

January 12 message

While many of us grew up on farms in the country, you probably had friends who grew up in town. Perhaps you visited or remember stories of how they would play with others all day unsupervised. Often it was a game of baseball at a local field or just riding bikes around going from place to place. Mom usually had the rule to be home when the street lights came on. If one did not show up then there was a yell out the door. If that didn't work a few phone calls were made, but then there would be consequences. Young people learned to entertain themselves and deal with whatever might have come their way. Things always did not go well and kids did get hurt or worse, but for the most part you were safe.

As for me, growing up on a dairy farm there were some chores and seasonal obligations like baling hay. But there was also free time. Looking back I often climbed trees and the roofs of various buildings on our farm. I think back to how dangerous that was and how lucky I am that I didn't fall. I would also ride my bike to the neighbors and hang around with the neighbor kids too, just telling mom I was riding over to so and so's house. When the closest town had its centennial celebration, I was 12 that was a big deal. I can remember running around the town all day having a great time.

We know very little about how Jesus grew up. All we have is this story from when He was 12. The festival of the Passover was a big deal. Passover is a celebration that commemorated the night the angel of death killed the Egyptian firstborn while passing over the firstborn of the Jews. Mary and Joseph and family were among the hundreds if not thousands of pilgrims making this journey to Jerusalem. There would have been much to see and do for everyone. It would have been quite an experience for a 12 year old boy who was growing up in a small village. Chances are Jesus found others His age and went out to explore. He probably checked in with his parents once in a while and let them generally know what he was up to.

When it was time to leave it was customary for women and children to be in the front part of the caravan and men in the back. 12 years old was kind of an in

between age where you were not expected to be in front. After thoroughly checking with family and friends, we're not really sure of the time line of three days. Perhaps that included one day of travel back, a day searching the market before finding Him on the third day. Imagine their relief! Even in those days a child could be taken, much like today.

We probably know this story pretty well. But today let's look at it a little differently. Mary and Joseph had lost something very important to them. Let's think of all the places they looked first. Maybe they also went to extended family first then the marketplace. I think of how we can lose something important and how we may not look in the right places at first. Many have lost what I will call a sense of purpose in their life.

I try to visit a friend of mine back where I grew up at least once a year. He lost his wife in 2023 after a long battle with cancer. He had become her full time caregiver during this two year ordeal. He never really was out and about very much but now he but his own admission is very reclusive. I have encouraged him to get out more, but he spends his days alone watching TV. This is how he is dealing with what life has dealt him. What we look to makes all the difference.

We also see how our society has glorified celebrity worship. While people have always had their favorite people to follow: sports stars, music icons, movie actors, and even political figures are becoming more and more important in our society. Some sports have almost become a religion attracting huge followings and loyalty. People place much importance on learning all they can about their team and the best players. Our culture in many ways encourages people to build their lives around these different personalities and organizations.

Mary and Joseph went to the marketplace thinking Jesus might be there; after all they knew a 12 year old would find this an exciting and happening place. Many also look to the modern day market place of all the things we can buy that are advertised to bring happiness, security, wealth, and peace of mind. We can easily be led to believe that our salvation is found in material possessions.

When Jesus is found, he replies, “Why were you searching for me, didn’t you know I must be in my father’s house?” The word “must” is translated from the Greek word ‘dei’ and it means a sense of necessity. Together with its root it means to literally bind or chain two things together. In other words, Jesus is saying, ‘why would you look elsewhere, I was bound to be here.’ Not only was He there but He was listening, inquiring and learning. At the end of this reading we have a summary of the next several years of His life. “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

We learn this about Jesus and may think how He was done growing in wisdom when He began His ministry at age 30. But that’s not the case, through prayer, study, and His teaching, I am convinced He continued to grow as He continued His work.

The special music we heard today is a song the kids in my home church used to sing once in a while. It speaks of growing up in the Lord’s way constantly learning. After that song would be finished the pastor would always comment on how we’re all under construction and how God is not finished with any of us yet.

This is good for us to hear this morning. I look at my own life and see how God still has plans for me. I sometimes think that it’s time for me to cut back as I approach my late 60’s, but then I get the feeling there is more to do and God isn’t done with me yet. Speaking of that the other day I got my 2 month haircut that took about 10 minutes to buzz all the gray off and do a little trimming. When I went to pay my stylist said she would give me the senior discount even though I didn’t look that old.....

No matter where we are in life, we are people under construction; God is not finished with us yet. Let us remember that. Let us look at this passage telling of this experience of Jesus and note how we need to continue to grow in wisdom and favor with God.

The hymn we are about to sing, speaks to that. In this world of many distractions we need that closer walk with Jesus.

We can look in many places to find a fulfilling life. I'm reminded of what Jesus taught, how He is the way, the truth, and the life. Only through Him will we find our true sense of purpose in life. Amen.