

Runaway Teenager

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church December 29th, 2024 –Luke :2:41-52)

When I was about seven years old, I packed some clothes and essentials into my little blue school case, and went and sat in the car, and waited for my dad to find me, so that I could ask him to take me to my Grandma's – I was running away.

He refused to take me, and I was too little to walk there, I guess he talked me round and eventually I went back into the house. Years later he told me he should have taken me (my grandma only lived one suburb away) because he knew she would have sent me back home straight away.

Have you ever run away? Do you remember why? Do you remember what happened next?

Or perhaps you have gotten lost or been separated from your parents? How did that feel?

Can you imagine how your parents would have felt or perhaps you have experienced the fear and panic when you have become separated from a child, even if it was only for a minute or two.

In our story today we see Jesus growing up. We know very little about Jesus after his birth (we know the family present Jesus in the temple when he is about eight days old, and then they escape to Egypt as refugees before returning home to Nazareth.) After that, we hear nothing about him until he is twelve and goes with his family to Jerusalem (which is about 145km each way) each year for Passover. A journey that would have taken several days each way. From the story, it appears they travelled with others to the city and the temple.

Jesus is growing up. We know that growing up is never easy. For parents it is filled with anxiety as they watch their children assert their independence and do things their own way. There is anxiety as they watch a child leave the nest or sometimes, they can't bring themselves to cut the apron strings. There are sleepless nights waiting for doors to be unlocked so that they know their child is safely home. There is disappointment when they announce that they don't want to go on the family holiday anymore. It is really difficult to watch them spread their wings, and go out exploring the world, and most of you here have had that experience. No matter how much you want them to grow up and be their own person when it is happening it is very difficult.

I have no doubt that Mary and Joseph had the same fears and anxieties as Jesus and his brothers grew up. Children though do need to become more and more independent and become their own person.

Jesus is growing up, on the verge of becoming a man and in the process of figuring out who he really is. On this trip to Jerusalem Jesus stays behind and does not return with the family – he is in the temple talking to the teachers, asking questions and perhaps he gets caught up in it all and doesn't realise that the family have left to go home. Or perhaps he does and is just exercising some newfound independence. Clearly there is a bit of a mix up as it takes Mary and Joseph a day or two to realise Jesus is not with them, perhaps they thought he was with family or friends in the group.

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Fearful and perhaps angry, yet hoping he was safe they hurry back many kilometres to try and find him. They search everywhere and eventually find him in the temple talking to the teachers. Their anger, hysteria, fear is understandable, isn't that what happens to us when we find a child to be safe, when we have been so worried, our reaction after perhaps hugging them is to give them a good telling off – that's how love and worry seem to mix. Mary and Joseph want to know why he'd done this to them, that's a completely normal parenting question isn't it? After all they have loved and nurtured him, feed and cared for him, they simply needed to know where he was and that he was safe. And they could have done without the couple of days of panic and worry.

Now Jesus' response is a typical teenager response, although it possibly is not the most helpful way to respond to parents who are worried sick. Should Mary and Joseph have known he would be in the temple?

After the whole fiasco we are told that Jesus returns home with Mary and Joseph where he was obedient, where he grew both physically and in wisdom and in favour with people. No doubt Mary and Joseph continued to nurture him, to teach him the ways of faith and little by little allow him his independence. And no doubt Jesus learnt from this experience, and all the others he had with family and friends back home in Nazareth. Jesus, like any other child or teenager is tackling the task of understanding his particular place in this curious and world, each day encountering fear and joy (his own and others), each day's experiences becoming markers for his growing sense of humanity.¹

And Mary remembers, ponders and treasures all that happens in those years, including this event at Passover in Jerusalem.

This is the full extent of our knowledge of Jesus as a child and teenager, the next time we meet him he is in his thirties.

So, what do we learn of Jesus the teenager as he exerts his independence? Clearly he has an extraordinary knowledge of matters of faith, his questions and his understanding amazed those teachers with whom he dialogued. Here we get a glimpse of what the growing Jesus will become – one who understands the things of God and who will amaze (and will sometimes upset) all who hear him teach. In this story Jesus now claims for himself that special relation to God which was the real meaning of his dedication as an infant.

In this episode we find Jesus clothed in love by Mary and Joseph but also growing in wisdom. We are catching a glimpse of what Jesus will become, of who God is calling him to be.

As we stand at the threshold of a New Year, I pray that we both individually and as a church community might continue to learn and grow in faith, that we might engage in the holy task of questioning and wondering, that we might be curious about how God is calling us to live in this world, that we might be truly engaged in living out our faith in the world.

¹ From p. 104 'Imaging the Word, Vol 1' quote by Jann Cather Weaver

Let me conclude with a poem by Andrew King.²

IF WE MISS YOU

If we miss you leaving the festival
leaving the celebrations and memories
leaving the feasting and traditions
leaving the prayers and the songs;

if we miss you leaving the festival
returning to the stresses and pressures
returning to demands and deadlines
returning to the everyday routines –

we can find you in places of peacefulness
we can find you where wisdom is spoken
we can find you where holiness is nurtured
we can find you where God's love is shared

and we will find you back with us in our travels
we will find you still with us at home
we will find you growing stronger within us
your grace embracing us, our hearts your own.

² From 'A Poetic Kind of Place' Andrew King's lectionary weblog [Poem For The Sunday Lectionary \(Christmas 1, Yr C\) | A Poetic Kind Of Place](#)