

First Sunday after Christmas      December 27, 2015  
Text – Luke 2:41-52      Theme: “Home, But Not Alone”

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Perhaps you know this is the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1990 movie, “Home Alone.” It was a holiday release, a Christmas comedy, which proved to be a true blockbuster, grossing over \$280 million dollars in ticket sales.

For those of you who haven’t seen it, “Home Alone” is a comedy about what happens when a family goes off on Christmas vacation to France, only to accidentally leave their eight year-old son at home.

Then child actor, Macauley Culkin, plays the role of the child left behind. The premise of this film may seem a bit outlandish, but not much more so than the amusing antics of the home alone child as he outsmarts some bungling would-be burglars.

Almost in the background of this movie is the frantic attempt of the parents to make contact with their lost child.

And now we are celebrating the birth of Jesus, a birth that even in its wonder had its own difficulties. Parents know that the birth of a child is just the beginning, and Mary and Joseph were no exception. Today we hear of their young son being left behind in the temple in Jerusalem when they leave to return home.

Like the parents in the “Home Alone” movie, when Mary and Joseph discover their mistake, they are frantic, as any parents would be. In the meantime, the story focuses on Jesus as he astounds the teachers in the temple.

He’s a twelve year-old with an audience and seems to be fending quite well for himself, apparently not the least bit concerned about his parents. And this is what some refer to as *the* “holy family!”

Perhaps the term “holy family” is unfortunate in that it puts them in some kind of unreachable dimension. The fact is that the ultimate family value is for all of us to become “holy” families, no matter how our family may be constructed.

Families are groups of people who in their togetherness learn of and share the love of God. Though this may involve fun and good times, it is not always done in comfortable ways.

The baby whose birth is celebrated grows up with no end of growing pains. Boy or girl, a child does not have the same priorities as a parent. So it is that family life includes a series of admonitions and a whole lot of patience in the give-and-take. It involves forgiveness and learning.

Sometimes it requires re-starting and even re-tooling.

Patching up wounds caused by thoughtless comments, or thinking in terms of “we” rather than “me,” can be a challenge. Perhaps we have accidentally or otherwise left a family member emotionally behind. Admitting that we were remiss, or even wrong, is all a part of the process.

So, today the church puts before us a scene from the real life of this holy family, even while the images of a manger and shepherds with a newborn Savior are fresh in our heads and, hopefully, also in our hearts. We are reminded that the difficulties went beyond Bethlehem.

We see one example of this in today’s gospel when a family member becomes separated. What the boy Jesus encountered alone was very different from what the slightly younger child in the “Home Alone” movie encountered. Yet, Jesus was apparently quite content.

At the same time, his parents were not having one of the best days of their lives. From past readings most of us knew how this story would end before the reading began today. But it remains for us to do with it as Mary did, to consider it in our hearts that it might enrich our own family story.

Way back in the book of Genesis we read that it is not good that man be alone (Gen. 2:18), and so it is that God has blessed us with relationship in family. It may be a biological family, a foster family, an adoptive family, or even a chosen family.

The common denominator is that we are called to be holy in that relationship. And that, put in simple terms, means that we are called to become what God has made us to be. Also, in the process, we can help the other family members to do the same.

They should be closer to what God wants them to become because they are in relationship with us. Of course, this doesn’t always happen. And when it does, the process is not always simple, but it is something for which we are called to strive.

Family life has its major defining moments – both delightful and painful. There may be births and accomplishments to celebrate. But there will also be illnesses and deaths, as well as failures in which we need to both support and challenge one another.

Many families cope with addiction in one or the other of its members. Such problems may be as difficult to admit as they are to resolve, but God’s grace is always more powerful than our problems, including even the ones we create for ourselves and for others.

Even after the celebrated child moves through the throes of adolescence and becomes an adult, the challenges often remain. Some grown children fail to launch as independent adults. Some go badly astray from the values in which they were raised.

We may become detached or even lost from each other along the way, and finding our way back together takes at least as much effort as that put out by Mary and Joseph in today's story. In these times, we may have the opportunity to learn humility by putting away our pride as we move through the pain to love.

Families are the birthplace of learning forgiveness – both how to give it, and how to accept it. Our family is our school where we are all the teachers and the learners. It's without a doubt the most influential school we will ever attend.

At times, our understanding appears to have a huge chasm that seems impossible to reach across. At age twelve, and not yet empowered by the Holy Spirit for his ministry, Jesus no more understood his parents' concern than they understood what he meant in telling them that he had to be about his Father's business.

But since when do twelve year-olds and parents always understand each other? That can only happen in a heart open enough to let God speak through it. And, actually, all of this goes far beyond the age of twelve.

We have all had the experience of being clueless about what someone else might be talking about and just as often, others are as baffled by us. We see the matter at hand from our perspective, and they see it from theirs.

Mary didn't understand how Jesus could do what he did. Jesus was equally clueless as to why his parents were upset. But think about it. Jesus did stay behind, but his parents assumed that he was in the crowd. Each of them contributed to the problem. But the issue is not who is at fault.

The issue is how we reach into the well of family love to bring things together. The issue is often about how willing we are to see our own role in the problem. Some would say that we need light to see. But just as often we need to see in order to create the light.

Holy families do not have to have God for a son. Holy families are the ones who provide an environment where their members can become sons and daughters of God, not necessarily by following the path that we lay down but by being provided with an avenue to see and experience the love of God in the place where they live. That is what homes and families are meant to be.

As we leave here today with this story of the twelve year-old Jesus in our memories, God invites us to move it into to our heart so that with the model of this holy family, we might do as Jesus did: that is, to grow in wisdom and age and grace.

Age will happen. Grace, though it must be recognized and accepted, will be given. Wisdom – that's up to us.

And as we do this growing in faith together with the families of which we are a part, or the families we find for ourselves, we will become holy. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.

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