

Ascension Lutheran Church

Pastor Hollmann's Sermon for the week of January 4, 2009

Finding Where We Are (Luke 2:40-52)

Now hold on. I just want to make sure everything is in order. I've got my hymnal. Here's my bible. Everything looks good. And, wouldn't you know it here we are. It's the New Year and there's a lot to do. For many of us today is really the last day of the Christmas holiday. Tomorrow, Monday morning, everything is back to normal. The buses and metro will be running on normal schedule. Banks, post offices will be back to regular hours. Back to work, back to school, back to running errands.

Soon it will be the same old, same old. It might be the New Year, but as it says in the Bible, there's nothing new under the sun. Another year, another list of things to do. Another year, another work week. Another year, another full schedule. And on and on it goes.

Now hold on. I just want to make sure everything is in order. Ah yes, here we are gathered together, sisters and brothers in Christ, here in God's house. We've got our hymnals, our bulletins, our seats. We're ready. Another year, another Sunday. Soon, it's back to normal here in church. The tree will come down, the beautiful Christmas crèche will go back in the box to wait until next December. There's always a lot to do.

Now every year Mary and Joseph and their young son Jesus used to go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover Feast. Every year Mary and Joseph and Jesus would travel from Nazareth, a little out of the town up north, to Jerusalem down south, the big city. Every year in Jerusalem, the city of the temple, the epicentre of religious life, they celebrated the Passover.

Every year they remembered the time when God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey. They remembered that night.

That amazing night, when through the awesome, terrifying power of God, all the first born sons of Egypt were killed. But God's people were saved. That night they covered the doorframes of their homes with the blood of the lamb. And when the Lord saw the blood of the lamb, he passed over their homes. They were delivered. They were safe. Soon they would be free.

Now hold on. I just want to make sure everything is in order. Ok. Now here we are. I've still got my bag. It's still packed. I haven't had time to unpack yet. Wow, it's been a crazy few days. You see we were on our way home from Jerusalem, Mary and I, on our way back to Nazareth traveling down dusty roads. It's a long journey back home to Nazareth. We just celebrated the Passover. There were lambs to sacrifice, prayers, family, friends. It was great. We go every year. Yes, another year, another Passover.

Well all of sudden, one day into the journey back home, we start to wonder where our son Jesus is. Sure we hadn't seen him all day. But we thought he was family and friends. A lot of us go down to Jerusalem each year from Nazareth. So we just thought he was around somewhere. But it turns out that he was nowhere to be found. We started to ask around, ask aunts, uncles, cousins: hey, have you seen Jesus. Where could he be? No one had seen him. He was missing. Where's Jesus?

Well you can imagine how that made us feel. Mary and I were worried sick. Imagine, your twelve year son or daughter lost, left behind in some big city. It was terrible. We rushed back to Jerusalem. We looked all over, all the places we had been. For three days we looked and looked and looked. We started to lose hope. We thought the worst.

Until finally, finally we found him. We found Jesus. And do you know where he was? He wasn't with family or friends. He wasn't hanging out in the market. No, he was in the temple – the towering, glittering temple of all places. And do you know what that son of ours was doing at the temple: he was sitting listening to the religious scholars, the experts. And not only was he listening. He even asked them questions!

Well I can't tell you how embarrassed we were. Here, our twelve year old son from our little town of Nazareth questioning the professors of theology in the big city of Jerusalem. It was shocking.

Well I was about to give my wayward boy a real talking to, but Mary got to him first. She was all out of sorts, happy to have found him, yet angry that he stayed behind. Mary said frantically to Jesus: "Son, why have you treated us this way? Look, your father and I have been searching all over for you, worried sick."

And then, he said something very strange, something we're still thinking about, wondering over: "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

I still don't understand it all. But, here we are now, back home, back to normal, back here in Nazareth. I think it's time to put this bag away. Hopefully we won't lose Jesus again.

Now hold on, I just want to make sure everything is in order. Ah, yes. Here we are. We're in our Father's House, the temple in Jerusalem. I'm here with the other disciples of Jesus. It's been a while since our lives changed forever. I kept this cloth as a reminder of all that's happened.

You see we lost Jesus. Or we thought we lost him. Jesus, our teacher, our friend, was killed outside the city here in Jerusalem. It was terrible. Then he was buried not too far from here. We thought we lost our friend, our leader.

Well strange things happened that first day of the week, three days after his death. We thought we lost him again, thought we lost his body. For when a few of our sisters went to the tomb early that first day of the week, they found the stone rolled away from the

tomb. Instead of Jesus' body they found two angels who told them Jesus has risen from the dead.

I couldn't believe it. I thought they were making it up. So I ran to the tomb and found this: the burial cloth, but no body. I didn't know what to think. It was bad enough that Jesus was gone, but now his body was gone too. It was too much to take. So I went back and stayed with my friends, the followers of Jesus.

Well that night we found the lost Jesus. Or really Jesus found us. He just showed up while we were talking. Just appeared alive and stood right here among us. Talk about an unlikely way to meet Jesus again.

And Jesus, somehow, I still can't quite explain it all, he opened our minds, he enlightened us to finally see that Jesus, our friend, Jesus, the Messiah, the chosen one, had to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day. And that through us, his witnesses, forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning right here in Jerusalem.

Then later he ascended; he went up to heaven. And now here we are, here in God's house, the temple, praising God for all we have heard and seen. Jesus was lost, but was found. Or, the more I think about it, I was lost. And Jesus found me.

Now hold on, I just want to make sure everything is in order. Ok. Here we are. Here at our Father's House, this first Sunday of 2009. We've got our hymnals. We've got our bulletins. Another Sunday, another year.

We've just come through the long Christmas season. There's been so much to do. And while all the preparations, all the activities, all the events here at this church are important, we might find ourselves wondering, where's Jesus?

Where's Jesus in our often busy lives? Where's Jesus in our weekly, unrelenting schedules? So where's Jesus? Mary and Joseph looked everywhere for their missing son Jesus. And they finally found him in the one place he was meant to be: in the temple, his Heavenly Father's house, listening and teaching.

Where's Jesus? We find him again and again here in his house. Here, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus listens to us, hears our prayers, hears our concerns, our worries, our cares, he hears us and intercedes for us with his Heavenly Father.

We've come here this morning to sit at the feet of a twelve year old boy in the temple. To sit and listen to words of wisdom. In fact, to listen to wisdom himself. As Scripture says, Jesus is the very wisdom of God. And Jesus, full of wisdom, tells us, like he told Mary and Joseph, that he's doing the work of his Father. He came to do the will of his Father.

And that work, that will of the Father, is love for us, our salvation. And now through the Holy Spirit, Jesus is calling us, bringing us, keeping us as children of our heavenly Father, and as children of God, forgiven and at peace, heirs of everlasting life.

Yes, it's a new year. It's 2009 already. What will this New Year bring? Like Peter and the other disciples who were worried about what the future would bring that first Easter evening, it's easy to get down, to worry about the future.

Well Jesus met those worries and concerns head on. That first Easter evening he stood among his disciples and gave them peace. And so today, through his Word Jesus is among us. By his body and blood, Jesus, the final Passover lamb who takes away the sins of the world, Jesus is in us: filling us with his peace; moving us to be his witnesses, to proclaim forgiveness of sins in his name: here in this city, in our homes, in our places of work, in our schools, witnesses of his death and resurrection, of his love for everyone.

Our Gospel reading today from Luke chapter two takes place in the temple: God's house, where God in the flesh, wisdom in the flesh, listens and tells. And the Gospel of Luke ends right after Jesus ascends into heaven with the disciples praising God in the same temple.

But Luke's Gospel has a sequel. Luke wrote two books: his Gospel and the book of Acts, the book about the mission of the early church. Acts begins in Jerusalem, the city of the temple, and ends in Rome, the epicentre of the ancient world.

But Acts doesn't really end in Rome. There are now Christians around the world. The good news of Jesus has made it all the way to snowy cold Montreal.

Now we are children of God, sisters and brothers in Christ, the community of Jesus, the community of love and service. Community with purpose: as we witness to Jesus outside this house, outside in our daily lives, in our actions. As we live out being followers of Jesus.

So just hold on, it's the New Year, there's so much to do. At the beginning of it all, there in the middle, and there at the end is Jesus: who in wisdom puts everything in the right order, who sets us on the course of following God: the life of listening, pondering, treasuring, praising, singing, loving, serving, telling, giving. Amen