**Sunday 3rd May 2020**

**Glynde Lutheran Church**

**Sermon on Luke 2:41-52**

**Theme: “The boy Jesus in the Temple”**

**“GROWING YOUNG (1) Fuelling a warm community”**

***Introduction:***

The story of Jesus being lost reminds me a lot of when our son Thomas got himself lost way back when we in Geelong. Thomas was about four or five years old, and we lived in a manse adjacent to the church yard. One afternoon, we couldn’t find Thomas. One moment, he was with us in the house, and the next moment, he was missing: he wasn’t in the house, and we couldn’t find anywhere on the church property, *despite us searching everywhere, and shouting out, “Thomas, Thomas, where are you!?”*

After a while, we had to face the reality: that Thomas was lost, or had wandered off, or worse still…. I was just about to ring the police, when I decided to have one last look around the house. As I walked around the house that one last time, I saw a slight bulge in the curtains which had been drawn on a window that was next to our side fence.

I pulled the curtain aside, and there lo and behold was Thomas: fast asleep and oblivious to all the frantic searching that was taking place…. Later on, we realized that after crying because he couldn’t do what he wanted to do, he had lain down behind the curtain and fallen asleep. Jenine and I were frantic about his welfare, but Thomas was oblivious to it all….

Now that’s a lot like what happened to Jesus when he was 12 years old: his parents were frantic because they thought that Jesus was lost, and Jesus, well he was oblivious to it all….

Let’s look more closely at Luke’s account of what happened, and then we are going to think for a while about the implications from this story for us, *and in particular the implications for our care of the young people in our midst.*

***Part 1: The boy Jesus in the temple***

Well, let’s listen to what Luke has to tell us.

He writes:

**Every year, the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. When Jesus was twelve years old, they went to the festival as usual***(Luke 2:41).*

Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph went regularly to the Passover Festival in Jerusalem, a seven day festival, when the Jewish people remembered God’s great rescue of them from slavery in Egypt *(Exodus 12:1-20; Lev. 23:5-6).* When Jesus was 12 years old, still “a boy” but nearly a man, he went with his parents to the Passover in Jerusalem…. I say a “nearly a man”, because at the age of 13 years, a young Jewish boy went through his *Bar Mitzvah,* his coming of age, at which he was declared to be “a son of the Law”, *a lot like our Confirmation at the age of 13-14 years* *(Henri Daniel Rops, Daily Life in the time of Jesus, p. 113-114).*

I guess that Joseph and Mary took Jesus to Jerusalem to visit the temple in Jerusalem prior to his becoming “a son of the Law” at age 13 years so that Jesus could learn what was expected of a Jewish man. His parents were doing all the right things good Jewish parents would do.

Luke tells us what happened when the festival was over:

**When the festival was over, they started back home, but the boy Jesus stayed in Jerusalem. His parents did not know this; they thought that he was in the group, *lit. the caravan,* so they travelled a whole day and then started looking for him among their relatives and friends.**

**They did not find him, so they went back to Jerusalem looking for him…** *(Luke 2:43-45).*

It wasn’t through carelessness that Joseph and Mary lose Jesus: they were travelling in a large caravan of pilgrims for safety and security, and a boy of his age might easily have been with relatives and friends…. It is only at the end of the day’s travelling that Joseph and Mary realised that Jesus that was not with them….

Imagine their horror and their agony of mind when they can’t find Jesus, *a lot how Jenine and I felt when Thomas was missing….*

They decided that the only thing they could do was go back to Jerusalem, and see if they could find their son Jesus. So they travelled a day’s journey back to Jerusalem, and the next day they searched everywhere for him.

Luke tells us what happened:

**On the third day, they found him in the Temple, sitting with the Jewish teachers, listening to them and asking questions. All who heard him were amazed at his intelligent answers.**

**His parents were astonished when the saw him *there,* and his mother said to him, “My son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been terribly worried, *lit. in great distress,* trying to find you.**

**He answered them, “Why did you have to look for me? Didn’t you know that I had to be in my Father’s house?” But they did not understand his answer** *(Luke 2:46-50).*

Jesus, *like Thomas in my lost story,* was oblivious to the worry of his parents…. Why?

Because Jesus assumed that his parents would know that if he wasn’t with them, *his earthly parents,* he would be with his Heavenly Father in his house…. A naïve response, perhaps, but it reflects Jesus’ growing awareness from his study of God’s Word, the Old Testament, that he has a special child-Father relationship with God….

Now why are we focusing on this story, as we begin this series on GROWING YOUNG? As the writers of the *Growing Young* book put it:

**There are a few questions *relating to this passage that* we don’t often hear asked about this story, but they have the potential to be game changers for churches that want to grow young.**

**Where did Jesus sleep?**

**Who made sure he was safe?**

**And maybe most importantly, *who fed this boy?***

**Have you ever attempted to keep a 12-year-old boy fed? I (Kara) have, and it’s not a small feat!**

**We can give a spiritualized answer to these questions, and perhaps God simply watched over and provided for Jesus those three days. But *the* odds are good *that* there is also a communal answer. Our hunch is that the faith community saw this young person, embraced him, and welcomed him to their table** *(p. 177-178).*

I wonder whether young people today find something similar in our churches? And in this church in particular…? Do young people in our church here feel welcomed, embraced, and cared for?

***Part 2: Deeper reflection***

The *Growing Young* authors focus on six core commitments of Churches who want to grow young, *in other words churches who want to foster having young people in their midst, and who want to grow the faith of their young people.* These six core commitment are given on their summary slide*.*

This morning, we are focusing on just two of the six core commitments, *commitments that flow from our Bible reading,* namely:

* **Empathise with today’s young people**
* **Fuel a warm community**

The teachers in the Temple empathized with the young pre-teen lad who was listening to them and asking questions of them. They didn’t ignore him, but they responded to him and valued him….

Young people, *like us older people,* have three main questions:

* **“Who am I?” (identity)**
* **“Where do I fit in?” (belonging)**
* **“What difference do I make?” (purpose)**

Our task as parents and adult mentors of the young people in our midst is to care for the young people around us, *to empathise with them,* and to help them answer these basic questions that they are struggling with, *or will struggle with.*

The authors of *Growing Young* state:

**We believe the gospel, the Good News of Scripture, matters and offers the most profound answers to young people’s three ultimate questions.**

**We think that young people’s deep questions about identity are best answered by God’s *grace.***

**We are convinced that teenagers and emerging adults’ need to belong is ultimately met through the unconditional *love* of *Christian* community.**

**We believe their hunger for purpose is satisfied by being involved in God’s *mission* in the world** *(p. 115).*

And I agree with them…. That’s what we are on about as a Christian community: to answer the questions of all, adults, and young people alike, *as we care for them and love them.*

Like the teachers in the Temple who empathized with the young pre-teen lad who was listening to them and asking questions of them, God wants us to empathise with the young people in our midst. God wants us to value them and to care for them….

And He wants us to “fuel a warm community”, so that young people *and adults* want to stay in a Christian community. The authors of *Growing Young* note that both young people and adults value churches that they are warm and friendly. They use words that belong to what they call “the warmth cluster” of words: *welcoming, belonging, authentic, hospitable, and caring (p. 166).*

That’s what the boy Jesus surely experienced even when he was “lost” in Jerusalem. His parents weren’t around, but he was still fed, and cared for, and given a place to sleep. He was looked after by the faith community around him. And that’s what God wants us to do with regard to one another, and particularly the young in our midst….

So what are you and I doing to empathise with the young people around us, and to create a warm community? And what could we doing in these areas?

Let me suggest a few things that we could be doing, *and maybe you are doing:*

* **Learn the names of the young people in our church**
* **Pray for the young people who you know by name**
* **Dive deeper with one single young person, or a number of young people: try to build up a relationship with a young person and to mentor that person in his or her faith** *(e.g. Sigrid with Amber; chatting to young people before and after worship).*
* **Foster the faith of the young people in your family circle or your circle of friends** *(e.g. Read The Beginner’s Bible to the children in your care; cf. Mike Pietsch reading to his grandchildren in Canberra over the phone).*
* **Involve young people and their families in worship** *(Have a family rostered on for Bible readings, prayers, children’s message, leading in responses etc.)*
* **Experiment with Intergenerational worship from time to time, where all generations worship together** *(n.b. Para Vista experience)*
* **Stimulate young people to go to Christian camps, where they can mingle with similar aged people and grow in their faith** *(n.b. Spin camp).*
* **Celebrate the milestones of the Young People and the emerging adults in your faith community** *(e.g., Starting kindy or school, graduating from High School, getting a job, special birthdays).*

These are just some of the ways in which we can value and care for the young people in our midst, and to fuel a warm community for families *and for everyone.*

***Conclusion:***

I think that the story of “The boy Jesus in the Temple” is a wonderful story of how the faith community cared for Jesus when he was “lost”.

Well, his parents certainly thought that he was lost….

In a similar way, God calls us to care for the young people in our midst: to empathise *(“feel”)* with them, *to put ourselves in their shoes,* and to create a warm community where young people *and older people, all people,* feel welcome and valued. God wants us to grow the faith of the people, *including and especially the young people* in our faith community.

May God bless us as we try to do this, and as we do this!!