

# AHA!

## Victory of the Lamb Lutheran Church

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### Rediscover Your Father

#### Luke 2:41-52

<sup>41</sup> Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. <sup>42</sup> When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. <sup>43</sup> After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. <sup>44</sup> Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. <sup>45</sup> When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. <sup>46</sup> After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup> Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup> When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

<sup>49</sup> "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" <sup>50</sup> But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

<sup>51</sup> Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup> And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.



Last year I served as a vicar for a congregation in Michigan and as the vicar I was in charge of the youth group. Now there's a phrase I've often heard: Ministry isn't about the numbers; it's about the people. I've heard it many times but it wasn't on my mind when I started the youth group. I was too excited. I started a google-spreadsheet and kept track of our expenses and materials, volunteers, etc., but one of those columns was entitled "attendance." I kept track of how many teens came to each youth group outing and I was determined to get that number to grow. So when a lot of kids showed up I felt good about it but when not so many showed up I grew skeptical of my activity choice or what I had done to advertise the event. And I'm sure that most of it didn't depend on me anyway— kids are in so many things these days. Well, about halfway through the year I started to get to know the teens better and soon I stopped caring how many kids and just cared about those teens themselves. And after one outing toward the end of year I thought of that phrase again, "Ministry isn't about the numbers, it's about the people." And I finally understood it for the first time. "Aha!" That's what it means! Why didn't I get it earlier!

Have you ever had an "Aha!" moment? A time when something finally clicked? A moment when a truth presents itself when you least expect it? What's really interesting about these "Aha" moments, is that although they usually surprise us, they don't necessarily have to teach us something new. What I mean is, sometimes the most profound "Aha" moments are the times when a well-known truth is rediscovered or maybe truly understood for the first time even though you've heard it a thousand times. It's one thing to know something, but it is a totally different thing to have something ring true in your own life and heart in a way that a textbook could never communicate. That's an "Aha!" moment. In this four week Epiphany sermon series we're going to focus on some life-altering "Aha!" moments in the lives of a number of God's New Testament followers. And many of the truths that we will look at aren't going to be completely new to you, but it's my prayer that you will rediscover these truths and appreciate them in a way you never have before.

The "Aha!" moment that we are going to explore this morning happened to Jesus' mother Mary. Mary is a woman well-known in the Bible, but we don't often hear the lesson in our text today. Let's start at verse 41: **Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. <sup>42</sup> When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom.** Each year every Jewish male was required by law to make a trip to Jerusalem and offer sacrifices at the time of the Passover. So Joseph, as a faithful Jew, made the trip every year. However, women were not required to go. And yet Mary went along every year. I think this faithful habit of Mary's speaks volumes about the kind of family Jesus grew up in. I mean there's no doubt that Mary and Joseph wanted to have a great family, right? After all they were the parents of the Son of God! What it would be like to be Jesus' parents? To raise a sinless child? (Maybe some of you are thinking, "A perfect kid? Ya, I wouldn't mind that!") But although he certainly was an obedient child, think of what it would be like to protect and provide for God himself? Can you imagine the responsibility they felt? I also imagine that there must have been times when Jesus' perfection rubbed against their sinfulness and that may have created some guilt or tension for Mary and Joseph. They had a special responsibility and not a light one at that.

Now at the time of our text Jesus was growing up and had been living under Mary and Joseph's careful protection for 12 years. This was near the time when a Jewish boy would become a "Son of the Law", that is - a young man required to keep the regulations of the Mosaic Law. And that's why on a spring day over two-thousand years ago Mary and Joseph set out with their young son on a hundred mile walk to Jerusalem. The family mostly likely traveled with other pilgrims from Nazareth, many of whom were friends and relatives of Mary and Joseph. So they all walked down to Jerusalem together and celebrated the Passover. But oddly enough, Luke doesn't tell us anything about this. He picks up right at the end of the festival when Mary and Joseph started back to Nazareth. <sup>43</sup>"**After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it.**" <sup>44</sup>**Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends.** <sup>45</sup>**When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him."**

Yikes! They forgot Jesus! Now, in their defense, remember Mary and Joseph were traveling in a caravan of people so they might have assumed Jesus was with some of their relatives, or with the other parent. Plus since Jesus was such an obedient son they probably simply assumed the best, but whatever happened, they left Jesus behind in Jerusalem. So of course, when they realized this, they immediately turned around. But it took them another whole day to get back there before they could even start searching. They must have been worried sick, separated from their son for the better part of three days and now they were trying to find him in a busy city, filled to capacity because of Passover celebrations. Just the temple courts around festival time could hold over 200,000 people, not to mention the zoo of animals waiting to be sacrificed, so finding a small boy among the crowds was not an easy task. However, Mary and Joseph not only found Jesus, but found him in the temple courts sitting among the Rabbis. Jesus was talking with basically the college professors of Jerusalem and amazing them with his understanding and answers. And then comes the moment that Luke really wants to show us.

In all of Scripture this account is the only glimpse of Jesus' childhood. And in this account Luke fast forwards through the long journey to Jerusalem, he completely skips over everything that happened at the Passover Festival, he barely mentions Mary and Joseph's frantic search, but then comes to a complete halt at this moment when Jesus' parents find him in the temple. The entire narrative is focused on this short conversation between a 12 year old boy and his mother. Mary finally sees her child and says, "**Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.**"

Only a parent can understand the overwhelming mix of concern and relief that Mary must have felt when she saw Jesus. Mary was entrusted with a great responsibility and I'm not just talking about the fact that her son was Jesus; I'm talking about the fact that she was a mother. There's no doubt that concern for her child consumed her every thought for those three anxious days of searching. And she was so concerned about Jesus that when she finally sees him, safely sitting and contently chatting with the Rabbis, her concern and responsibility boils over and she questions Jesus, "**Son, why have you treated us like this?**" (You can almost hear the frustration in her voice.) In that moment Mary forgot that Jesus wasn't just her son. In that moment she forgot that Jesus was also the son of his Father, the Almighty God.

This moment when Mary questions Jesus reveals an experience of the human heart which happens to us here today. There's a tendency in our hearts to feel that the causes for which we live and work are more our causes than they are God's. We may feel like our children are more our responsibility than they are God's or that our own souls belong to us alone, not the Father who created us. One current example of this experience is closely related to our story and also takes place between a parent and their child. It happens whenever a kid grows up leaves the house. It's a big moment for the child and the parent. The young adult is typically just excited; they're getting their own place and finally gaining their independence! But the parent probably experiences a bunch of things: thankfulness, pride, concern, and on the whole probably happiness. But somewhere else inside there is a type of heartache, because they can't keep that child for whom they sacrificed so much under their own care. The real understanding of this moment, both for the child and the parent, depends on whether they can see in it the larger truth - that this child is not merely the child of his parents, but also the child of God. However, in those moments, as Mary showed us, that truth is easy to forget.

Individually, we often, knowingly or accidentally, leave our heavenly Father on the sidelines of life. We don't ask, "What does God want me to be?", but "What do I need?" Or, "What would be best for me?" Perhaps it's the ways we try to self-medicate with addictive and darkened remedies, the way we run into destructive relationships to fill the void that only our heavenly Father can satisfy. We fail to see God as our true Father in so many ways. And just like with Mary, it often shows up in our families. Dads, have you ever wanted your son or daughter to make the team and spend hours practicing with them, but forget to spend even a fraction of that time speaking about their Father in heaven or making sure they get some quality time with him too? Mothers have you ever disciplined your child and told them that you forgive them, but forget to tell them what's more important, that when they sin, they have God's forgiveness too? Kids here today, and I confess this with you, do we only think about what we want from our parents or how we wish they would act, but rarely ask God what we could do for them or how we could help them spiritually? Any one

dating or married, how often in your marriage has God's example of selfless love been overshadowed by your selfishness? Do the word's "I'm sorry" come flowing out in humility or are they only heard when you can rip them out of your pride's clutching hands? Or have any of us here ever chosen to let a family member linger in sin that we knew about because if we brought it up it would make it really awkward or could ruin our family dynamic? Well while that sin may not upset our family life too much, God's not going to let it slide under the rug. There are so many ways that we, unknowingly and purposefully, follow our own will to make ourselves or others happy, but forget God's will.

But thankfully Jesus has the answer for us this morning and it's the same one he gave to Mary. Jesus said, <sup>49</sup>**"Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?"** Notice that Jesus says to Mary and Joseph "I had to be in *my* Father's house" not "*our* Father's house" or "*the* Father's house". Jesus knew that he was the Son of his Father, along with, but also *over and above*, the son Mary and Joseph. Jesus knew that before he would follow any will, even that of his parents, he first needed to listen to his heavenly Father. This is the "Aha!" moment.

So for all those times that you and I have pursued only own desires, for those times when we have disregarded the will of our heavenly Father, God remembers his Son as a twelve year old boy who said "Didn't you know that I need to be in my Father's house?" and God thinks about his Son who taught us to pray "Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." God hears his Son who prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." And in the end the Father's will was done. Jesus gave himself up for our sins. Jesus said, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit" and died, nailed to a cross. Jesus died because your soul, for which you are responsible, is not your soul only, but it is God's soul too. Yes it is yours, genuinely, really yours, but behind you and over you, God's. God's soul, which he held so dearly that he decided to forsake his own family for you. You are God's soul, which he thought so precious that he sent his Son to die so that he could call you family. What does it mean to be a child of God? It means that we are forgiven and free, dearly loved and heirs of a heavenly Father, destined for paradise. And all this through Christ, who even as a twelve year old boy was perfectly fulfilling the law in our place and remembering his Father.

Because of our Savior we have become children of God the Father. This is an "Aha!" moment. And if you really get it, if something just clicked for you, just think about how this truth could change your life! Parents you can teach your children that going to church isn't an obligation, but a true joy in your life because you get to earn from the true Father and hear about the Son who died in your place. You can show them that the best kind of family time is the time you spend together with God. And when your children grow up and leave the protection of your house, you can take comfort in knowing that their heavenly Father is still there, always there to love and protect them. Husband and wives, when you look at the selflessness and sacrifice our Savior displayed as he sought his Father's will, I pray you are inspired to reflect his love. I pray that you can forgive each other, because you know what God did to forgive you. Kids here today, one thing we learned from the story is that young children can teach their families. Don't let anyone tell you that you can't understand deeply or have a strong relationship with God. Some of my most humbling moments as a seminarian or vicar have come from my time with young kids and seeing the strength of their faith. You have more influence than you can imagine, and especially so in your family. If you were to ask your parents to say a prayer with you, I guarantee it will happen and make a lasting impression.

Finally there is one last application that seems almost inescapable. Jesus said he "had" to be in his Father's house—he needed to be there. But because of God's love we are not only convinced of the necessity to seek our Father, we are convicted with desire to be in his house. What greater blessing is there than for us to get together with our spiritual family here in our Father's house? Here at Victory of the Lamb? Now I'm not saying that going to church is going to make your family perfect (not even Jesus' family was perfect) or take away all your problems. But I do think that this is a good place to start getting better. Here you will be reminded each week that God is your true Father and here each week you will listen to the message of Christ Crucified—a message that everyone needs. I pray that each week you go home and don't ask "What should I do to make my life better?" Or, "How can I make my family better?" But rather, "What is God's will for my marriage, for my children, for my parents? What does God want this soul of his to be?"

Amen.