

## Jeff's reflection – Dec 26

Some stories get told just to make a point.

That's why I think we have today's story about the 12- year-old Jesus.

I think that because if I read it as a news report about what happened when Mary and Joseph went with Jesus to Passover in Jerusalem, I end up thinking that Mary and Joseph would have good reason to be upset – both with Jesus and with God.

Passover was and is a major Jewish festival. Passover is a time of remembering how the Spirit of God passed over the Jewish people who were basically economic slaves in Egypt; passed over their houses and caused the death of Egyptian children – all of which led to Pharaoh finally agreeing to Moses' demand, spoken on behalf of God, to 'let my people go.'

Passover, in the time of Jesus, was a time when Jerusalem was crowded with pilgrims coming for the festival. It was also a time when Jerusalem would have had a large Roman army military presence. The Jewish people were gathering to remember a time when God freed them from the domination of Pharaoh in Egypt and brought them to this land, this land that was now an occupied land, occupied by the Roman Empire, and so the Jewish people were now under a new regime of domination. Jerusalem was an inspiring, a dangerous and a crowded city in which to visit during Passover.

Joseph and Mary and Jesus quite likely traveled with others coming for the festival, perhaps with people joining the caravan of pilgrims as they passed through towns and villages on the way.

The story does not tell us about their time in Jerusalem, only that they attended the festival and then, at its conclusion, set out again for their homes.

We are told that Mary and Joseph thought that Jesus was with other relatives or friends from Nazareth. We aren't told why they thought this, but according to the story they had walked for an entire day when they started to look for their son, only to discover that he wasn't with anyone amongst the pilgrims.

We are left to imagine what they would have felt, what anxiousness, what fear.

Mary and Joseph return to Jerusalem to search for Jesus. We are told they searched for three days – which we might note is a recurring time pattern in the scriptures – Jonah spending three days in the belly of a big fish, Jesus' resurrection being experienced three days after the crucifixion.

After three days they find Jesus. He is in the temple. Jesus is in the temple sitting among the teachers. He is sitting with the teachers, those who teach the Torah, who

teach the faith stories, who teach the covenant between God and the Jewish people, between God and the nations, between God and all creation.

Jesus is in the temple, learning about God. Jesus is listening to the teachers and asking them questions.

So – the point of the story – if we are looking for Jesus, we might do well to look for God!

The point of the story, I think, is NOT to tell us about Jesus' relationship with his mom and dad one year shy of him coming into his teenage years!

The point is that Jesus, even as a child, was all about God, about learning about God, about asking questions about God, about sharing his insights about God.

This passage concludes with the word, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.'

The point of the story – go and do likewise!

We refer to Jesus' followers as disciples – as students, as companions who were learning and whose lives were being shaped and transformed by the life of Jesus.

Next weekend we begin a new calendar year, we enter into 2022. Some people have a new year's practice of making a New Year resolution- of naming a goal, a practice, an action to engage with during the year.

This story of the young Jesus can offer us a new year's faith resolution, to increase in divine and human favour by seeking Jesus, by doing as the young Jesus did, seeking God and seeking what it means to live attuned to God.

To help us each think about seeking God by seeking Jesus, I offer just a few reflections on some faith practices.

For some, regular worship is significant to their ongoing nurturing of their faith.

In worship services, we intentionally open ourselves to an alternative view of the world – we hear scripture readings and stories, we hear reflections and prayers – stories, reflections and prayers of people who engage with God as they engage with the world; who are willing to engage with possibilities that seem impossible – that people can live in peace, that food can be distributed so that no one is hungry, that we can choose to seek to forgive others rather than to condemn or denigrate others, that we can build neighbourhoods rather than gated communities, that we can build relationships of friendship with people unlike ourselves, that we can allow God within us to recognize God within others, that we can find healing through our woundedness, that we can live in community and care with all of God's creation.

Worship is one practice. Another is regular prayer. There is no one way to pray. For some it may be helpful to say the Lord's Prayer, the prayer that Jesus taught. Because we are so familiar with the words of this prayer, we can sometimes say them without actually praying them. I sometimes find it a meaningful prayer practice to say the prayer slowly, being attentive to each word, each phrase, sometimes pausing at a word or phrase to 'feel' it's meaning or to briefly think about it's meaning – it's meaning to me personally where I find myself in my life, it's meaning in a larger sense of the world.

Prayer may not be words at all. Prayer may be listening to music, listening to the sounds around oneself, focusing on one's breath, seeking a certain stillness from the busy-ness of our minds. Prayer might be speaking or saying whatever we feel, whatever we are experiencing. Prayer may be petitioning God – help, heal, give me courage.

Worship, prayer – and acts of compassion and justice- doing something to make the world more like that world I described us attending to in worship, doing something to bless someone with a sense of worth, of being loved by God; doing something to bring safety, healing, hope to someone else.

Mary and Joseph found Jesus as he was trying to find the God who was with him, the God who is with all of us.

May we all search for Jesus in our lives, in our world, in our communities.

Let us find Jesus searching for God, in our lives, in our world, in our communities.

Let us be found by Jesus who embodies God's love in this world; let us be found by God, the Heart at the heart of all creation.

Thanks be to God. AMEN