

**“Treasure and Ponder”: Luke 2:41-51**

*Written for the people of St. Lucas United Church of Christ on December 30, 2018*

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To begin, I have to tell you about this phenomenon in Christendom. It spans churches, and denominations, even eras and it concerns this very Sunday. This Sunday, the one that follows Christmas is like its counterpart, the Sunday after Easter are known as Low Sundays in the church. As in low attendance Sundays. Among clergy circles it has another nickname, Associate Sunday, as traditionally Senior ministers are resting and recuperating from the high holy days and the newbie gets the pulpit. If you look around this morning you will notice that we are indeed in observance with such an occurrence. Pastor Keith is off today, as is our organist John Gross, and as is the Choir. And so here we are this morning, leading you in worship: a Seminarian – a student, a middle schooler on the organ, and a bunch of ukuleles! (No offence guys.) And... I'm not even sure how to break it to you, but there aren't even any donuts for us today! And while I might be tempted to feel bad for you in all that, I can't help but remember that motley crew in the manger we've been talking about all week. The way in which a young girl from the middle of nowhere and a bunch of dirty and ill-reputed shepherds, not to mention farm stock, all bore witness to the miracle of all miracles – the birth of our Christ.

I'd like to share a poem with you. It's called virgin.

“Most people require 3-5 years' experience.

Not God.

God is always looking for the one willing to try something new.”

You see at Christmas time we are reminded repeatedly about how God's sees things in his own way. And how often that way is at odds with the ways of the world. The values of the gospel, born in Bethlehem, is that the lowly are lifted, the last are first, and in today's passage the lost are found.

This scripture passage is actually quirky enough to fit in on this ukulele of a Sunday. It's odd in its singularity. It's the only story we have about adolescent Jesus. We know what happened to him very early in his life – his birth of course, then his presentation at the Temple with Simeon and Anna and also of infant Jesus, whom the three kings visited and whom King Herod wanted dead. But then there are no further accounts of Jesus growing up until this very scenario at the age of 12. Then there are no additional stories about teen age Jesus, or young adult Jesus. We won't meet Jesus again until he is a man in his thirties and baptized by his cousin, that child that leapt in Elizabeth's womb.

In the story we are remind of the piety of Jesus' family. They were good Jews. Ones who observed the laws and who celebrated the Passover. They were traveling by foot, in a caravan of many others to return home. There would have been chaos, and livestock, and divisions

based on labor not bloodline. So sometime passed before Mary and Joseph realized what was going on. We can only imagine their fear upon discovering that Jesus was missing. It's every parent's nightmare, to lose their child, I can attest to that – even though when we lose our children today, we have every privilege imaginable from automatic lock down, overhead pages, security cameras, cell phones – it's still our biggest nightmare, so we can only imagine how terrifying it was for Mary and Joseph. Maybe especially since Jesus was already a survivor of King Herod's plot to kill him. Who knows what dangers could befall him? The agony of those holy parents as they could only move as fast as their feet could carry them.

When they find Jesus, Mary says, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." But Jesus doesn't understand. He wasn't lost. He was exactly where he was suppose to be. And he says so, I think, with classic teen delivery: "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

Parents of middle schoolers, am I right?

And then at the end of the passage, Mary's response is so wonderful. She treasures all these things in her heart. Imagine that. The terror of discovering your missing minor child, the physical exhaustion of having to turn around and walk back carrying heavier hearts this leg of the journey, then the elation of finding Jesus but then being corrected by him. She's not freaking out? Or falling apart? Not running from this call on her life... But treasuring everything. Woah Mary. That's awesome of you. I've lost it in the Target check-out line with toddlers over far, far less. What self-control, brave girl.

Notice Luke uses this same phrase earlier in the Gospel and once again, in description of Mary. When she first finds out from the angel Gabriel that she is pregnant with the lord, she also responds by treasuring this thing and pondering it in her heart. Another opportunity to freak out, to run, but no, Mary ponders, Mary treasures.

I'm left wondering if this treasuring and pondering is in fact Mary's super power. You see when we met Job and were told he was a good man, we are then told why. We are given his resume, his curriculum Viète and learn all about his sinless lips, his piety, and his burnt offerings. But when we meet Mary, we aren't told exactly what makes her blessed among women in fact we may even wonder if her blessedness resides solely in her being chosen for this special project. This call on her life. When Moses and Jonah were called, they ran from their calls – and those calls didn't even include labor and delivery, not to mention the agony of the cross through the eyes of the mother. But this brave girl, this thoughtful girl, doesn't run, doesn't hide. She leans in. And then she treasures these things and ponders them in her heart. Just as she does again with adolescent Jesus, when what once was lost is actually found.

The confusion in this story is not unlike the air of confusion that surrounds Jesus throughout his life. One thing we can observe about the divine's presence on earth, is that it is most often misunderstood. Jesus was certainly misunderstood by Kings and governments, and

even by his own disciples. Throughout scripture we find those guys scratching their heads, wondering what is he talking about? Like when they are napping in the boat. Or like when they can't understand how just a few loaves will feed the huge crowd. So, we too, as disciples, follower of Christ in our own time, can be confused about Jesus too. Just when we think we've got it all figured out, we can lose Jesus – quite literally- like Mary and Joseph did.

At Christmas time especially, when Christ is seemingly so present, we can nonetheless lose Jesus. We can once again mark the occasion as a shopping accomplishment. We can once again over eat and over spend and make it seem like Christmas is amazon.com's story to tell, instead of you know, God's story to tell. We can lose when we only focus on *how* God's son came to earth instead of *why*.

Let's not lose Jesus again this year. Let us not tuck him away in the storage totes and drag him down to the basement until next year. Let's not be the type who could witness the birth of a messiah and then just go back to our normally scheduled lives. Let's not walk into our New Year's with the news that Christmas is over, and we are on to the next thing. Christmas, check. Let us find another way of looking at it. Let us treasure this thing and ponder Christmas in our hearts.

Hear these words from Pastor and Poet, Howard Thurman.

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
when the star in the sky is gone,  
when the kings and princes are home,  
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,  
the work of Christmas begins:  
to find the lost,  
to heal the broken,  
to feed the hungry,  
to release the prisoner,  
to rebuild the nations,  
to bring peace among the people,  
to make music in the heart.<sup>ii</sup>

As givers don't, we all know the satisfaction that comes with giving somebody something that they'll really use? The joy we feel when they wear the scarf we knitted or notice a child playing with something we picked out just for them! Well, can't we imagine God has those same moments of delight each and every time we use the gift, he gave us? Each and every time we use Jesus?

Use Jesus might seem like funny language. He's not a gizmo or a gadget. But he was a teacher, an exemplar. Someone given to us to show us how to live. How to be in the world. So, when we use him, when we utilize him as intended, then we engage him in this way. We live lives informed by his teaching. We make choices based on his wisdom. Afterall, as students of a

great teacher, we need to demonstrate what we have learned. Isn't the goodness of our teacher indeed reflected in our grasp of the material? And so, to truly utilize this gift we have been given, once again this year, we must do the work of Jesus. We must be the hands and feet of Christ here on earth. That is how we make God delight by receiving his gift.

It's a cliché isn't it, to put on the scratchy wool sweater aunt Mildred made when she comes to dinner, as if you always live in it. And I'm afraid this cliché applies to God's gift too. This happens when we only get out the gift of Jesus on Sunday mornings or when engaged in some kind of church stuff, and not in our everyday lives. Thurman's words challenge us out of this confusion. Indeed, the work of Christmas is ongoing. Daily.

to find the lost,  
to heal the broken,  
to feed the hungry,  
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to bring peace among the people,  
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It strikes me that it's quite worldly to define this Sunday as low Sunday. To measure with earthly metrics and not divine priorities. After all, you could also call this Sunday Faithful Sunday, for we are in the company of the faithful. Ones who look for opportunities to worship together. So, listen here, Faithful:

If you received the gift of the Christ child on Christmas Day, then for the love of God, use it. Don't lose it. Don't let Christmas be lost on you. Don't let a miracle befall on you and then remain unchanged. Live lives worthy of the gift you've been given, for after all it has been written that "to whom much is given, much is expected."<sup>iv</sup>

Let us treasure that. And ponder it in our hearts. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Found on Rev. Nadia Bolz Weber's website, attributed to her "pastor friend".

<sup>ii</sup> Thurman, H., & Smith, L. E. (2006). *Howard Thurman: Essential writings*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

<sup>iii</sup> Thurman, H., & Smith, L. E. (2006). *Howard Thurman: Essential writings*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

<sup>iv</sup> Luke 12:48