

HAVE YOU FOUND JESUS?

Luke 2:39-52

Have you found Jesus? I've heard that question a lot. For example, one of my favorite movies is "Forrest Gump" and in that movie there is a scene where Lt. Dan Taylor asks Forrest, "Have you found Jesus, Gump?" Forrest replies, "I didn't know I was supposed to be looking for him." That's funny because, I don't know about you, but I have found that question.

What's with this business of finding Jesus? Just yesterday we celebrated Christmas. Jesus Christ is born. Hallelujah! Let the angels sing. Shepherds quake at the sight. But that gives us a new problem. How do we find him?

Several years ago, we heard this question more often than today. That makes me wonder why we don't hear it more often. How come we don't hear that question more often? Could it be that we've already found him, and we don't need to look anymore? Perhaps we did and I missed the announcement. Could it be that we just don't care about finding him? Sadly, that could be true for some of us. It's clear to me that some people could care less about Jesus or God or the church. Perhaps the saddest thing to me is that I think some of us have just tired of the search.

This biblical story is about finding Jesus. It's about Jesus being separated from his earthly parents. He's lost. Unlike Forrest Gump, they knew they needed to search for him. They go searching for him, but it raises some interesting points about our spiritual search for Jesus too.

Strangely, when Mary and Joseph first discover that Jesus is missing, at first, they don't search for him at all. That's hard for me to fathom as a parent. Why wouldn't you drop everything and go looking for them? I would, but Joseph and Mary don't. They assume he is somewhere in the caravan, hanging out with friends and family. I don't know why they didn't feel the need to confirm that, but they didn't.

Now, sometimes our search for Jesus is like that. Some of us don't find Jesus simply because we aren't looking for him. Those people who aren't Christians aren't looking because they could care less. Those of us who are Christians, figure, as Mary and Joseph, that we know where to find him or that we've already found them.

There's a family story about sister Cynthia. Cynthia is a retired MD who lives in Washington State. When she was a kid, she asked my dad why she had to go to school. After all, she already knew how to read and write. Sadly, many of us have that same attitude about our faith. Why should we go to Sunday School or worship or bible study? I already know the basics. I already believe in Jesus.

In my opinion, fundamentalism has fueled this response. The chief question that you hear asked is, "Have you been saved?" The hope behind that question is that the person will then commit their life to Jesus. The obvious question that should follow this is, "So you believe,

now. That's great! What's next?" That's not an idle question. Being saved, and believing in Jesus Christ is only the first step. It's the beginning of the Christian Journey. It doesn't mean you've found Jesus. It means you've started looking for him. That's a journey that will consume your entire life.

Going back to the story in the scripture the next thing we find is that it takes Mary and Joseph a whole day for them to decide that they better look for Jesus. Be honest. Don't we often assume that there's going to be plenty of time? Our lives are full of so many things that we just put our faith on the back burner. After all, it can wait. We think there's going to be plenty of time so it's rather low on our list of priorities.

Years ago, when I was in Jackson, I was talking to a pastor there. He was telling me that before moving to town, he commissioned a study of the community and the local people's attitude toward faith. What the study found wanted religious nurture for their children, even if they were not themselves active in the faith. I would hate to tell those parents, but they were wasting their time and money. It amazes me that people will go to their children's ball games, because they say they want to support their children, but they won't go to church with their children. I don't understand that point of view, but I guess it happens.

Yet another reason we have a hard time is displayed in the story. Mary and Joseph took three days to find Jesus because when they went back to Jerusalem, they looked in the wrong place. It amazed Jesus when he learned of it. He said to them, "Did you not know that I must be in my father's house?" We aren't finding Jesus because we aren't looking in the right places.

The tragic thing is that often times even the church isn't the right place. Several times through the years, I've heard people say they don't go to church because they don't feel they get anything out of it. I understand that reaction. They may go to the church and find a beautiful building. They may go there and find a beautiful service of worship. But do they find people there who so deeply love the Lord that it's apparent to everyone their lives are being transformed? Do they find people there who can tell them how to find Jesus?

Sadly, they often don't. I don't think that's the fault of the people who are there. I think some years back the church forgot how to help people find Jesus. Even our pastors don't know because we don't teach them how anymore. It was a painful realization for me to discover that I didn't know how to do this. I was raised in a family that went to church and valued church. I spent three years in seminary. I've been pastor for 25 years. I've spent countless hours studying the scripture and teaching it to others in Sunday School and in preaching. It wasn't easy for me to admit that I didn't know how to lead people to Jesus; truthfully, I was never taught how. The good news is that I am learning, and hope to bring it to you in the new year. Stay tuned for further developments on that front.

The scripture describes Jesus as growing in wisdom, stature and favor with God and men. Finding Jesus is an undertaking that forces us to grow, painfully at times, in wisdom, stature and favor with God. If we set out along that path, we will find Jesus- it's inevitable.

If you find yourself searching for Jesus today, I have a clue for you. Want to hear the real secret of finding Jesus. We don't really find him. He finds us. What we really do is open our eyes to the reality that Jesus has been there all along. Wherever we are, whatever we're doing, he finds us and invites us into a new life of freedom, which only his grace can provide. In that new life of freedom, we don't find Jesus-again, he's been there all along. Instead, we find our true selves.

Jesus loves you. He's right there in front of us, if we can just slow down enough to take a look and see. We don't have to find him. He's right there. He wants to be in a deep, abiding relationship with us. He wants to show his love to us. He wants to share his wisdom with us. He wants us grow in wisdom and stature with God and others. If that's what you want too, you don't need to find Jesus. You just need to open your eyes and see that he is right there in front of you.