

# First Sunday after Christmas

**GIVE IT UP FOR JESUS!**

**Luke 2:41-52**

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**Analysis by James Squire**

41Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. 42And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. 43When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. 44Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. 45When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. 46After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." 49He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" 50But they did not understand what he said to them. 51Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. 52And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

*NOTE: For a literal treatment of this gospel text, see <https://crossings.org/theology/1998/theolo93a.shtml> . What follows is a metaphorical approach, treating the bizarre*

*behavior of the boy Jesus as a metaphor for God's radical new way of acting in our world.*

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Safe in Convention**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – Disarray**

Only a devout anarchist could possibly take an instant liking to this Jesus. For the rest of us who behave in a civilized fashion, we encounter a maverick juvenile Jesus who seems intent on flying in the face of tradition with no remorse whatsoever. He disrupts our very existence to a distressing degree. We think we understand who he is and where he is going – home with us to learn our ways so he can help us out (v. 44). After all, we are who we are and where we are, and shouldn't he start there? How distressing it is to look up a little bit later and notice that he let us go home without him (v. 48)? He refuses to respect our agenda (v. 49). There is certainly room for discussion and compromise, but did he or did he not intend to make his home with us? Then what's he still doing at his Father's house? Does he want to be with us or not? Honestly, Jesus is a terrible panic for a Messiah, isn't he?

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – Disconnected**

Actually, Jesus is a brand new creative order – either that or a very, very old long lost creative order that is totally incomprehensible to us. His Father's work (v. 49) seems to be to blow our comfortable existence sky high. How can we abide such a revolution? His agenda is not simply different than ours, it is opposed to ours. From our point of view, the choice is clear. How can he expect us to throw out our long developed pattern of living in order to take on his radical agenda? Thus we return to him in his Temple, demanding an explanation and expecting repentance on his part. Instead we get a lecture. It seems as

though we have lost Jesus, and we are left to puzzle how this could have happened to such diligent, responsible people as us.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Despairing**

In fact, we return home resigned to our irreconcilable differences with Jesus, figuring him to stay in his Temple where he seems to be happy, and we figure we'll just struggle on without him since he really doesn't seem interested in our problems anyway. It's too bad, we could have made such a team, and with our friendship, if allowed to develop, we could have made beautiful music together. But alas, it was not to be. And, in fact, we are left with lingering thoughts of how much better our life could have been. We've always felt a little lost, and we guess we'll have to go on feeling lost, wondering if there will ever be another opportunity "to touch the face of God" ( <http://www.geocities.com/everwild7/highflight.html> ).

## **PROGNOSIS: Reckless in the Gospel**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – Re-Pairing**

How strange it is that one brief encounter should make us believe that we know what motivates Jesus, as if we are now quite prepared to "write the book" on him – to "write him off" as it were. Funny, he sure seems to act like he's been written off, for on our way back home, we glance to our side and there he is, dutifully following us home (v. 51). At this point, we admit we are completely flummoxed. Perhaps he responded to our wake-up call, but who can tell for sure? He is obedient, but to whom? To whom does he "listen" (audience please note, this is the root meaning of "obedience")? What if it is still his Father's work he is doing? Has he brought the Temple with him, somehow? Isn't his agenda still going to clash with ours? He must know he's not going to be a happy camper. But then why is he coming home with us? He'll be living under our roof, violating our rules and bearing our wrath. Could this be his

Father's work? He will submit to our wrath, absorbing our blows and coming out alive – and it will all take place under our roof? We didn't really know him all that well, after all. Prematurely, we wrote him off, but he didn't dismiss us so quickly. He is radical, but not for his own benefit, for ours! He is willing and able to go through the death of our relationship to have us. The "face of God" has touched us and is never letting go.

#### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – Re-Connected**

It is still true that we have been thrown for a loop, but Jesus is in the loop with us (v. 51), and paired with him, our relationship grows in stature and favor (v. 52). We have exhausted our frustration upon him, and he keeps on dwelling with us. In the place of all that negative energy, trust begins to grow between us. If he's willing to hang with us through thick and thin, we are willing to give his agenda a try. Moreover, we repent of misjudging him. He has grown on us, much to our surprise. In spite of ourselves, we find much to treasure in our hearts (v. 52) about this Jesus.

#### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Re-Arranged**

Strangest and most surprising of all, we now become the disruptors of the comfortable regimes of others. We get to invade the comfortable Temple existence of others and share Jesus' radical agenda with them. Through us, they get to learn the incredible staying power of Christ, who absorbs their complaints and keeps on hanging on. Like us, their lives could use some disruption from one whose agenda is to cling to their lives in order to transport them to a new creative order. The "tradition" crutch is no longer needed where Jesus takes us. Bountiful life in Christ springs not from traditional patterns established in our youth, but from the reckless Gospel of forgiveness and mercy. Just how reckless Jesus truly is can be seen from the misfits – us – whom he puts on the front lines of

his revolution. But the gospel gives us the power to be reckless – with God's forgiveness and mercy. Our own warts make us look doubly silly to the world, but our mandate from heaven is iron-clad. We are doing the Father's work, hanging in there with comfortable sinners, bringing God's merciful regime into their lives.