

January 13, 2008

**Astounded!**

Luke 2:41-52

Here's the story to strike *FEAR* into any parent's heart. It's the story of a **lost child** and parents driven by fear and dread searching and searching and searching.

- We remember the searches parents have conducted for their missing children in Iowa.
- We saw the young faces on milk cartons and watched interviews with tear-stained adults on television.

Your child... gone missing.... Hours pass. Then days.

You ask all the relatives and all the friends.

You retract steps looking for leads.

You ask strangers. You mount search parties.

You fall into bed exhausted because there's nothing else you *can* do but you cannot sleep.

Memories flood over you like a tsunami

- some argument when you said things you wish now, oh sweet Lord how you wish now, that you'd never said them.

- And the tender trust your child put in you, thinking you could solve every problem and sooth every fear, you remember it all with vivid clarity.

- Missing! **YOUR CHILD!** How could this happen? And you beat yourself up for being such a terrible parent who'd lose a child, your very own child.

Mary and Joseph hadn't even missed him for a whole day. They'd been on the road a whole day and never wondered about their son,

- their only son, this son about whom angels sang and shepherds rejoiced,
- this boy who, at his tender age of eight days was saddled with prophecies of greatness by Simeon and Anna, here in this city,
- "Mary", said the old prophet, your own heart shall be pierced. " What this the piercing? How could it be. He was only a boy. He'd had no time to cause the rising and falling of many in Israel. And where was God?
- They'd gone to Jerusalem for prayers and festival. They'd gone to Jerusalem, every year. There'd never been trouble before. This special, gifted child of theirs, precocious and delightful, had always stayed with them before. But not this time.

They **ran**, bumping against the flow of traffic on the road, all those thousands of pilgrims returning home from the Passover festival, **□HAVE YOU SEEN OUR BOY? TELL US, HAVE YOU HEARD ANYTHING ABOUT A MISSING CHILD?□** "No." Always the answer was, "No. Haven't heard a thing. Don't know the boy Jesus. Sorry."

At the end of the endless day the walls of Jerusalem come into view.

- It's a big city. They're small town people.
- And he's a small boy, only twelve, a child really, even though he's almost

a man. It'll be years before he has to shave. If he has years left to live. Could someone sell him into slavery? Did some wild animal chance upon him? Is he injured, lying alone somewhere in terrible pain, unable to find help? Is he sick? A boy alone, unattended, he won't know how to take care of himself. He'll be wanting his mother.

Three days in the city, tracing and retracing their steps, hurriedly, stumbling in their haste - maybe he's at the bazaar - maybe he's gone back to where we spent the night - maybe he's down at the river where he and the others went to play - maybe he's hungry - maybe he's hurt - maybe he's in the hands of evil doers who'll sell him into slavery - maybe he's still alive.

Each day brings new heartaches. Each day offers less hope. Each day is harder - there are fewer places to look. There are fewer leads to follow.

There are fewer people left to ask, **□HAVE YOU SEEN OUR BOY?□**

Who knows why they thought to look in the temple? You wouldn't expect a boy to be in the temple.

- Young men and old men went in the temple, children and women were only in the outer courts or on the porticoes. The festivals were not at the temple.
- Sacrifices and solemn things went on there, high and holy things were there.
- Money changers were there, with all the animals, those perfect animals, brought in from the surrounding countryside to be slaughtered

for God, they were there.

- And the priests. But not a boy. They'd run off a motherless boy.

Not this boy. Joseph and Mary could not help but explode at him, the way parents always explode when the panic over the safety of their child recedes and the anger that rode on its back leaps up.

**□ WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?  
DON'T YOU CARE THAT WE'VE BEEN SCARED OUT OF OUR  
WITS LOOKING FOR YOU □ THREE DAYS IN THIS CITY LOOKING  
FOR YOU □ WE ALL SHOULD HAVE BEEN HOME LONG AGO  
BUT WE COULDN'T GO HOME BECAUSE WE WERE SEARCHING  
DAY AND NIGHT FOR YOU! □**

*This is where the story gets interesting.*

Jesus has been in the temple all this time, day and night, night and day, talking, exploring ideas, holding his own with the scholars, deliberating on the inscrutable will and way of God. A twelve-year-old boy might know something, but not too much.

- He's been in synagogue school.
- He's memorized psalms and torah law.
- He knows a lot if he's been paying attention.

But he's no match for the scholars who debate with ferocity and passion as they fling their arms about and raise their voices and dare anyone to refute

the logic of their arguments. They are Jewish scholars. It is their way to contend with each other and to forge from all the arguments a pathway of understanding. It takes years, studying the history, learning the letter of the law, praying day and night, meditating until it get into the innermost parts of the being. A boy of twelve, no matter how fine a rabbi he had back in synagogue school, would want to endure more than a passing moment of such passionate discourse.

But these scholars were **astounded**.

- His wisdom and understanding amazed them.
- His grasp of the kernel of the matter astonished them.

He'd met them square on for a whole day, then another, then another. Oh the joy of it. He would surely become a mighty prophet like an oak tree to be a bulwark for the people. Maybe he'd become a scholar of the law and devote his life, here in this very sacred place, the golden-domed temple, plumbing the depths of the revelations of God... until these two pesky parents showed up, demanding their son's attention, scolding him for their petty worries. No wonder he'd fled to the temple to taste the pure deep waters of holy reflection with those two on his back all the time.

**“DIDN’T YOU KNOW,”** he calmly stilled the argument, **“THAT I WOULD BE IN MY FATHER’S HOUSE?”**

Sure he may have been a whiz kid who knew the answers to the perplexing questions when all his friends would have been out herding the sheep or

playing some games or learning the trade which would be their livelihood. Of course he was intelligent, more intelligent, they'd suppose, than any of the scholars. None of *them* had sat in the temple when they were young. It was unheard of. But as bright as he was, and he was, we all know that; the more telling thing is his question back to his parents: **“WHY WERE YOU SEARCHING FOR ME? DIDN'T YOU KNOW THAT I MUST BE IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE?”** Not your house back in Nazareth, this house. Have you not known me for twelve whole years, didn't you remember the angel and the prophets Simeon and Anna and the shepherds and all that and you haven't figured it out yet? Doesn't it make sense to you that the temple would be the first place you'd come looking for me? You think I'm interested in herding sheep or building houses?

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” It's the question every kid hears over and over. And, for most of us, the answers change as we grow and have a chance to look around at what interested us and what might be our heart's desire.

Jesus knew the answer. Years before his beard even came in he knew without the shadow of a doubt, and nothing else mattered more. God's house. The law of God. The will and ways of God. The covenants struck with the people and what they meant. Jesus knew and let his parents know: he was God's son, not theirs.

This would have been an excellent time for Mary and Joseph to become really really afraid. There are no plays in the parent's play-book for when

your child is the son of God. And everybody knows what happens to the prophets of God: they die violent deaths, they pierce your own heart.

I knew when I was twelve years old that I wanted to be a servant of Jesus Christ. I was never the bright one sitting in the center of the circle of theological debate but, from the edges, with a kind of open-mouth **astonishment** at him - the *PURITY* of him, the *INTELLIGENCE* of him, the energy of him - I just loved him and wanted to draw close to him and dog his footsteps and let whatever may become of me be because of him.

It has always seemed odd to me that there are people who find Jesus boring or irrelevant as if he has nothing to say about their lives or to their souls when quite the contrary is true. His ideas about what is really important in this world, what is of first order for people and politics, what is deeply personal and always very public are revolutionary. He turns the world upside down - or - I believe - he turns the world right-side up. We've got it wrong. **He's** got it right.

This uncontrollable young man, this fascinating, uncontainable, enigmatic, explosive, dazzling honest young man really is the hope of the world. His way is the way that works. Those of us who follow after him really do come out right in the end because of it. He takes everything we've got and gives back such an abundance that he overflows into us and makes us more, makes us like him. That's a good thing. That's **astonishing**.

Don't you want to follow someone like him - someone who so knows the human heart and mind that even as a boy he confounded the scholars with his insight and as a man amazed them with his hold on God? Of all the persons we admire and pattern our lives after, is there one who even comes close to him?

Will you come with me as we go after him? He'll likely be in God's house... in the people who are there looking, he'll likely be teaching and touching, healing and feeding, setting free and gathering in. It's a good thing. Come and see.