

## *Linger in the Sanctuary*

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Luke 2:41-52

*“Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”*

### *Movement 1 – Something is Lost*

Have you ever felt like you have lost something? Have you ever felt that something is missing? We have all had the experience of losing our keys, our wallet, our driver’s license, our old silver serving platter just before company arrives, our shoes just before we have to go, and on and on. We have all lost something from time to time. There are many ways things get lost, either the house is too cluttered or our mind is cluttered or you have pets/children that help to rearrange things, or things just get misplaced. But we have all experienced losing something from time to time. We turn the house upside down, we empty out all of our pants pockets, we pace up and down the backyard, and we continue to search and search until we find what we have been looking for. Or we decide that whatever it is that is lost is dispensable, and we find a replacement. This is a common routine when we lose things. You know what I’m talking about because we have all lost things from time to time.

Have you ever felt like you have lost something in a relationship? Have you ever felt like a relationship you have had lost a spark, a pull, or that something emotional that is just no longer there. Old friends grow apart as they live their own lives. Parents and children change in their relationship as the children grow and become adults. No longer can the parent hold and cuddle his or her child. Something is lost. Some couples who have been together for twenty five or thirty years have known to separate because they have just become two different people. Something that was once there in a relationship is lost. Something that once added a spark to a relationship is missing. Have you ever felt like you have lost something in a relationship?

Think about your relationship with God. Maybe some of you have been a Christian for all your life. Maybe some of you are still hovering on the idea of committing to a relationship with Christ. But have you ever had that experience when you feel like you have lost something in your relationship with Christ or with God? Have you ever felt like you have lost Jesus? In the scripture for today, Mary and Joseph have lost Jesus. They traveled a day before they realized that Jesus was not with them, and they were frantic. They had lost Jesus. Imagine yourself as Mary or Joseph. Imagine yourself as someone who has been traveling with Mary and Joseph, assuming that everything is good and everything is fine, and then you stop and notice. You notice that something is missing. You can’t find Jesus. Jesus is missing in your life. We have all lost things in our lives, but have you ever had that experience, that feeling that you have lost Jesus?

### *Movement 2 – Where did Jesus go?*

This isn’t something that happens right away. We don’t usually lose that connection, that experience or a relationship in an instant. It isn’t something that occurs overnight, but is gradual, slow, and hard to notice in the moment. Yet it is something that happens, and that can happen to any of us, this feeling of having lost Jesus. Maybe we can remember the moment when we first gave our lives to Christ. Maybe we can remember that sermon, that Crusade, or that song that drove us to our knees and opened our hearts to Christ. Maybe it was an amazing experience, maybe it was a simple, quiet, but powerful experience. Was it provoking and life-changing. Did you find yourself singing for weeks? Did you find yourself smiling for days? Was it like falling in love, that moment when you gave your life to Christ? Maybe we can remember that moment as we look at our current relationship with Christ and wonder what happened. We wonder where Jesus went in our lives?

I wonder how Mary and Joseph were the first couple of weeks of Christ’s life. Not only have they now welcomed a new child into their lives. Not only were they new parents, but so much happened with Christ’s

birth that they must have been excited. They must have looked for a sign in every one of Christ's coos. They must have looking for a symbol of divinity in every one of Christ's burps. I wonder if over time, they got used to Jesus being a normal boy and took his divinity for granted. We don't know what Jesus' childhood was like, but let's assume for now that he was a normal child who grew up in a normal way. Let's assume that Mary and Joseph took Jesus to Jerusalem every year for the Passover festival, and he stayed close just like every dutiful child would do. Maybe Mary and Joseph began to assume that Jesus was normal. Maybe they forgot the amazing events that occurred in Bethlehem. Maybe they had let go of the prophecies and the symbols. Maybe they still had Jesus at their side, but they had lost Christ, the divine, the Messiah who Jesus was claimed to be.

Has this happened to you? You have accepted Jesus as your savior, but the day after, the following week, the next morning or a couple of months later you are lacking that same spark? You have had this amazing, this powerful, this wonderful experience. How do you feel now? Do you still have that high? Do you still have that emotional explosion leaving your lips, your soul? Or are you now a little tired, a little empty and a little normal? The day after Christmas feels empty because it is now just a return to the normal, the mundane and the routine after all that anticipation and all that excitement. You now have to clean things up; you now have to make things normal again. Or think about the day after that revival, that Crusade, that preaching, that concert. Maybe you feel pretty good, maybe you feel something still carrying you through, lifting you up and making your life feel a little better than normal. But days go to weeks and go to months and maybe you begin to feel yourself fall back into the normal of life. It happens slowly, but before you know it, you have lost Jesus.

One of the great preachers in the evangelical tradition, Jonathan Edwards, complained that after a revival, he noticed people backsliding into the normal, the routines that they were involved in at one time. They seemed sincere when they accepted Christ into their lives, they seemed to have a holy experience, but then they seemed to fall back into the normal. They seemed to lose that feeling, that passion and that sincerity to love their Lord. Maybe Edwards was asking the question, "Where did Jesus go?"

It is a question we need to ask ourselves just as Mary and Joseph asked this same question one day into their journey home. They were tired and they were ready to return to their life. They left so quickly, they turned their heads from Jerusalem to Nazareth as soon as the festival was over, and then they noticed that Jesus was missing.

This can happen to us as well. We turn from the experience so quickly; we turn back to Nazareth, to the world, to the demands of our life so quickly that we may find ourselves asking "where did Jesus go?" The routine of life, the responsibilities of life take hold, and the mountain top experience has gone. Horace Bushnell criticized the Baptists as people who would offer individuals a mountaintop experience, and then leave them to quickly go back to the world. He saw the Baptists staging revivals, holding camp meetings, and then packing up and leaving the people to spirituality fend for themselves. They left the people who more than likely returned to their lives just as they were before the revivals, and no doubt they were asking "where did Jesus go?" Bushnell criticized the Baptist for an irresponsible spirituality.

Where did Jesus go? This is a question that we need to ask in our own spiritual lives the day after our spiritual awakening, the week after our Baptism, and the month after the party of our soul. "Where did Jesus go," we ask, because the experience, the high, and the initial excitement might not be enough maintain our connection with Jesus. Maybe your faith is still important, but it takes a back seat to your life. Maybe you have to let your faith be a Sunday thing, because the world does not have room for the enthusiasm of Christ. The world will call us back, the demands and the responsibilities of our life will call us back the day after all is said and done. It is something that happens right away. It isn't an experience that occurs overnight, but overtime, many of us find that we have lost Jesus.

*Movement 3 – Looking for Christ in all the Right Places...*

Do you want to find Jesus? Do you want to reclaim that lost feeling, that love, and that fulfillment? Do you want to find Jesus? Maybe you find yourself compelled to find Jesus. Maybe you find yourself searching, looking and hoping to find Jesus again, to recapture that experience and to reclaim that feeling again. It felt so good before, and you want to find it again. You notice a longing in your life. You notice that you are walking again with a spiritual limp, that you are feeling darkness in your own life. You yearn for that experience, that relationship you once had with Jesus. You want to find Jesus. You long for the sense of comfort you found from Jesus, you desire the hope you had with Jesus, and you become anxious to find Jesus. You need Jesus in your life because you face difficulties, uncertainties, and tragedy. You need Jesus in your life for that assurance that blessed assurance to pull you through to another day. Do you want to find Jesus? Look with Mary and Joseph for Jesus. Look in the highways and the byways of Jerusalem. Look in the marketplace, and in the town square. Look everywhere you can for your savior. Join Mary and Joseph and search for Jesus.

This drive and passion to find Jesus reminds me of the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. In that movie Richard Dreyfuss's character had an amazing experience when he saw a flying saucer for the first time. After that experience, Dreyfuss could never stop looking to the skies, he never stopped looking for more. He did not want to lose the experience. He chased it, he tried to catch up with it, and afterwards he wanted more. He wanted to sculpt the picture he saw in his head. He wanted to find out more and more. His life was changed and he couldn't go back to normal. He wanted again and again to find and claim that experience. He was driven and compelled to find again the experience.

But where do we go? Where do we look to rekindle that feeling, experience or the relationship with Christ? We can we find Jesus? We can't go to a relationship counselor. We can't go on Dr. Phil, because this relationship is different from any other that we may have. Should we return to the source, the place where we first met Jesus? Maybe we need to have a Christmas service again and again? After all, Christmas is a powerful occasion; it is the moment when we first meet Jesus. So let's return to Christmas every Sunday and hope that there we will find the Jesus we have lost. Yet it would get routine. The carols would become tired and redundant. We may even find ourselves growing further away from Christ out of boredom.

Can we go back to that initial moment? Can we repeat the experience? We cannot go back, because we have changed. We cannot repeat an experience because we are not the same people, the experience will not be the same.

Maybe we need to have a big choir number every Sunday to lift up our spirits and our hearts? Maybe we need to have a rousing sermon every Sunday. Maybe we should find the church with the biggest organ, the loudest choir, and the best preaching. Will we find ourselves closer to Jesus? Maybe then we will find Jesus. Yet don't we run the risk of just contriving an emotional experience to grow close to Jesus; aren't we just forcing our spirituality with big, show-stopping numbers? Maybe in the short term it makes sense to look for the most emotionally moving and appealing to find Jesus, but how long will such an experience hold us through? How long will such a repetition carry us? I wonder if we will also find ourselves, in weeks or months looking again for Jesus.

In the Medieval period, people were known to wait for a moment in the Mass when the priest would hold up the chalice. This was a moment when they believed they would receive grace from God simply by looking at the cup. To insure that they had as much grace as possible, many would run from church to church so they could see as many priests as possible lift up the chalice and receive the grace of God. It seemed to be something contrived, something forced, and something missing in their search. We can fall into the same trap and assume that by hearing a sermon preached, the choir sing, or just attending worship we can improve our relationship with Jesus. All we need to do is go through the motions, pay our dues, and we will never lose Jesus. But going through the motions won't bring us to Jesus.

We are looking for Jesus, and we look in what seems to be all the right places, but something seems to be missing. Will just music, or preaching, or ornate buildings bring us to Christ? Where can we go to find

Jesus? We have felt the presence of Christ. We have been lifted up, changed, and moved, but where can we go to continue that experience, that feeling, that drive? Where can we go to find Jesus?

#### *Movement 4 – The First Words of Christ*

Listen to the words of Jesus. Skip ahead and hear what Christ has to say to his anxious parents who were searching and searching for him. Skip ahead and hear what Christ has to say to us who are searching and searching for him. Jesus almost rebukes his parents and us, telling us with a tired and exasperated voice, “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” These are the first words that we hear Christ say in the gospel of Luke. These are the words that set us up for the rest of the ministry of Christ and they are words that speak to the obvious. “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” In the house of God, in the moment of worship, in the moment when the body of Christ, when fellow Christians gather together, there must Christ be found. It is not necessarily when the choir sings, it is not necessarily when the preaching begins, but in that moment of two or three people gathering together around the Holy Word, around scripture to experience and hear and live the Gospel that God offers. In God’s house, in the place of praise, in the place of prayer, in the place of listening, there will Christ be found.

It seems so obvious. It seems so clear. Just like when you find your glasses on the top of your head. Just like when you realize your keys were on the key ring all along. Yet maybe Mary and Joseph were looking instead in the market, or any other place where they assumed a normal twelve year old boy would be. But maybe they had forgotten who Jesus was; they lost the Christ, and did not think to look in the temple. Maybe by now they had taken it for granted that Christ is indeed divine. Yet Christ’s divinity shone as he sat there in the temple with the doctors and teachers. There Christ was, in his Father’s house, in the most obvious place.

It is obvious. If you want to find Jesus, go to church. Go to church and be a part of that church. Don’t just go for the initial emotional experience. Don’t just go for the praise, but go deeper into the life of the church. I have already said that just listening to a sermon will not necessarily pull you closer to Jesus. But dive into the scripture with the preacher. Live the text with the sermon. Listen with prayful, critical ears. Let the words of the scripture, connected with the message of the sermon rest on your heart and challenge your life. This is an active listening that calls you to sit and linger with the scripture. Remember that a sermon is just a proclamation of the word to us today. Linger and hear that word. Linger in the sanctuary and let the words of Holy Scripture settle on your heart.

Listen to the people sitting next to you in the sanctuary. Share with them; study with them, and pray with them. Linger in the sanctuary and listen for Christ among the people, the community. Remember that the church is the people. The temple of the Lord is the gathered believing community. Linger in that sanctuary and experience Christ amongst the hand shakes, the questions, and the growth.

Take the church with you. Let God’s house be a holiness that we grow into, that we work into every day. It is spending time in prayer, spending time studying the Word, and growing closer to Jesus in that way. Pray by yourself, pray with your family. This is the temple of the Lord. This is where we will find Christ.

It is spending time in worship with our brothers and sisters. It is knowing each other’s concerns and desires so that as a body we can lift them up. It is being connected to the world, so that we can pray for the world as a people, as a body. It is praying together, studying the word together, and growing together as a people.

Jesus calls us to find him; he wants us to find him, but not in recreating the rituals, not in the choir, not in the preaching, not in the ornate nature of the building in God’s house. That is where Christ must be, and that is where Christ will be found.

#### *Movement 5 – Finding Christ*

Christ is also found in the work of God. Christ is found in serving. Other translations suggest “business” instead of “house.” If you were to read the KJV, you would hear Christ say that he would be about his father’s “business.” The two words must be held in tension, for both are true to the words of Christ. Christ is found in the home of the Lord and in the business of the Lord. Both are where Christ must be found.

Let’s consider that idea of business. What is the business of the Lord, but standing up for justice, holding onto righteousness, sharing the word, hearing the word and living the word? Hold onto that idea of doing God’s business. When kindness is shared, there will Christ be found. When justice is done, there will Christ be found. When mercy flows, there will Christ be found. When love is experienced, is offered and is received, there will Christ be found. For God’s business is the business of the meek, the weak, the lowly, and the afflicted. With them will Christ be found.

Maybe you have heard the story of the shoemaker. It is a story of a shoemaker who is told that he is going to receive a visit from Christ in the next day. The next day he is visited by widows and poor. He is visited by people with no food or shelter or adequate clothing. The shoemaker offers food, he fixes shoes, and he helps out those in need. At night as he went to bed he found himself asking where Christ was and why Christ didn’t appear as promised. The answer the shoemaker received was that in each of those people who he helped, Christ was present. This is also obvious. This is Matthew 25, when we are told that the Lord will be found in the least of society. It is obvious, but it may not be the first place where we would look. Christ is found in the work of the Lord.

This month, we are going to go to a food shelter in Norristown. I am going to invite all of you to reach out, and to serve the homeless, the weak, and those who have been caste away by society. Serve them, do the business of the Lord, and you will find Jesus.

It is offering to share the gospel at any opportunity. It is looking for moments to spread love and kindness and mercy. It is doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with our God. There we will find Jesus.

#### *Movement 6 – Staying in the Family Business*

The initial experience will lead to a change in life. The joy of Christ should compel us to look for Christ. But if we just look again and again to the same source, we will not grow, and we may not find Jesus. But if we listen to his words, and indeed go about God’s business, then we will find Jesus. This means we are called to walk with Jesus, to listen to Jesus and to grow with Jesus. This is a sanctification that we are called to live.

This is what Bushnell called being nurtured into our faith. It is what Aquinas called a grace of sanctification – building up habits to make us holy. It is what Bonhoeffer called a costly grace that demands our lives but gives us full and free and complete life. We don’t worship to reclaim the feeling, but to find again and again Jesus.

My brothers and sisters linger in the sanctuary and become sanctified. Grow in your faith and be sanctified. Look for Jesus in the house of the Lord and in the work of the Lord, and let your holiness grow. Our relationship with Christ will change, but it need not be lost. We can instead grow closer to Jesus, we can grow with Jesus and we can experience the sanctification, the working holiness of the Lord. Let stay with Jesus in the house of the Lord, in the work of the Lord, and in our life, Jesus will be found.

AMEN