

Sermon preached by Chris Wedge

30 December 2018 – Christmas 1 – Luke 2:41-52

What are you looking for? The facile answer to this question is often keys, wallet and phone but to be searching is a frustrating and sometimes stressful problem.

At the age of 12 Jesus goes missing and he is missing for three whole days. Put yourself in the shoes of Mary and Joseph. They are on their way back from Jerusalem with a crowd of others doing their Jewish duty. Somehow, we are not told, Jesus gets separated from them and for three days they are searching. This is in a different league to searching for keys and wallets.

Eventually they find him. Where is he: In the temple. At the age of twelve they find the child Jesus engaging in theological debate, he is teaching and being taught, he is showing curiosity and wisdom in equal measure. There follows a tense exchange between mother and son. Why have you done this to me an exasperated and perhaps tearful Mary asks? You should have known I would be here replies Jesus. This is a window into childhood and parenting. But of course there are deeper lessons for us today in this Gospel.

Mary and Joseph were looking in all the wrong places. Jesus thinks they should have known where to find him. In our complex and confusing lives it can be hard to know where we can find the Living God. We hope that the institution of the church is a good place to start looking but often the church can get in the way. Institutional corruption and sin have turned so many people away from faith in recent years. So much of church life can seem to be shallow, trivial and unimportant. Like Mary and Joseph we look in all the wrong places.

We live in a culture addicted to money and success and I am just as much a victim of that of any of you. We are driven by the pursuit of financial gain, we admire the rich and we ignore the poor or even worse we blame them for being poor. We look for meaning and purpose and hope in bigger and better houses, new cars, clever investments and the material things of life. Too many of us have made our work in to a God that rules us and we are slaves to our employers allowing them to rob us of time and freedom and dignity. Some of us look to other props to make us feel safe. Alcohol and drugs offer the empty promise of oblivion and escape. Some of us become bullies, manipulating others in a vain attempt to feel superior and to keep at bay the reality of our own emptiness. We look in all the wrong places and that is why we are unfulfilled and stressed.

But let's get back to this fascinating Gospel story. Jesus goes missing on the journey and somehow or other he is lost for three days. There followed a frantic search, the parents must have been beside themselves with worry and yet all this was necessary. Jesus had to leave his parents, however briefly, to discover who he was. He had to fulfil his own identity in the temple and to separate from his parents to grow into his true self.

In the three day search for the missing Jesus we are given a little window into Easter. For three days Jesus lay in the tomb before the rock was rolled away and his resurrection was revealed and so it is today that Jesus is lost and then on the third day he is found, we have before us a mini

resurrection, a promise of what is to come for we too are promised mini resurrections in our own lives. In this adventure we are told that Jesus left behind the shadow of childhood, the age of twelve is a significant point of transition for a young Jewish boy, and he is on the cusp of manhood, from the age of thirteen he carries the rights and responsibilities of adulthood. This story is about transition from childhood innocence to the reality of adult life. Jesus was leaving behind his childhood and encountering his purpose and meaning. We are invited to grow up spiritually in this holy season, to cast off the distractions and false promises of the here and now and to focus on light and love and hope.

What do we need to leave behind to discover who we are? What do we need to set aside in order to live out our God given identity?

If you are looking for deep peace, fulfilment and purpose then begin in silence and simplicity. Declutter your life, fill your prayers with silence and listen to the loving word of God in scripture as much as you can.

I know that many of you will be thinking: the chance would be a fine thing. But you know living your life at 100 mph is a choice. Working twelve hour days is a choice. Filling your free time with frenetic activity and busyness is a choice. These are all choices that lead us away from God and our true selves and we can make different choices. Of course making different choices comes at a cost but living differently is the invitation of the Gospel.

If you want to make a change in your soul then begin with small steps. Set aside a few minutes each day, ideally the same few minutes at the same time every day and give them to God. Stop and enter more deeply into the presence of the one who loves and adores you and enjoying being with Him. Slowly build up, when your stillness muscles have grown stronger start to read the Bible every day. Take the pew sheet home and read the Gospel every day for a week. Reread the story. Look for new meaning, new depth, and new insight. God will not disappoint you when you leave behind the attachments of this world.

Dare to make Eucharist every Sunday. Feed your soul; nourish your inner life, honour God week in and week out not just when your diary allows it. When you are not here God grieves.

It is through the community of faith that we are enabled to hold in our hands the things of heaven. When we dare to make Eucharist I know why I was made, this is when I am most fully alive, this is the purpose of my life, and this is what I am for. This is where we should be looking because here is love made real, here is food for the journey and here is the promise of love and light. Here at this altar life makes sense.