

2nd Sunday after Christmas – B
Text – Luke 2:46

After three days they found Him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them & asking them questions.

AFTER THREE DAYS

If you ever spend time living in North Dakota, one thing you'll hear a lot of are 'Ole jokes.' Ole is a very traditional Norwegian name, but the jokes always reveal that Ole isn't exactly the smartest guy in town. Norwegians love to make fun of themselves in that way. The other thing you need to know is that lutefisk is a very traditional Norwegian food.

So Ole goes into a store & asks the clerk for some lutefisk. The clerk looked at him & asked, "Are you Norwegian?"

Ole, clearly offended & angry, says, "Well, yes I am, but let me ask you something. If I asked for Italian sausage, would you ask if I was Italian? Or, if I asked for bratwurst & sauerkraut, would you ask if I was German? Or, if I asked for a Taco, would you ask me if I was Mexican? Would ya, huh? Would Ya?" The clerk answered, "Well, no."

"And if I asked you for some Irish whiskey, would you ask me if I was Irish? If I asked for Scotch, would you ask if I'm Scottish? What about Canadian Bacon, would you ask me if I was Canadian?"

"No, I probably wouldn't."

With self-indignation & more anger, Ole says, "Well, all right then, why did you ask me if I'm Norwegian just because I asked for lutefisk?" The clerk replied, "Because you're at Home Depot." **PAUSE**

In the jokes Ole is always missing something that's so very obvious, which leads into today's Gospel reading, "After three days they found Him in the temple, sitting among the

teachers, listening to them & asking them questions.” As you can imagine, Mary & Joseph are not happy parents when they find Jesus. He was supposed to have been walking home with the rest of the family. Now they’ve lost three days of travel, & they find him hanging out at church.

“And when His parents saw Him, they were astonished. And His mother said to Him, ‘Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father & I have been searching for you in great distress.’” Yet, from Jesus’ point of view, Joseph & Mary apparently missed something that was so very obvious:

“And He said to them, ‘Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’” Luke then comments regarding Mary & Joseph, “And they did not understand the saying that He spoke to them.” They’re the very 1st words of Jesus, recorded in Scripture, & His own parents misunderstand them. That’s a theme for Jesus’ entire ministry.

Despite an angel announcing to Zechariah, Mary & Joseph, the birth of John the Baptist, & that Jesus would be born as Messiah; despite the angel warning Joseph to flee to Egypt before Herod tried to kill the Christ child; despite Anna & Simeon prophesying in the Temple; by the time He’s 12 it seems that Joseph & Mary still had no idea what Jesus came to do.

In spite of numerous predictions of His death, & of His resurrection after three days, the men whom Jesus would spend three years training failed to understand what their Master came to do. In exasperation, Peter finally takes Him aside & begins to rebuke Him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”

Notice that those who are closest to Him, in this case His parents & later His disciples, are recorded as failing to understand Him. As with the Ole jokes, far too often it’s the most obvious things that we miss, & the Christmas season is one of those so very obvious things in our culture. That means it is ripe for misunderstanding. Advent & Christmas are meant to

wake us up to the reality that Jesus will return, & He'll do so when we least expect it. We can count the exact # of shopping days left 'til Christmas, it's 355, but we cannot do so with Christ's return. All of us need to be ready at any moment, every day. Advent was designed to help us in that preparation.

You'd think that Christians would make the effort to remember, & thank God for, all the blessings given in 2008. If Christians really understood why Jesus came, you'd think they'd take time to look ahead & ask God for courage to remain faithful during all the temptations & struggles of the year to come – that they'd want to be in their Father's house on New Year's Eve.

You'd think that on the very last day of the year, Christians would be willing to stop their busyness to reflect upon the 12 months just past, & to rededicate themselves to preparation for the Day when the Son of God returns to end life in this world.

But since only 20 or so of you showed up last Wednesday evening, it's clear to me that no matter how close you think you are to Jesus, like Mary & Joseph, you do not understand why Jesus said He must be in His Father's house. It's apparent that you lack the appropriate desire to be in your Father's house. Your emphasis during Advent & Christmas was misplaced.

Fortunately, we have a merciful & forgiving heavenly Father. When the Law convicts us of our thoughtlessness & indifference to Him, there's a very simple solution. We surrender & allow Yahweh to draw us to Himself. Frequently Christians believe the proper response to the conviction of the Law is to work harder, to be more diligent, to put more effort into keeping it.

But that only results in additional busyness on our part, something we already have too much of. If our spiritual life is weak, we don't need to work harder. We need to work less, & lean upon God more. If we feel a need to escape the craziness of our lives, going to a year-end party is not the solution; spending time in your Father's house is the answer. You may believe

you've moved beyond such a simplistic, childish & unsophisticated spiritual life. You might even feel awkward when singing, "Jesus love me this I know," because that seems beneath you. The Bible's answer to our dilemma is to work less hard, because the only thing we ourselves have the power to do is to resist. Stop resisting the Holy Spirit, & allow Him to work.

Joseph & Mary struggled with understanding that. The Disciples struggled with understanding that. You & I struggle with it too. His family left Jerusalem for home & after three days Jesus was still in the Temple, "sitting among the teachers, listening to them & asking them questions." How long do you think you'd last in a three day Bible study? **PAUSE**

The anxious searching of Jesus' parents for their son typifies their efforts at grasping His true identity & purpose. The anxious searching for meaning & fulfillment in our lives also typifies our efforts to find identity & purpose for our existence. The answer is not to work more anxiously, but to surrender, to repent, & to turn back to our Father's house.

There isn't much pride or sophistication to be found in that solution. It'd be difficult to brag about how great a Christian I am, if all I have are stories of failure & repentance. Yet that is the truth, & it's the only place purpose & meaning for life is to be found. In every way that we fail, in church, in school, in marriage, at our jobs, Jesus has succeeded in our place.

The final result then is that in Christ we never fail. In Christ, all our sins are paid for. In Christ we find the courage & the energy to live the unselfish lives that bring healing to others, & purpose & meaning to us. Try as we might we will never find fulfillment in our efforts, yet our Father in heaven works all things together for our good, in spite of our ignorance & sin.

If we believe that, if we trust Him, then we will find rest in Him, from all our anxious searching. As of today's Gospel reading, Mary & Joseph had not yet found that in their son, & their Lord. They saw him only as a 12 year old boy, instead of as their Savior from sin. That

understanding wouldn't come to Mary until after her son's crucifixion & resurrection. To help us see it, Luke's Gospel is purposely written as a circular journey – the narrative of Jesus' birth, & the whole Gospel, begin & end in the temple at Jerusalem.

Our spiritual life on earth can also be pictured as a circular journey, beginning with Baptism in the church & ending with a funeral in the same place. The OT revolves around the journey of God's people to Jerusalem & His promise to meet them there.

Likewise, the Christian life may be viewed as a pilgrimage to the new Jerusalem, a journey following Christ into the heavenly sanctuary. With all of that we find significance in today's text, "After three days they found Him in the temple." As a 12 year old boy, Jesus was there in response to His heavenly Father's calling. He would return to die years later.

The Feast of the Passover celebrated the greatest redemptive event in the history of Israel, when God delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. Jesus' death replaced it as He delivered all mankind from bondage to sin & damnation. Yet that news is so obvious we often miss it & live our lives in contradiction to it's clear message.

That being said let us turn away from pride & selfishness, returning to our heavenly Father with humble & repentant hearts. It's here in our Father's house that we find rest & healing for this journey we are on to eternal life. It's here in our Father's house that we encourage each other all the more as we see the final Day approaching.

Jesus is coming back, & He's working here, in this place, among this people, that we might be ready whenever that Day arrives. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all human understanding will guard your hearts & your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.