

Finding Jesus

Luke 2:41-52

Who of you can name a business where the father has passed the business on to his son or daughter? [Various examples.]. In the broader context, Rupert and Lachlan Murdoch; Lang Hancock and Gina Rineheart; so there are many examples of fathers passing on the business to a child in order to preserve the business as it was started. When I was at school, and kids left who were not going on to tertiary education, we sometimes said they were going IDB — into Daddy's business.

Next time you are out and about, have a look around at the names of businesses on shopfronts, utes or trucks. You'll see many instances of businesses having been handed down from father to son. There's something reassuring about dealing with a firm that has a long and settled history. Father providing supervision, whether wanted or not. We may be inclined to trust a business more because of the family connection. Like father, like son, or these days, like daughter.

The first Sunday after Christmas is also known as Holy Family Sunday. Today's gospel is the only reference in the whole of Scripture to the life of Jesus between his infancy and the beginning of his ministry at the age of thirty. So this event has some significance. Jesus is 12 years old, standing at the transition between childhood and adulthood in Jewish religious practice. Now, the family would have gone from Nazareth to Jerusalem on an annual basis, with a bunch of people from the village making a caravan — a bit like us going down to Anglesea Lutheran Camp annually — and actually the distance from Melbourne to Anglesea is 114 km, and the distance from Nazareth to Jerusalem is 112 km. So while the distance is almost the same, it would, of course, have taken them a lot longer, because these guys were doing it on foot.

This is the last time that Jesus would have been going to the Temple as a child. At 13 he would have undergone his Bar Mitzvah, and been required to fulfil all the Torah's commandments. Things are changing in Jesus' life.

Jesus and his family have made their customary pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover festival. Joseph and Mary knew how important it was to steep Jesus in the history of God's dealing with his people, here in the house of God. But one day into their homeward journey this time, Jesus' parents discover that he's not with them. Remember, there would have been a number of families in the group travelling to and from. Can you imagine the conversation?

"Mary, have you seen Jesus?"

"No, I thought he was with you."

"I haven't seen him since we left the Temple grounds. Check with the Levis — he could be playing with Aaron."

A few moments later — "No, he's not with them, or the Cohens."

"I don't believe it. We'll have to go back. Delays like this I do not need. I've got a business to run."

They double back to Jerusalem. They don't know where Jesus is at the moment — fear rising in their gut, angry and worried in equal measure. After three days — now, they're a day into their trip, so a day back, and they spend two days looking for him in Jerusalem — can you imagine the

tension between the parents. They eventually find Jesus, in, of all places, the Temple. He was sitting with the theologians, listening to them, asking them questions. This was no place for a 12-year-old. They were flabbergasted. They ask the obvious question. “Young man, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been half out of our minds looking for you.”

Jesus replies, “Why were you searching for me?” That sounds like a smart-aleck answer. Surely Jesus knew his obligation to his parents. He was under their authority. Yet what was clear to him was that he should be right here, in the Temple. “Don’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”

Mary and Joseph didn’t understand. Who could blame them? No doubt Joseph assumed that Jesus would follow in his footsteps. Had he already introduced him to the trade, to see how the tools fitted his maturing hands, earthly father tutoring his son? Now, interestingly, this is the last time we hear of Joseph recorded in the life of Jesus.

But Jesus was aware of the stronger calling of his Father in heaven. Staying back at the temple was not a childhood prank. Rather, it was a divine necessity for Jesus to be busy with the interests of his Father. His calling to serve his Father, and to serve the human race, had to take precedence over his earthly relationships. These competing claims caused ongoing tension in Jesus’ life, as even his family misunderstood his mission.

The Temple was the place where Jesus was able to discuss the things of God with those who were authorities in the Law and the Prophets. These words of Jesus are the first recorded in the Gospel. And they show that Jesus knew already that his life’s mission was to be about his Father’s business. As Jesus says in the Gospel of John: “I do nothing on my own, but speak what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.”

Jesus doesn’t stay in the Temple, though. Part of his life of total obedience to his heavenly Father is expressed through his obedience to his earthly parents, in line with the clear command written in God’s law: “Honour your father and your mother.” So Luke tells us that Jesus returned home to Nazareth with his parents, and “was obedient to them.” There’s a gap of 17 years in the Jesus narrative. We can safely assume that the family business did continue, and Jesus became apprenticed and learned his earthly father’s trade. More than that, “As Jesus grew up, he increased in wisdom and favour with God and with people.” Just like the prophet-in-waiting Samuel did, as God prepared him for leading his people.

At the age of 30, a Jewish male was considered a full member of the community. This is the next time that we hear about Jesus. We don’t know what he had done in those intervening years, but we do know that he is inexorably drawn back to Jerusalem. It makes sense for a man on the mission of God. It’s the capital of the Jewish nation and also the place of God’s presence through his temple. He’s following his heavenly Father’s direction again.

“Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem,” Luke tells us. “Resolutely” is an interesting word — it means determined and in an unwavering manner. But this time the stakes were far more serious. Jerusalem was the big smoke, and it was a dangerous place for someone whose teaching was now in conflict with the teachers and scribes that he first met with when he was 12 years old. They might listen to a boy’s ideas with interest and patience, but the same won’t be the case now.

Previously it was his parents who left him behind. This time it will be Jesus who leaves his followers, friends, and his mother behind. This time Jesus will lose his life, just outside Jerusalem’s city gates, and those left behind will grieve for him. On this third day they will go to pay their respects at his tomb, but they won’t find him. But Jesus hasn’t wandered off; instead, he has risen to new life. The obedient son has been rewarded with life that will never end. He has done his Father proud. The Father’s business is in good hands.

The next part of the business plan is ready to go. Jerusalem is where it all happens. Just like the young Jesus in the temple, so the infant church gathers together in the temple courts. It's there that they listen to the "apostles' teaching", and they spend time in fellowship, they break bread together and they pray. They demonstrate their dependence on God's grace and power. In baptism, they have been called God's sons and daughters, and they carry on the Father's business in his name, and in the name of his Son. Like Jesus, they were "praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people."

The Father's business has been handed down from generation to generation, to this very day. And we are the latest in the long line of obedient sons and daughters. The business plan is still working, although the business environment is quite different. Many have said we live in a post-Christian era. What does that mean? Does it mean that now, we are away from the centres of temporal power, or we have lost the influence we once had? Did Jesus sit with the powerful, and take counsel from the establishment of his day? No. He healed the sick, sat with the outcasts; the unloved, the unfashionable, the ordinary and the marginalised were his people; and he spoke truth to power. As would the apostles do on their journeys, and have the saints done again and again.

Now is the time to heed the call of Christ to bind wounds, heal the sick, advocate for the dispossessed, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, spread the Word of love, proclaim the call to repentance, and to bestow forgiveness.

The church today still gathers together. But this time the temple is Jesus himself, the presence of God in human form, still today. We are doing, and every Lord's Day do, what Paul commands us: "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing with gratitude in your hearts."

Entrusted with the Father's business, we now take on anew the challenges before us. Receiving forgiveness, reconciling with one another, rediscovering our joy in the Lord, and being refreshed and renewed for the work ahead. We do the simple things well: gathering to worship our Father in Spirit and in truth, listening to Scripture, responding to God in prayer, bringing the needs of the world to him in intercession, and serving friend, neighbour, stranger, and even enemy in the love of Christ, doing both word and deed "in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." We today are to go about our Father's business. Amen.