalayas. Because everyone is currently staying home during the pandemic, and everything has stopped, residents in India say that for the first time in 30 years the smog is lifting and they can see clearly the Himalayas! One local athlete said, "It is

beyond my imagination that anything like this could ever be possible.” The sky is bluer. The breeze is cooler. Birds are back. I can see the Himalayas!

Three Questions...

1. Your mistakes are never final
2. These flashbacks of Jesus prove His Messiahship, we win...in the end.
3. Like Mary through the Holy Spirit,
Treasure, treasure the time To See Jesus like you've never seen Him before.