

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 12/26/2021



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

First Sunday After Christmas

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, December 26th

Luke 2:41-52

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Leaving Jesus Behind

As the birth narrative concludes, the Gospel lection features the story of the boy Jesus visiting the temple with his parents at the age of twelve. This text contains several things worth noting. It is the only canonical account of a childhood occurrence of Jesus. It contains His first recorded words. The boy Jesus is introduced as a scholar. We read how Jesus could not be found for three days, perhaps a prefigure of some 20 years later when Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried only to be resurrected on the third day. It contains an account of how Mary disciplined Jesus. We read how Mary and Joseph (although Joseph is not mentioned by name) do not understand Jesus' explanation of why He was in the temple. We also learn how Jesus returned with His parents and how He was submissive to them. The passage concludes with an account of the rest of Jesus' childhood and early adulthood - Jesus increased in wisdom and in favor with God and man.

Of particular interest to any disciple of Christ is Jesus' response (v.49) as to why He stayed behind in the temple - "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be about my father's business?" Here Jesus shows an absolute sense of mission and commitment to purpose. This is also a theme that continues throughout the rest of Luke's Gospel. As the new calendar year approaches, this text challenges us to reflect on our own calling and commitment to that call, no matter what season of life we are in.

Luke 2:41-52 Commentary

The infancy narrative concludes where it began - in the temple.

⁴¹ Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom.

First Century, God-fearing Jews were required to make one pilgrimage to Jerusalem each year to celebrate at least one of the major festivals (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles). From the opening lines we know Jesus was raised in a pious household since we read His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of Passover. The distance was about 80 miles (about a three day's journey). Jewish boys became men at 13 when they completed the "Son of the Covenant" ceremony (this has since been replaced by the Bar Mizvah). While Jesus was not yet of age, boys would accompany their fathers a year or two earlier as part of their preparation.

⁴³ And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, ⁴⁴ but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they

began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances,⁴⁵ and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.

After seven days of celebration, Mary and Joseph head home with their group. Unbeknown to them, Jesus stayed behind in the temple. After one day's journey back to Nazareth they begin to look for Jesus and can't find him. Pilgrims typically travelled in large caravans with women and children in one group and the men in another. It was logical for Mary to assume Jesus would now be traveling with Joseph. Joseph may have assumed Jesus was still with Mary since he was still not yet of age. In any case, it takes them a day before they realize Jesus was not with their caravan. We can assume it took another day to travel back to Jerusalem and thus they must have spent the entire third day looking for Jesus in any number of places. Being lost for three days will come to mean much more later in Jesus' life.

⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

Evidently the temple was not the first place Mary and Joseph looked since it took them a full day of searching to find Him. They found Jesus there sitting among the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. On such a prominent feast, the members of the Sanhedrin would come out on the terrace and teach. Luke states, "*And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers*" (v.47). Clearly Luke wants us to be aware that Jesus already shows signs of possessing great wisdom. Twenty or so years later, Jesus would be *The Teacher* in this same place. The next generation of the people who are currently amazed at Jesus' understanding and responses will be the ones who seek to kill Him in 20 years or so.

⁴⁸ 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 and I have been searching for you in great distress." ⁴⁹ And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

When Mary and Joseph finally encounter Jesus in the temple it must have been an emotional moment: a combination of relief, exasperation, and amazement. I am sure Luke did not capture the full and raw verbatim comments Mary made to Jesus (and perhaps to Joseph when they realized Jesus was missing!). Luke captured nothing from Joseph. Regardless, Jesus' response is the main focal point. I am sure Mary and Joseph were surprised by Jesus' response. How their little boy had suddenly changed!

The key word here is "*must*". The Greek word used is "*dei*" typically rendered as "*must*" or "*it is necessary*". Some translations render this as "*had to*" (NASB, NIV) but the word "*must*" more accurately conveys the obligation or compulsion Jesus is under. There are several other "*dei*" statements in Luke that pertain to Jesus. Here are some:

but he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose." (4:43)

"The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." (9:22)

Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.' (13:33)

And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." (19:5)

For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors.' For what is written about me has its fulfillment." (22:37)

What is therefore unmistakable from Luke's Gospel is the clarity that Jesus has regarding His identity (my Father's house), His purpose, and the intensity and resoluteness of His commitment to it. Even at 12 years old Jesus could not compromise God's purpose in His life.

⁵⁰ And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. ⁵¹ And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

This is the first time recorded in Luke of the many examples where Jesus is misunderstood. We also see Jesus returns to Nazareth and is submissive to His parents. This illustrates Jesus wanted to avoid any misconception that His actions were out of disobedience. The intimate words about Mary treasuring such memories suggest Luke must have either talked to Mary firsthand or a close acquaintance. One wonders whether Mary would remember this time in the frantic time after His resurrection when she thought His body was missing.

The final verse stresses the humanity of Jesus. He learned the same way other humans do.

Reflections

As we reflect on Jesus' intensity around his purpose so evident at an early age, we are encouraged to reflect on our own purpose and ministry, no matter what season of life we are in. Our calling does not expire until we do. Luke was very clear when he used the word "*dei*." What words would we use to describe our attitude and mindset towards our own calling? "Should do?" "Have to do?" "Must do?" Another theme in the Gospel lection is the idea of learning and growing in wisdom. What plans do we have in place to ensure that by the end of this upcoming New Year we will not be in the same place as we are today when it comes to our learning and growth as a disciple? What specific plans are we making to spend more time in God's Word? For some, this may be the year you commit to teaching Bible Study or bringing the message of the Gospel to the world.

As we approach 2022, let us be intense and resolute in how we go about our Father's business and live out our mission and purpose as disciples of Christ. Let us fully claim and embrace our identity as Christians and what it means to be in Christ. Let us be willing to adopt an "it must be done" attitude. Let us be willing to take bold action. Let us take Jesus out into our communities by both our actions and our words. Anything less and we will be guilty of leaving Jesus behind in our church buildings.

