

The Rev. Kate Byrd

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### Finding Jesus

Mary and Joseph, overcome by both the exhilarating joy and sheer exhaustion of a week-long holiday, begin to make their trek from the Temple in Jerusalem back to their humble abode in Nazareth. With their entourage of family and friends still surrounding them, taking up what bandwidth they have left. The whirlwind of their feastal season still overpowering each and everyone of their senses. The feeling of freshly cleansed skin from dozens of ritual baths taken before entering the Temple, still apparent in their dewy glow. The sounds of those always familiar and ever comforting songs of praise and worship, still reverberating through their ears. The crisp smell of smoke wafting through the air as offerings are placed reverently on the altar fire, still fresh in their nostrils. The taste of those predictably delectable dishes they travel so far to enjoy year after year, still lingering on their palate. The sight of thousands upon thousands of faithful Jewish worshipers gathered together, packed tight within the walls of that holy and sacred space, still present in their minds. With all their senses overcome by the spirit of another Passover season come and gone. And, as they lay their weary heads on the hard ground they are traveling upon, so worn down by the festivities of the past week, ready to close their eyelids unimaginably heavy with sleep, they realize. Jesus?! Oh, Jesus, their teenage, literally holier than thou son, is gone.

And, while this sounds much more like a scene from Home Alone, as an overwhelmed and overly distracted mother, in the midst of holiday travel realizes her adolescent son is nowhere to be found, separated by both many hours and many more miles. It is in fact the only story we have from Jesus' youth. Taken from the time between his birth and the beginning of his ministry (17 years later). And, while it also sounds even more like a scene about the Holy Family in which we are invited to simply write off the Virgin Mary as (at least in that moment) irresponsible and lacking in wisdom (unlike her hormone infested literal God-child who is schooling the local clergy and elders in the sacred Temple), I would argue that it is much more accurately, a scene from our own everyday lives (at least from mine).

As we move from our season of hope, peace, love, and joy, passing with haste into a new year. I can imagine many of us, myself included, feel (like Mary and Joseph from our story) overcome with sheer exhaustion coupled by quickly waning joy from our swiftly fading holiday season. And in the midst of it all, it is not hard to imagine how easily it would be to simply leave Jesus behind. To lose sight of his presence, to ignore his wisdom, even to forget his grace. I mean, I very much sympathize with Mary. Especially as it seems we have done all we were supposed to and still live in a world of unpredictability, maybe even chaos. I can even hear my own voice, as she employs her son, "Why?" Why Jesus? "... have you treated us like this?"

When things don't go the way we wished, hoped, or dreamed, it is easy for us to look around and try to figure out what went wrong? Where does the blame lie? Who is at fault? But, more often than not, it's not that simple. And, too often in the process of trying to assign blame in order to find some form of healing and wholeness, we just end up with more pain and more division. As Mary and Joseph approach Jesus, their teenage son, in the Temple, he says to them "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And, while we could ascertain that Jesus, like any good teen, was certain in his conviction that he was exactly where he needed to be. He goes with them. And, moreover he, as Luke tells us, "increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor." So, who is to blame in our narrative, I would argue no one. Who is in the right? Again, I would argue, no one? Because that's not the point of our story, at least not today. The point is, Mary and Joseph realized that they had lost sight of Jesus. And so they searched fervently after him, found him, and brought him home. Making room for him to grow alongside them, "in wisdom and in years, and in Divine and human favor."

What if, this New Year, after the rush of another holiday season, we let go, even just a little, of everything we have taken on. Turning from all the distractions. And like Mary and Joseph, searching with vigor and passion for Jesus, his wisdom, his grace, and his presence. Which, in our haste, we may have ignored, left behind, or even completely forgotten. For as Paul reminds us "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" How might we, like that obstinate teenage boy in the Temple, go willingly with those who love and care for us? Might we too than be able to grow in wisdom, and gain human and divine favor.

Nadia Bolz-Weber, an ELCA pastor and author, released a New Years blessing for 2022 that I believe speaks beautifully, if not a bit sarcastically, to how our lives might be changed if we sought out God's Spirit (as Paul reminds us) that dwells within us. That spirit of grace and love, whose burden easy and yoke is light. As Nadia says (and I have slightly adapted):

*This new year, as you grasp for control of yourself and your life and this chaotic world. May you remember that there is no resolution that, if kept, will make you more worthy of love. There is no resolution that, if kept, will make life less uncertain. So this year, may you just skip the part where you resolve to be better do better and look better this time. May you expect so little of yourself that you can be super proud of the smallest of accomplishments. May you expect so little of the people in your life that you actually notice and cherish every small lovely thing about them. May you expect to get so little out of 2022 that you can celebrate every single thing it offers you, however small. Because you deserve joy and not disappointment*

This year, may we search for and find Jesus at the center of our lives, allowing the Divine space to grow within us so that we might gain a spiritual wisdom in our own lives and loving grace for others and the world.

