

## ***"The Day After"***

Rev. Jeff Bacon

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Let's join our hearts together in prayer. Let us pray: **Gracious and loving God, thank you for the baby born yesterday in a stable, wrapped in bands of cloth and placed in a manger, in whose name we pray. Amen.**

Happy Boxing Day! This is the first Sunday service that I have led on Boxing Day. I used to think that Boxing Day was a day for cleaning up all the empty boxes from Christmas, hence the term "Boxing Day." And, of course, it's also a day to watch some sports on TV, maybe do some Boxing Day shopping, and eat leftover turkey. After a bit of research, I realized that the sports, shopping and turkey sandwiches are all fairly recent traditions, and that "Boxing Day" has nothing to do with old Christmas boxes.

Boxing Day originated as a day to give gifts to the poor. The tradition of giving money and other gifts to those in need, or in service positions has been dated to the Middle Ages. Some believe that "Boxing Day" refers to the alms boxes placed in the narthex of Christian churches to collect donations for the poor. In the late Roman, early Christian era, alms boxes placed in churches were used to collect special offerings tied to the Feast of St. Stephen, which falls on the second day of Christmastide – December 26<sup>th</sup> – when the alms boxes were emptied and distributed to the poor; hence the term "Boxing Day."

Boxing Day might also be derived from the giving of a "Christmas Box" to servants of various kinds on the day after Christmas. A very old British tradition is for the servants of the wealthy to be allowed to visit their families on the day after Christmas since they would have had to serve their employers on Christmas Day. The employers would give each servant a box to take home containing gifts, bonuses, and sometimes, leftover food from Christmas dinner; hence the term "Boxing Day."

Regardless of origin, today is Boxing Day, and at our home we will be enjoying leftover food from Christmas dinner! But it's also the first Sunday after Christmas, which traditionally celebrates the child Jesus being accidentally left in

the Temple by his parents after leaving Jerusalem in a large group of people destined for home. Interestingly, today, we hear about Jesus as a young boy, and then next week for Epiphany Sunday, Jesus will be an infant again, visited by the three wise men in Bethlehem.

The gospel according to Luke is the only gospel to include a story from Jesus' childhood. There are other apocryphal gospels, written many years after the four gospels in the New Testament and some contain stories of Jesus' youth. The Infancy Gospel of Thomas concludes with a version of the account of Jesus in the Temple that we read today. It reports that Jesus "put to silence the elders and teachers of the people expounding the sections of the law and sayings of the prophets." The scribes and the Pharisees respond to Mary with praise for Jesus, exclaiming "for such glory and such excellence and wisdom we have never seen nor heard."

For Luke, this passage about Jesus' dawning awareness of his identity serves as a transition from the birth narratives to Jesus' adult ministry. It foreshadows Jesus' relationship with God, with the teachers of Israel, and with the Temple. It also demonstrates how Mary and Joseph carefully observe the Jewish laws and traditions. The family's pilgrimage journey to Jerusalem each year fulfills the requirement that all adult male Israelites should make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. At a pace of about 15 miles per day, the journey would have taken them four or five days. There's safety in numbers and it would have been a large caravan of relatives and friends walking to and from Jerusalem.

Can you imagine being in such a caravan, where your children are running around as a group and you feel comfortable on the long walk that they are being looked after by other families that you trust. And then you realize that your son is not among the friendly group of travelers! Have you ever had a child disappear while you were busy in a store or at the mall? Have you ever felt that sheer panic, that sick feeling of realization, followed by a frantic search? The rushing about followed by incredible relief. And then, possibly followed by anger: anger toward the child, and anger toward yourself.

Deb vividly recalls playing with our four children in the public-school playground after the older two finished school. After a short fun playtime, Deb piled them into our minivan to take Sarah to a dentist appointment. Deb later received a call from the school that she had forgotten our youngest child, Julia, playing in the schoolyard sandbox! We know that Jesus had younger siblings and maybe Mary and Joseph just got caught up in the caravan and forgot 12 year-old Jesus in Jerusalem!

A father was out walking with his young son. "How far are we from home?" the father asked his son. The boy answered, "I don't know, Daddy." The father then asked, "Well, where are you?" Again, the boy answered, "I don't know." Then the father said good-naturedly, "Sounds to me as if you are lost." The young boy looked up at his father and said, "Nope, I can't be lost. I'm with you." Ultimately, that's the answer to our lostness, too. We can't be lost if God is with us.

Jesus didn't think that he was lost. The first words that Jesus speaks to his parents are Jesus' first words spoken in the gospel according to Luke. Their three days of searching is a possible allusion to the three days of Easter, also at the time of the Jewish Passover. And then, when they find him, Mary ironically tells Jesus "your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." Jesus responds that they should have known "I must be in my Father's house." Jesus is the Son of God.

Barbara Brown Taylor, the American Episcopal priest, professor, author, and one of the most effective preachers of our time, says that there are three themes introduced in this passage that will remain central throughout Luke's gospel. The first theme is the importance of the Temple. Jesus' parents carry him into the Temple at 8 days old to have him circumcised, they present him to the Lord at the Temple a month later, and he likely journeyed to the Temple every year thereafter with his parents. The Temple is his Father's house.

Second, are the boundaries experienced by Jesus' family. They do not miss Jesus for more than a day because they are travelling in a caravan of relatives and friends who Jesus would have grown up with. Jesus stayed behind with his family of teachers in his Father's house. This family will expand further during Jesus'

ministry and include not only teachers of the Jewish faith and the Jewish people, but also the gentiles, and eventually, all humankind.

Third, is Jesus' authority as a teacher of God's Word. Jesus grows from his Jewish roots, responding to his divine call to fulfil God's purpose for his life, increasing in wisdom as he grows. For the time being, Jesus will obediently return to Nazareth to honour his earthly father and mother, but at about age 30, Jesus will begin to publicly fulfil his calling as the Son of God.

A father decided that Christmas was going to be different this year. He called a family meeting and challenged his family to be more disciplined in the management of their time during the busy Christmas season. They had to curtail excessive spending on gifts. He talked about better relations between visiting relatives and a more congenial atmosphere around their home. He brought his speech to a crescendo with, "Let's make this the BEST Christmas EVER!" His second-grade son countered his father's big motivational speech by noting, "But Dad, I don't see how we could ever improve on the first Christmas."

Mary treasures her experiences with her son Jesus that are infused with God's presence. Mary responds as a concerned mother for her missing son. Mary also responds with her obedient discipleship to the Son of God. The toughest choices are not between right and wrong, but those that call us to choose between alternatives that both represent worthy claims. Mary had to make those choices, and as a young boy, Jesus was already subordinating other priorities to his sense of God's purpose for his life. We had a glimpse today into Jesus as a boy, growing up.

Christmas is about the birth of our Saviour, Jesus. I hope that you had the second-best Christmas ever, even though it may have required some unique accommodations because of Covid! We are blessed by the grace of God to venture together with Jesus, in faith. Thanks be to God. Amen.