

Message: Who will you love?

Who do we obey: our parents or God? That’s a question we find in our lesson for today, from the gospel of Luke 2:41-52.

It’s clear that Mary and Joseph were devout. They took the family to Jerusalem for the Passover festival as required by the Law:

Deuteronomy 16:16 says, *“Three times a year every male among you must appear before the presence of the LORD your God in the location he will select: at the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Booths. They must not appear before the LORD’s presence empty-handed.”*

There are three festivals during the year:

- ***Festival of Unleavened Bread or Passover*** – remembering final plague that changed Pharaoh’s heart and freed Israel from slavery. Unleavened bread was eaten for seven days.
- ***Festival of Weeks*** – celebrate harvest seven weeks after Passover. Today, that’s when we celebrate Pentecost.
- ***Festival of Booths or Tabernacle*** – five days after the Day of Atonement. Everyone remembers the 40 years in the desert: *“That your generations may know that I made the Israelites dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt”* (Leviticus 23:42-43).

The journey took at least three days. It goes through hilly country.

If you take the most direct route, it’s about 90 miles, but that goes through Samaria – difficult and dangerous travel. If you avoid Samaria, it would be about 120 miles. They went as a group, most likely traveling with others. One ancient historian, Josephus, tells us that it wasn’t uncommon for an entire village to go together. Everyone is helping out – carrying goods, preparing meals, watching the kids, that kind of thing.

As a 12 year old (like a new scout), Jesus would have had freedom to do what he wanted, but certainly had duties and responsibilities.

That’s one of the reasons Mary and Joseph weren’t initially worried when they didn’t see him that day. When they stopped for the night, it became obvious something was wrong: **Jesus was missing!**

The group realized they hadn't seen the boy at all, so they decided to return to Jerusalem to look for him. If you're a parent, you can hear the anxiety level creeping up. The city wasn't a safe place. They're on a major trade route. The Romans had a military outpost there. The population trebled during the festival. Jesus could be anywhere!

It took them three days to find Jesus! Can you imagine how worried they were? Mary and Joseph found him in the last place they imagined: sitting at the feet of the teachers in the temple, listening and asking questions. Jesus impressed the teachers with his answers. This is a special note. While anyone could sit and ask questions, for someone to do so with such clarity at a young age marked them as a prodigy.

How did Mary and Joseph react? They were shocked (pissed off)! There are several reasons they reacted negatively. First, they're worried and upset. Anything could have happened to him. Jesus is clearly an obedient child, so for him to act this way was very unusual. They're also hurt by his behavior, by the fact that he didn't come looking for them. Everyone must have been talking about it. They were embarrassed. Finally, they never would have expected to find him in the temple, talking with the teachers the way he was. They're simple people from a small town. One just didn't do such things.

Jesus explained, “*Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house?*” (v49). But Mary and Joseph didn't get it. Jesus put their mind at ease. He went with them and was obedient (v51). Luke tells us that his Mom cherished every word in her deep in her heart (v52).

Let me say a word to our young adults and children. This is a story that reminds us to honor our parents by obeying them. But if we stop there, we've missed the bigger part of it. This story isn't about Jesus being the perfect child, one who never gets in trouble, so the bar is set so high for all of the rest of us that we can't ever make it. We know we'll always end up on the naughty list, so we don't try. That's not it!

This story IS about Jesus' relationship with God and other people.

Jesus didn't mean to make his family and friends worry, lose money and feel shame for the fact that they'd misplaced a child. The whole village would look bad for that. That wasn't his intent.

Jesus was so focused on learning and understanding more about God that he lost track of time. Jesus knew there's more to life than chores and every day things. When he was given the opportunity to learn from others who studied and knew more about God, he jumped at the chance! Jesus knew he had a role to play, a ministry that God gave him. And Jesus knew he needed to learn all he could to do it well.

That's a lesson for you today. God made you the way you are. And God has big plans for you, just like God has plans for each and every one of us. Those plans start with a good relationship. We need to learn and know everything we can about God so we can become the person God has made us to be. Then we can follow the mission God gives us to the best of our abilities. No excuses, no regrets, no looking back. That's what God wants all of us to do.

How we know that? Luke tells us in verse 52, “*Jesus matured, growing up in both body and spirit, blessed by both God and people.*” God blessed Jesus as he grew up – through his relationship. God will bless you as you grow up - through your relationship with Jesus. Life isn't about being separate, but being part of a family within a community of faith. Other people – family, friends and people we meet, will bless us just like all the people in Jesus' village and others he met later blessed him. That's because they'll see that we put God first in our lives. Loving God and loving our neighbors isn't just something we say. It's what we do, every day. It's how we live. And that's needed today.

Who do we obey: our parents or God? We obey both, because we love God and we love our parents and we want to honor them. Jesus helps us understand why we love others. That's what life is all about.

Let us pray ...

Gracious God, thank you for blessing us. You gave us parents, friends, family and many others. Give us good teachers and mentors so we may learn about spiritual things. Show us how to love others the way you love us. We pray this in name of the one who shows us, Jesus. Amen.

Luke 2:41-52 (CEB)

Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. When he was 12 years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to their custom. After the festival was over, they were returning home, but the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn't know it. Supposing that he was among their band of travelers, they journeyed on for a full day while looking for him among their family and friends. When they didn't find Jesus, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple. He was sitting among the teachers, listening to them and putting questions to them. Everyone who heard him was amazed by his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were shocked.

His mother said, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Listen! Your father and I have been worried. We've been looking for you!”

Jesus replied, “Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house?” But they didn't understand what he said to them.

Jesus went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. His mother cherished every word in her heart. Jesus matured in wisdom and years, and in favor with God and with people.