

“The Inconvenience of Jesus”

by Pastor Steve Hammond on 12/15/19

Text: Luke 2:41-52, at FBC of Newport, NH

//41 Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. 42 When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. 43 After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. 44 Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. 45 When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48 When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."//

—Luke 2:41-48 (NIV)

I do wish there were more episodes of Jesus' life between his infancy and his public ministry around age thirty. But if we are to have just one story from Jesus' private life, God in his wisdom knows *this* is the glimpse he wants us to have. Here Jesus is a twelve year old boy, which is to say he is as much of a 'full grown' boy as he can become. After this he will be at the start of his becoming a full grown man. It's such a crucial time. I see it as representing the whole of Jesus' private life, as well as aspects of his entire life. I'm including it here in the midst of our Advent Sundays so as to broaden our focus beyond the simple coming of a baby, while not losing that focus entirely. Jesus came as a baby. Jesus also came as an toddler, as a boy, as a young man, and as the man who would save the world on that cross—in the prime of his life.

Jesus also came in a way that was inconvenient, even troublesome, even when he was a boy.

According to Luke, Jesus' family made the journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem every year for the Passover. They would travel with not only the relatively large family, but also with extended family and friends. This was safer and surely more enjoyable. With such a group the trip would take a good four or five days.

This makes me think of my days growing up in Maine. Every summer we would travel from my home town of Pittsfield (Maine, not NH) to Bailey Island. We'd crowd the five kids, mother, father, possibly a grandmother and also a small dog into the car and ride for an hour and a half. You think that's bad? My uncle Steve had a family of seven kids and he managed to put his whole family into a Volkswagen Beetle for a two hour drive from Bangor. From a kid's perspective the trip was fun. Can't speak for the

adults. Then, when we arrived we would have all these relatives and new neighbors to do things with.

There must have been some of that sense for Jesus and his family on these trips to Jerusalem. A special time to be traveling with one another, to talk at length, play “I spy,” and maybe even squabble at times. And to finally arrive, prepare and gather for the Passover meal filled with food for both the stomach and the soul.

But at least this one time there was a serious problem that developed, centering on the boy Jesus. Mary and Joseph lost Jesus!

Given the large number of people in their traveling group, plus the fact that they make this trip every year, it’s not hard to picture them trusting Jesus to be taking care of himself when it came time for everyone to leave. Luke says Mary and Joseph thought Jesus was “in their company.” He just wasn’t in their sight as they left. Helicopter parents they were not. In fact, I like the thought that they gave Jesus such room to roam at that age. Keep in mind children did not turn into teenagers in Jewish culture in that day. They went from being children to being adults. So responsibilities were surely not a foreign idea for Jesus.

Having said all that, though, it was at the end of a day’s travel that Mary and Joseph discovered that Jesus was nowhere to be found amongst the families. Imagine that shocking realization coming over them. Imagine how their minds have speculated and worried all the next day, as they race back to Jerusalem, about what might have happened to Jesus. He could be hurt. He could have gotten into the wrong kind of crowd and into some serious trouble.

He could be dead. Yes. Surely they wondered about that.

It’s too easy for us to say, “Well, he couldn’t be dead. Because he’s God’s Son. So he couldn’t be dead, or even in all that much trouble.” That’s easy for us to say. We weren’t there. And we’ve read the story end to end. But even though Jesus’ parents knew of his miraculous birth and of his destiny with God’s plan of salvation, it’s not like they knew every detail of that plan. Think how the disciples twenty years later would also panic, even though they knew—in much more detail—the plan of God for Jesus. They feared Jesus was dead because he was, in fact, dead. And the immediacy of the moment took over their feelings and conduct as they wondered what was to happen next. Much like with Joseph and Mary, I suspect.

I speculate about all this, but I don’t think it’s much of a stretch. One thing I am quite certain they did not wonder about, given the exchange with Jesus when they found him, was expecting Jesus to have simply chosen to stay behind in order for him to be at the temple longer than scheduled.

Sure enough, after three days, Mary and Joseph eventually tracked down their boy Jesus. He was at the temple in one of the places where people gather to hear the teachers. He was asking questions, carefully listening to what the teachers had to say. And when Jesus himself spoke up, people were amazed at his understanding and the answers he could give to questions.

In order for this report to be given, probably by Mary herself, she and Joseph must have paused for some time and listened to the discussion before rushing right in upon Jesus. But when the time was right, his mother did approach Jesus and asked him what any parent would have asked. **“Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”**

Now, before hearing Jesus’ reply, which most of you know by heart, you have to pause and appreciate such a natural question. They were normal parents; they were worried sick. But Jesus, along with being God incarnate, was also a natural twelve year old boy. And at this juncture he is coming of age—toward his supernatural Father. He is also at his Father’s house and listening to the designated teachers concerning the truths of God. If this were a boy visiting a military history museum at just the right age to appreciate it, and finding out his father owns it and offers him a talking tour by specialists, do you think he might just seize the moment and trust his mother and step-father might understand when they eventually catch up with him?

But this is no ordinary twelve year old boy fascinated by military hardware and an earthly father. This is Jesus, the Son of God. The temple is God’s house. The time he is spending there, with his Father, is precious. And everything about it speaks to Jesus’ heart uniquely—as only he and his Father can truly understand. Mary, Joseph, and the rest of us, can only look on here as outsiders. When Jesus replies to his mother, he is not playing games. He is expressing the most natural understanding of the situation, as *he* sees it. He gave this reply.

//“Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” But they did not understand what he was saying to them.// —Luke 2:49-50.

They would understand it if they were in his young sandals. But they couldn’t be. And neither can we, or anyone really. Instead, Jesus will have to walk in ours. And he does so. The passage goes on to say:

//Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.// —Luke 2:51-52

I am taking my time telling this little story because I have only one point to make about it. **Jesus is not convenient.** It is not convenient to have Jesus in your life. He isn't going to fit into your life and leave you comfortable. He is going to inconvenience you time and time again.

Surely this makes sense for Mary and Joseph here, right? They're raising the Son of God right in the midst of their rather ordinary family. Something is bound to make for a misunderstanding now and again. There's a distinct difference of perspectives, priorities and things we can't even imagine at work here ... right along with all the usual differences people have just with the age difference alone.

And surely this makes sense for you and me, today. Anyone who has invited Jesus into their life can expect there to be some great inconveniences to come right along with him. I'm not even talking about sin, though I certainly could. Jesus will be insistent in his "go and sin no more" even as he forgives us. But that is not to be inconvenienced. That is to be corrected and set straight. What I'm talking about here is the inevitable difference that *must* come to our lives when God is with us in the down to earth way of Jesus.

Much of that difference will be recognizably wonderful: the way the scriptures come alive; the sense of forgiveness; the depth of fellowship with other believers; healing of soul and even body; and many answers to prayer.

However, some of that difference will be obviously inconvenient: not understanding why God, or one of God's people, hurt your feelings; getting "no" sometimes as an answer to prayer; finding out God doesn't think exactly like you on something; going on what seems like a wild goose chase as you desperately try to find out where Jesus went in your otherwise happy life; or simply going to church week after week. And even agonizing over the possibility that God would allow a tragedy to hit your life, threatening even your most precious, promised child.

Like Mary, we need to remember who it is we've invited into our lives. And when those differences show themselves, we need to ponder them carefully.

I will end with a poem by Madeleine L'Engle, who captures the inconvenience of Jesus most powerfully. It's called "First Coming."

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First Coming

He did not wait till the world was ready,
till men and nations were at peace.
He came when the Heavens were unsteady,
and prisoners cried out for release.

He did not wait for the perfect time.
He came when the need was deep and great.
He dined with sinners in all their grime,
turned water into wine.

He did not wait till hearts were pure.
In joy he came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.
To a world like ours, of anguished shame
he came, and his Light would not go out.

He came to a world which did not mesh,
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh
the Maker of the stars was born.

We cannot wait till the world is sane
to raise our songs with joyful voice,
for to share our grief, to touch our pain,
He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

~ Madeleine L'Engle, in *Cry Like a Bell*, 57.