

December 26, 2021

“What Child Is This?”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake

1 Samuel 2:18–20, 26

Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy wearing a linen ephod. His 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. Then 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.

Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and with the people.

Luke 2:41-52

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day’s journey.

Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

When 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.” He said to them, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in God’s house?” But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

Sermon “What Child Is This?”

One way that I come up with ideas for sermons is to use the old monastic practice of lectio divina. It is a way to reflect on the texts through prayer and meditation. It is less about studying the scriptures and more about experiencing them, taking them into your spirit and seeing what rises up for you, allowing prayer and hopefully the Spirit to guide your path to what you need to hear.

It is always a meaningful exercise for me and it makes the scriptures feel alive and gives me even more reverence for them in this way, not in an idolatrous way as I have seen them treated but in a relational one. Just one more tool in God’s toolbox to communicate with us when we are open to it.

Some weeks I can't get there, my mind is too cluttered with whatever, busyness or fear. But this week the scripture took me to four different places and each stop was a powerful experience and they all centered around community for me.

My first stop was at the Safeway grocery store in Dallas, Texas when I was about six. I got separated from my Mom and I was terrified. My Mom had always taught me to go to the checkout area at the front of the store if I got lost. I went and they asked me my Mom's name and all I could tell them, was that her name was "Mom" and she had on red. So the manager paged over the intercom, "could the Mother with something red on please come to the front of the store."

He then gave me a soda and some M & M's and sat with me, calming me down until my Mom returned. I have no idea if she had driven off without me, I mean four kids can be a handful or she may have just been in the back of the store at the clearance rack, where I often find myself to this day. But what my take away from that was that it wasn't just my parents in my community that would take care of me, that there was kindness in some strangers as well.

I don't know what my Mom went through that day but I can only imagine it was like what Mary went through looking for Jesus and finding out that he was missing. Thinking about this to me to my next stop with the scripture, remembering the times when our kids became separated from us, maybe just for a moment or two but I felt abject terror whenever it happened.

I remember once making a random man go into the men's room at Walmart to look for my son and my son coming out with a look on his face that I picture to be much like how Jesus looked at his Mother. His eyes said "what the heck, I told you I was going to the bathroom and you just didn't hear me".

This is really the only story that we have of Jesus as a teenager. I think those of you who put your parents through it, did whatever you wanted and sassed them should take great comfort in this story and let yourself off the hook.

Something else that pulled at me about both of these stories is that we see that both Samuel and Jesus had parents that loved them and supported them in their journey to being the people they became. They also were traveling with people that Mary was comfortable with thinking her son was traveling safely with them for a whole day. Jesus obviously had a safe and caring community that surrounded him growing up.

Then the thought came up about whether or not that would be true in communities today for our children. That we could just trust for the day that our kids were safe. The answer of course is no.

Then that saying "seeing the face of Jesus in every one" flashed through my mind. What if we furthered that by seeing Jesus in the face of every child. What if we made all our communal decisions this way.

We know that Jesus was born to common people, the carpenter's son, what if we thought that every child in every city around the world could be Jesus and we are to be that group of travelers, or the people at the temple that are to nurture him, help him along the way, encourage his mind and his faith, protect and care for him?

Would we insist on a better educational system, not just in the "good" school districts? Would we insist on making sure every child had food, and good medical care, whether his parents could afford it or not. Just something to think about.

If Jesus were to come back, what would happen if he was born in the inner-city, would he be traumatized by violence and never find his way clear of it? Or what if he was born into a family that brought him up with a steady diet of hate? Would the compassion and love that were the hallmarks of Jesus's heart have ever had the chance to grow in him?

Or what if he was abandoned as a child, or his parents had died, would the "system" as it is now give him what he or she would need as a child to become who he was supposed to be? It is something to ponder.

I'd like us to think that way, as members of God's community doing our part to help the children of the world become the best versions of themselves whether we work actively as agents for change, send money, write our congress, donate our time, or elect our leaders with children in mind.

Or we could just be that stranger that went into the bathroom because some lady with crazy eyes asked you to. Or maybe we can just be a kind stranger that comforts a child who is lost.

My last stop on my journey into the scripture was a great gift to me that I want to share. Like most of you, I have lost some people, members of the community that helped me become who I am. My holiday memories always seem to bring them back in such a beautiful and hard way. They are everywhere. My grandmother comes up whenever I bake a pie or actually cook anything. Like me, but much better, she would just cook intuitively, I can hear her say, "just a little of this, just a little of that."

We also have my Aunt Lucylle's and Julie's grandmother Dodie's china and gravy boats from them both, we always set sail during the holidays. And her parent's voices ring so clear to me in so much of the Christmas music. I can't contain the tears sometimes when I hear them singing still in my memory.

So when I read these words with my heart and mind wide open "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in God's house?" I felt that peace that passes all understanding come over me. I do know where all my people are and they are doing just fine.

I hope at least one of these stops on my journey into this scripture resonated with you. If you ever want to learn more about lectio divina I would be happy to share what I know. Let us be a people who ponder the meaning of scriptures in our time and in our lives. AMEN

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