

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26

¹⁸ Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy wearing a linen ephod. ¹⁹His mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. ²⁰Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, 'May the Lord repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the Lord'; and then they would return to their home. ²⁶ Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favour with the Lord and with the people.

Luke 2:41-52

⁴¹ Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴²And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. ⁴³When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. ⁴⁴Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. ⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' ⁴⁹He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' ⁵⁰But they did not understand what he said to them. ⁵¹Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

Sermon: Lost and Found

Losing things. We all do it, and I find as I age it happens more and more. I put things down and they seem to sprout legs and immediately disappear – where they end up I have no idea. Especially at this time of year there are so many things to keep track of with all the frantic busyness that comes with having extra family and friends around – it's hard to keep up.

Invariably, as Christmas winds down I find things I have forgotten – in the back of the fridge I'll discover a bottle of wine or the special ginger cranberry sauce that was supposed to go with dinner. There will be a card or a present that got tucked away and never delivered. That one isn't bad – I find that it's always good to have a backup lego or box of chocolates or other gift that can be pulled out in emergencies.

Those are the things that got forgotten, but rediscovered. Maybe not so much lost since I wasn't aware that they were missing until afterwards – lost in time perhaps – the moment of giving was lost.

But then there are those things that we have lost, in the sense of being misplaced – we are painfully aware of their absence and the not knowing drives us crazy. Keys, glasses – I watched my eldest son go a little crazy a couple of days back looking for his phone.

Those things that are suddenly and inexplicably lost are the ones that are the most maddening. Mikal had been using his phone in the front seat of the car – as I was dropping him off the panic set in as he checked his pockets over and over and looked through his bag. At one point we were even digging through the trunk of the car, as though the phone had somehow teleported itself through the seats and was somehow nestled among the emergency kit and the shopping bags.

Periodically in the search Mikal would go through all his pockets, just in case it magically reappeared, because after all, it should be right here. As foolish as that is, it seems that is exactly what happened. After a few minutes of searching the phone was found in his pocket, just where it should be. I don't know where it had been during all that time when he was checking and rechecking his pockets, but in the end it was found right in the place that it ought to have been.

I have trouble keeping track of my car sometimes. We only have the one, so usually I will take it in the morning, go swimming at the Rec centre, then come in to the church. Often during the day Kyoungsoo will drop by the church, take the car to do her running around; bring it back, leave the key in my bag and be off on her way.

The problem is that parking is at a bit of a premium around here, so most often when Kyoungsoo returns there are no spots available out front of here on Lot St, so she will have to park elsewhere. So, at the end of the day I walk outside, key in hand, hopeful expression on my face, and try to find my car.

It could be on Colborne somewhere, or Robertson. Perhaps parked over by Trinity, or in the Food Basic parking lot. It's always an adventure, trying to find the car again – especially if I happen to not see it the first time I walk by. Sometimes I walk further looking for the car than if I had just chosen to walk home in the first place.

My losing cars isn't limited to Simcoe. One day my friend Rob and I lost a car in Sydney. Big city – five million people. We were out and about one night and then spent a good hour walking the streets at two o'clock in the morning trying to remember where we left his Ford Falcon.

We ended up taking a cab home that night, which was probably for the best anyway, and returned the next day to find the car.

We never did find that car – at least not on our own. Five days later the police called – they thought it had been stolen and abandoned, sitting at the side of the road with piles of parking tickets filling up the windscreen.

We lose things all the time – big things, small things; inconsequential things, and also precious things. Sometimes we even lose a person. That is terrifying.

I suspect that most parents here have felt that cold stab of fear when you suddenly realize that

you can no longer see your child in the store, or the beach. Noah used to like to hide in clothing racks.

Usually he would hide for a moment or two and then pop out to startle whomever happened to be walking by. I didn't mind too much because I could use my super-dad senses to generally keep track of where he was, even though I pretended not to know, but I remember one time scouring Mountain Equipment Co-op – through the whole store several times – before I finally found him hiding among the down sleeping bags. Seems that on that day he learned that patience is a necessary part of hiding, and is the part that makes it particularly effective.

Everything worked out on that day, and I have never come home from being out with the boys missing one. But, losing a person can and does happen, and especially when that person is a child who isn't capable of finding their own way home – it is a terrible feeling. A helpless feeling.

This is the position that Mary and Joseph found themselves in. And they didn't just briefly lose their kid in the marketplace, then have him turn up – they were a full day out from Jerusalem when they realized that nobody had seen Jesus since they left.

They rushed back to the city, and spent three frantic days searching the alleyways and common areas, calling his name, begging for help, probably not sleeping, hope fading, despair welling.

It may seem inconceivable that they forgot their eldest son, but it was one of those things that sometimes just happen. It was likely not just Mary, Joseph, and the kids travelling, but also grandparents, uncles, aunts, neighbours and various other relatives. The highways were lonely and dangerous places, so it's very likely that they travelled as part of a larger group. It's also likely that the parents were more focused on keeping track of the younger kids, as parents do, and assumed that Jesus was walking with uncle Zach, or his cousin John.

However it happened, to Mary and Joseph, Jesus was lost because he was not where he should be, which was on the road with them.

Jesus' reaction when he was found seems odd – he appears almost uncaring in his nonchalance. Jesus didn't understand the fuss – as far as he was concerned he wasn't lost – if being lost means not being where you should be.

Jesus said 'Why would you spend three days combing the city? Didn't you know I would be in my Father's house?' According to Jesus, he was where he was supposed to be. Not lost. Not by a long shot.

In a curious manner, Jesus turns things around on his parents and all the other relatives that had been looking for him. By telling them that he was exactly where he should be, he implies that it is they who are lost. It is they who are not where they should be.

In retrospect it makes a lot of sense. If Jesus is the son of God, as both parents were aware, why not look in God's temple first? When looking for Jesus, does it make sense to go to a marketplace, a money lender, or a brothel?

At this point I'm no longer talking about finding boy Jesus – I'm talking more generally, about us. If we want to encounter Jesus, where should we be? On a mountaintop? In a monastery? In a drug den? A soup kitchen?

I would argue that we can find Jesus in all these places and more, but if you want to find Jesus in the most direct way possible, doesn't it make the most sense to begin by looking in God's house? Where God's word resides, and God's people gather?

You see, Jesus never is lost. Jesus never has been lost. Jesus was and is always right where he should be. Rather, it is we who are usually lost even though we think we are not. That is the amazing thing about this story of Jesus' family looking for him. They were concerned that he was not where they thought he should be, but Jesus turned it around on them and let them know that it was actually they who were not in the right place. They went everywhere in Jerusalem except for the right place.

The same is often true of us. Way back in the beginning Adam and Eve wandered away from God and hid in the garden. God came looking for them because they were not where they were supposed to be, which was walking in the cool of night with their creator.

Things haven't changed much. We wander to and fro around the world that God created, following our every desire and whim. Whenever things don't work out the way we'd like we look at the messes that we have made and ask 'Where is God?' as though God is somehow absent. Like Jesus' family, we think God is missing, when it is really we who are in the wrong place.

Fortunately for us, God never ceasing looking for us, chasing after us. God sought out Adam and Eve in the garden. And though we were forced out of the garden into the wider world, God followed us into exile.

That is the gospel message. Though we are lost, though we turn away, our faithful God continually seeks us out. God is looking for you. God is coming to find you, even though you may not even be aware that you are indeed lost – not where you are intended to be. That is the good news that last week's Christmas celebration announced. That is the good news that Easter confirms. That is the good news of the whole bible – God's undying, unceasing, unstoppable quest for humanity.

In the afterglow of Christmas we reflect on the boy Jesus, and what he would grow up to be. One like us, who has come to where we are to bring us home to his father's house.