

Our Gospel reading for today is the only thing we ever hear about with Jesus as a boy. Everything else that we hear about in the Bible comes from his adulthood, when he's preaching, when he's teaching, when he's suffering, and so forth. And I think because of that, we can get a little bit sentimental about a passage like this. Grown-ups love to hear about what kids are doing, after all. It's very touching. It's a very emotional kind of thing. And that can color how we look at a passage like this. And more than this, the passage itself is pretty exciting. It's very dramatic. It's very easy to get caught up in the feelings and the emotions of this. Because what parent hasn't worried about a child that they can't find, especially one that has been left behind? All of this can blind us to the main point of this passage. Because the main point of this passage, Christians, is not about family. And the main point about this passage is not about Mary and Joseph's feelings. The main point of this passage is what Jesus is doing. Jesus is in his Father's house. Jesus is carrying out his Father's business. Jesus is focused on what truly matters.

So what exactly is happening in this reading? The Law required that every man in Israel had to go to Jerusalem every year for the Passover. Exodus chapter 23 says: "Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God." And this was one of those times. Passover was one of the three. And so Joseph, being a righteous man, is doing what God wants him to do. He's going to Jerusalem without a second thought. But his family also goes with him, not because they have to, but because they're righteous too. They want to worship the Lord as well. And so that's why Jesus is in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.

But on their way back up to Nazareth, they get ready to go, only to leave Jesus behind. Now, we should not think of Mary and Joseph as being negligent here. They are not bad parents. The fact that they go back to Jerusalem all those miles, covering them again, shows that they are concerned for Jesus. They're not bad parents. What has happened here is simply because of a misunderstanding. Because in those days, when people traveled like this, they went together in a group, often with a lot of their extended family. But that group was segregated into smaller groups: the women and the young children would go together in a group, and the men and the older boys would go together in a different part of the group. It's kind of like churches used to do, at least in separating children from adults. I know you used to do that here. It's the same kind of thing. But Jesus was twelve years old at the time. He was at that age where he's starting to become a man. So in other words, he's no longer just a young child, but he's also not quite a man either. He's at that awkward stage where he doesn't really belong to either. And so what happened simply was that each parent thought that Jesus was with the other. Joseph thought, "Well, Jesus must be with Mary, so I don't need to worry about him." And Mary thought, "Well, he must be with Joseph. I don't need to worry about him. He's somewhere in the group. We'll get along just fine." But when they discover the truth when they stopped for the night, they hurried back to Jerusalem in order to find him.

And I think we as parents can easily sympathize with Mary and Joseph here. How anxious they must've been! How worried they must've been looking for Jesus! Asking questions like, "Where is he? Is everything okay? Is he going to be okay? What's going to happen?" And for three days, they could not find him. Is it any wonder, then, that Mary, when she finally does find him, says in verse 48 of our reading: "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." She's feeling what every parent has felt: that mixed feeling of joy and frustration, wanting to hug and to strangle your child at the same time. We know how that feels.

But Jesus shows us the main point of this reading, so that we don't get caught up in those feelings. Jesus says a remarkable thing to his mother, verse 49: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Jesus gently rebukes his own mother. It's as if he was saying: "Have you forgotten, mother? Have you forgotten what the angels said about me? Have you forgotten what the shepherds said about me? Have you forgotten with the Magi and Simeon and Anna all said about me? Have you forgotten who I am? I have been sent into this world for a purpose, and now I am going to carry it out. I'm going to do what I have been sent to do. I must be in my Father's business. I must be in my Father's house. No need to fret and to worry. No need to look for me. I am exactly where I need to be."

In other words, Jesus is focused on the most important thing. Jesus is focused on what truly matters. Because nothing else in all the world can compare with doing the will of his Father. Not even his stepfather and his mother, as important as they are, can compare with doing what his heavenly Father wants him to do. Nothing is going to get in the way of Jesus doing what he has been sent to do. It's as Jesus says in a different part in the Gospels, Luke chapter 14: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." To be focused on God is truly important in a way that not even family can be. Because, yes, family is important. Yes, his stepfather and mother are important. After all, he goes back to Nazareth with them and submits himself to them. They are important, but they could not compare with being in his Father's house. They could not compare with being about his Father's business.

Christians, do we have the same focus on the things of God? What is the most important thing in our lives? Because our life is full of responsibility. We have work to take care of. We have chores to do. We have a family to provide for. And our life is full of activities too, things like school or vacations or sports or entertainment or whatever it may be. And all of those things are good. None of them are bad. God wants us to do our work. God wants us to care for our family. And we need to relax and to take it easy so that the cares and anxieties of this world don't become too much for us. These things are just fine. But do we let them get in the way of the things of God? If it came to choosing between these things and the things of God, choosing the things of this world and the things of God, which one would we choose? Does our work keep us away from prayer? Do our activities and being busy prevent us from coming to church? We need to ask ourselves: what is the most important thing: the things of this world or the things of God?

But we might want to ask: why are the things of God so important? All of these other things are important too, right? We need to do our work. We need to relax. We need to do all of these other things. Why is it good for us to be in our Father's house? What makes this so important?

Three reasons, Christians. First of all, these things are important because the things of God are eternal. They will never pass away. They will never change or be taken away from us. Everything else in life is going to go away. Nothing on earth lasts forever. Our work will come to an end. Our activities will cease. Our days will come to an end. Heaven and earth itself will pass away. But the things of God last forever. The things of God never come to an end. The Word of our Lord endures forever. And in eternity when we are with God, we will see him face to face, to worship him before his throne forever. So why chase after the wind? Why chase after that which is passing away anyway? Let us be about our Father's business, and let us be in our Father's house.

The second reason why these things are so important is because of the peace and the joy which comes from God, a peace beyond all human understanding. Because our lives are filled with anxieties. Our lives are filled with uncertainty. We're always running after something. We're always trying to get something done. In fact, we do it so much that if we stop even for a little bit, we become anxious about that. Should I be doing something? Should I be taking care of something? I can't just sit still. But here, Christians, we find peace in the things of God. God gives us joy in the midst of our sorrows. Jesus says in Matthew chapter 11: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He says in John 14: "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled. Neither let them be afraid." Where else other than here, Christians, can we find such peace? Where else other than here can we find this rest, this joy? Come and be refreshed in the presence of your God!

And the last reason is because it is here that we meet God face-to-face. It is here that we come before him. Yes, God is everywhere. Make no mistake about that. If we didn't have God, we wouldn't be able to work. We wouldn't be able to go anywhere. We wouldn't even be able to travel. We need God in everything in our lives. Without him, we cannot do anything. But it is here that we meet God in a way unlike anywhere else. Let me use an analogy. It's kind of like water. If you think about it, water is everywhere. The air is full of it. We call it humidity. We're surrounded by it all the time. But if we want to satisfy our thirst, we don't get it from the air. We go to the source to get the water that we need. And it's the same way with God, Christians. God is everywhere, it is true. But it is here in the things of God that we get that living water, which if we drink of it, we will never thirst again. God is dwelling among his people. God is enthroned on the praises of Israel. We meet him here in his Word. We meet him here in prayer. We meet him here in his sacraments. So, come! Come and meet your God.

So Christians, don't be distracted by the things of this world. Keep your focus on that which is truly important. Keep your focus on the things of God, because he is the one thing necessary. Come and hear his Word, because it is the Word of life and truth. Come and pray to him, because he has promised to hear you through Jesus Christ. Come and receive him, given to you today for the forgiveness of your sins. Let us be in our Father's house. Let us be about our Father's business, because he is the good portion which will never be taken away. Heaven and earth will disappear, but our God goes on forever.

Let us pray. Father in heaven, though we are troubled by many things, you are the one thing needful. Be with us this day as you have promised to be, so that we may sing our praises and give thanks for all that you have done; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.