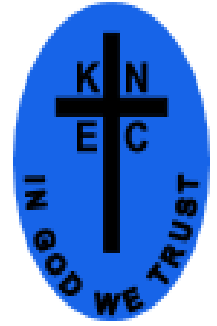




Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

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Reading Luke 2 : 41-52

Sermon: 27 December 2009

48c 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.

I think this passage is a very scary passage for any parent to read. I do not think it was easy for Jesus' parents to experience him being gone for almost three days! Nanda and I once experienced something similar, although not in the same extend and still if I think of it I have nightmares. We were eating at a restaurant which serves buffet lunches. Henro and I went to the counter to place our order and to pay. As I was paying, I took my eyes of him and then when I looked down again, he was gone. I am telling you I was panicking. I remember running up and down, to the outside afraid that he went to the parking area. Then Nanda joined me because she was getting worried about our whereabouts. Both of us were really scared someone snapped Henro from us. Luckily Nanda found him a few minutes later playing as if nothing has happened in the play area! It can happen to any parent but forgetting about a child for a whole day, I do not know if this is neglect! But off course then I am judging the situation from my post modern perspective. Let us go now to the background of the passage to see what really happened and what the writers intention was with the passage.

The writer of the Gospel of Luke was a master in many ways. He writes his Gospel in such a way that Jesus ministry would run a full circle. His ministry started in Jerusalem during the Passover and would later end there too also during the Passover!

Luke is also providing us with a good picture of the lives of an ordinary Jewish family in time of Jesus. It was custom for all Jews to go Jerusalem every year during the three great Jewish pilgrimage festivals namely Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, which were celebrated from the sunset of the fourteenth to the twenty-first day of the first month, the Feast of Weeks, which occurred at the beginning of the wheat harvest seven weeks after the presentation of the sheaf of barley and the Feast of Booths, which was celebrated on the fifteenth through the twenty-second days of the seventh month when the harvest and produce were gathered in.

In our reading Jesus' parents went to celebrate the Jewish Passover. It was kept in remembrance of the Lord's passing over the houses of the Israelites when the first born of all the Egyptians were destroyed. Passover itself was the opening feast of the seven-day festival called the Feast of Unleavened Bread and was celebrated on the fifteenth day of Nisan. It was called the "feast of unleavened bread", because during its celebration no leavened bread was to be eaten or even kept in the household. A detailed account of the institution of this feast is given in Ex. 12 and 13. It was afterwards incorporated in the ceremonial law as one of the great festivals of the nation.

Jesus was then 12 years old. Usually in the Jewish families the boys began their religious lives in their fourth year. They were expected to learn the Scriptures at five, the Jewish oral law at ten, and to fulfill the whole law at thirteen. At twelve years they were expected to learn a trade, and attained to something of independence at that age, though they did not come into full rights as a citizen until they were twenty.

After the weeks festivities (which lasted 7 days) they returned home. However Joseph and Mary did not notice that Jesus was not with them. They just assumed that Jesus was with their other relatives. But then in those days they did not have to be alarmed at all. The extended family took care of each others bairns! After a day's travel they noticed Jesus was still in Jerusalem. A day's travel was about 20 to 25 miles. It was only at dinner time when all the families came together as a separate entity that they would notice a missing family member. They returned back to Jerusalem and in the turmoil of so many people they found him only after three days. Maybe Luke again is pointing to something that will happen in the future namely Jesus' resurrection on the third day. When they found him He was with the "teachers" in the temple. Luke does not want to say explicitly "teachers" of the law due to the negative connotations to the scribes. They were amazed by his knowledge and insights. Luke often repeats this word to emphasize the reaction of people to Jesus' public appearance. It seems evident that there can be no doubt of Jesus' real calling as the Son of God which He affirms in verse 49.

It is interesting to note that Mary says: "Your father and I" without any mention of the fact that Joseph was not his real father. In those days adopted children were not regarded as such. If someone gave them their family name they were considered as full family members.

It is clear that Mary and Joseph did not fully understand Jesus' true mission. I think they must have thought by themselves: who is this child? Jesus' shows that He possessed a unique relationship with God and confirms the angelic message that He is God's Son! Jesus says to them He "canna" understand why did not look for him in the temple. Did they not know that He would be in the temple where He was supposed to be? But clearly his parents had no clue. It is interesting to note that during Jesus' lifetime on earth there would be many more people who did not understand his true mission.

Luke concludes his story with a few personal remarks. Mary treasured the words of Jesus in her heart. Jesus was obedient to them and he became wiser as He grew older. He was a favorite with God and with the Jewish people. Luke makes this concluding remark to outline and emphasize that Jesus was truly blessed.

Luke takes us on a journey beyond the little baby that was born in the stable. He emphasizes this at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. He wants his readers to start their journey too with Jesus.

And I think this is exactly what the message is for us too. We must journey in faith with Jesus as our only Saviour. He was truly God and human. He managed to overpower death. Luke is telling us that Jesus did not stay in the crib and He most certainly finished his journey on earth at Calvary.

We also know that this journey will not be easy. In faith we will have to rely fully on God and trust him in every trying situation. It will mean that we stay true to His word and live life full of prayers. It will mean that we obey him with all our hearts, minds, and souls. It will mean that we say NO to the temptations of this world and Yes to the things that really matters,. It will mean the right choices. If we serve God and put him first, then we will succeed and enter the kingdom of all eternity where time does not exist.

Unfortunately there are still people who still think about God or Jesus as the little baby in a crib. There are even people who do not even know that Christmas is about Jesus. For them there is no journey with Jesus at all. For them the only time they come to worship is when someone has died or when there is a wedding, and then it seems as if the whole worship happens for them in a blaze.

Why does this happen around us?

I think people do not know Jesus because:

- We want to be too politically correct in not talking about our faith with our friends, children or in public,
- We do not show enough the love and the mercy of our lord and Savior,
- We sacrifice in silence without acknowledging through our suffering the presence of our Lord and Saviour;
- We do not read and know our Bibles to tell others about what God has done for us in Jesus Christ;
- We do not have a life of prayer while acknowledging all the prayers that has been answered by God;
- We are not listening to God's word and missing the ample opportunities to speak to people about the existence of God;
- We are too easily manipulated by our world to feel sensitive, vulnerable and anxious about our faith in God.

It is shocking that so many Christians do not attend to God's harvest while they journey in faith with God.

Now is the time and now is the opportunity. We should make the most of every moment and every second to travel with God in faith and taking with us as many pilgrims as we can find!

Then our journeys will not end when we die but will lead us into the eternal life with God.

Amen

Readings of the week

Luke 2:41-52

Luke is the only gospel writer to provide us with an insight into the childhood of Christ. The purpose of including the story is to enable the reader to know that Jesus did not 'become' the Son of God by virtue of anything he said or did at some point in his life. Jesus was born as the Messiah, grew up as the Messiah, lived, died and rose again as the Messiah. There are parallels in this story with that of Samuel who was raised in the temple of God to be both a prophet and a judge of Israel. Samuel was known to be obedient to God. This particular story shows how the most important thing to the young Jesus was to be in his Father's house, this suggests that Jesus was aware of his high calling even as a young man. This knowledge could not have been easy either for Jesus or his family. In this passage Luke lets us glimpse something of the confusion and worry it engendered. We learn of Mary's astonishment that Jesus seemed to be so inconsiderate of their very real worry and concern and of Jesus' puzzlement at their worry. Why did they not know that he had to be in God's house? The final sentence in this passage is therefore a deliberate echo of the words Luke used in the nativity story. They are meant to inform us of Mary's growing wonder and understanding of who Jesus really is and what all this might mean.

Prayer

by

Elizabeth Bruce Whitehorn

Jesus, son of Mary and Joseph,
a helpless baby born in the humble surroundings of a stable,
wondered at by shepherds and visited by wise men from afar.
Jesus, Son of God,
an independent twelve-year-old at home in the temple in Jerusalem,
amazing the experts with answers and understanding.
Jesus, both human and divine,
may I, too, grow in wisdom and in favour with God.
Amen.