

Something lost?

Colossians 3:12-21; Luke 2:41-52

Merry Christmas. I was reminiscing about the last time I helped lead a Christmas service here at Robertson-Wesley. I was five, going on six. The Verdin family had volunteered to lead Christmas family service. And by *volunteered*, I mean Mom and Dad volunteered; the kids were voluntold. My role was to play quietly behind the soldier with my brand-new truck that had amazing rubber tires. I miss that truck this morning.

But we do grow up, whether or not we want to. Jesus has been growing as well. It seems like just yesterday he was a baby in the manger, yet today we find ourselves 12 years in the future, at least according to the gospel. Mary and Joseph are now faced with the challenge of raising a tween. For those who have raised children, I'm sure they can relate to the dread at this time of life. For those who haven't, it's a period of time when children begin to stretch their fledgling independent muscles and feelings, and at times stretch their parents' patience.

The confusion of the travel home from the Passover celebration left Mary and Joseph searching for their wayward son, assuming he was with other relations or neighbours further ahead or behind them in the caravan. They came to the end of the first day realizing that their son was lost, and they retraced their steps and took three days to find him in the temple, working with the teachers, amazing them with his answers and understanding. This display of how advanced their son has become does not stop them from asking the age-old question, "Where have you been?" "Do you realize how worried he have been?" Yes, I speak from personal experience at this point, and can relate to how they feel. If you have ever lost track of a child in your care, you have feelings of relief and joy at finding that child, even if it's only been a few minutes. And then you're swamped by the angry lashing out: "Where have you been? I've been worried sick about you." This is how I imagine Mary's response when finding Jesus still at the temple. That initial response of anger masks the fear and dread you've been dealing with ever since you realized your child had been missing.

Now a young child's response in return from his or her parents would be, "You were lost!", or a tear-filled reunion, even if it's only been a brief separation. The tween's response, however, is very much like young Jesus' answer to his parents: "I was here all along. You should have known

where I was.” Yeah, I can speak from personal experience on that one too, and I can almost see the rolling of the eyes as he said that to them. That’s another personal experience of eye-rolling from tweens that can really test how tight of a rein you have on your temper.

The scripture states: “He returned home and remained obedient and grew in wisdom and years” but fails to tell us what the rest of the conversation was like on that trip home. I suspect it went on for a long, long time. Some things don’t change, even after over 2000 years.

Losing sight of important things can happen so easily, especially during this Christmas season – a time packed with shopping and parties, family gatherings, feasts and potlucks. It’s a time when we’re deluged with commercials telling us what we need to have a successful Christmas. Pleas for support from dozens of charities competing for the dwindling pool of resources. External pressures to conform and perform and be the best that we can be all crammed into a few short weeks. It’s very easy to lose sight of important things. It’s also easy to assume that these are not lost; they are, well, just around the corner, or back with some friends or relations. It’s a form of avoidance; not lost, just elsewhere. I know I’ll catch up to it sooner or later. No worries.

At the end of the day, it becomes obvious that we are still missing these important things. It’s becoming more too evident over the last two years that our society is losing sight of what is important and what isn’t. Our nation has become even more divided and less tolerant than ever, it seems. Where at one time, it seems, the greater good was the watchword and community was so important. Now it seems to be simply “me”; *my* feelings, *my* beliefs, *my* rights are more important than yours or the community. That horrible imposition of wearing a mask in a public space overrides the importance of protecting each other.

How are we to turn this around? How do we encourage people to stop and think, and decide to look at important issues, past the rhetoric and politics and the self-serving leaders we seem to find everyday? Perhaps some of the answers can be found in our first reading: Paul’s letter to the Colossians. Those powerful words, in part, invites us to “clothe yourself with heartfelt compassion. With kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” If people – all people, whether they’re believers or not – could follow this advice, things, I believe, could change.

Imagine if people could arm themselves with compassion, dress themselves with kindness and humility, how rancorous, angry arguments could be turned into productive, respectful discussions that produce positive action and possibly reaching a consensus. Extreme opponents who dress themselves in gentleness and patience might find a common ground with their opposite numbers and may achieve an end result that can make both sides happy. Employing heartfelt compassion would mean the people being lost in the politics and angry

demonstrations come to the forefront of the issue, cut through the red tape and receive the prompt and genuine help they so desperately need.

While it's not all looking good, it's not all bad news. In the bad news of what sells newspapers are glimmers of light shining through. There are local groups banding together to serve refugees, to see that they have the means and resources to establish a new home in our community and provide support needed to help them transition and to live in their new land. Individuals band together to replace a stolen bike; Christians across North America are speaking out against those who use the Bible to suppress those in need. Social media has actually been employed to put pressure on governments and bring their transgressions to the light of day. Social media – that double edged sword that allows vocal minorities a global soapbox to spread a message of hate is also being employed to spread a message of hope and links where people in despair can turn to for help and support. Closer to home, many people across Alberta are calling for moderation and calm, and an end to unacceptable threats of violence. Those voices are faint, but there are calls for moderation and calm and soon they may be heard throughout the province.

Hope is there, but it is still so easy to lose sight of what should be important. What can we do to find our way back? Like Mary and Joseph, we need to stop. Realize what is missing, and begin the search. Keep searching and not count the days. It took three days of searching to find their missing son. Should we not be willing to spend at least that much time and even more to find our own way back to important things? The things that really matter. Amen.