

**“LEAVING JESUS BEHIND”**  
*Luke 2:41-52*

All being well, my brother’s coming to spend Christmas with us this year. He has four sons, whom he will be bringing with him, I expect. Fortunately, they’re getting a bit older and more independent now, but I can remember one occasion when his children (and, of course, ours) were quite a bit younger and needed constant supervision. We were in town here and went into Woolworth’s – four adults and seven small children. As we scoured the shelves for the things we wanted (this was before they’d refurbished the shop to prevent you finding anything you want), we gradually fanned out. Some time later, a frantic sister-in-law appeared saying, “Where’s Daniel?” I said, “I thought he was with you.” No, he wasn’t: he must have been with Paul. Paul denied any responsibility. OK, then, he must be in the main group with Sally. No, she thought he was with Mandy. Eventually we found him and the usual haranguing of a small child who’s wandered off took place.

That was in Woolworth’s. With quite a small group of people. In a not terribly overcrowded shop which doesn’t cover too much area. In the story we’ve just read, Mary and Joseph were walking back from Jerusalem to Nazareth – several days’ journey – with a large crowd of people: probably several related families and a large number of children, all excited because of the recent Passover Festival they’d been attending in Jerusalem. Usually, the population of Jerusalem at this time was 25.000 people. During the Passover it went up to just under 100.000. That’s a lot of visitors! They weren’t all going home the same way as Jesus’ family, but quite a few of them were.

They’d been walking for a whole day before the “I thought he was with you” conversation began. In the end, there was nothing for Joseph and Mary to do, but retrace their steps and see if they could find their son, Jesus. And remember, they knew he was the Son of God and had a very important destiny to fulfil. If they lost him, that could have big implications for the world. (Imagine the conversations in heaven if he’d got lost before fulfilling his destiny!) They made it all the way back to Jerusalem without meeting him. And once they’d got there, there was another day of searching before they found him. He was in the Temple, with all the rabbis and teachers, “*listening to them and asking questions*”. That was the way teaching went on amongst the rabbis – lots and lots of questions and answers. And he seemed to be holding his own amongst these great scholars.

Mary starts to tell him off, her voice no doubt a mixture of anger and relief. They’ve been worried sick about him, but Jesus just says that they should have expected to find him there. But he’d learned that lesson, because Luke tells us that “*he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them.*” And that’s all we hear of him during his childhood and youth.

It's a story we need to think carefully about, though – and it's not just for children who need to beware the danger of getting lost. There's a powerful point to be made here about Joseph and Mary. There they were absorbed in the atmosphere of religious activity. They'd been to the Passover, the holiest and most important of their religious festivals. They were doing their duty – and completely caught up in it. But they lost sight of Jesus in all of it. They couldn't work out where he was. For a while it was OK – they didn't even notice. Then panic set in and they had to put in a lot of effort to find him again.

You can see where this is going, can't you? Here we are, all good church-going Christians, part of Wade Street Church – “*A church at the heart of the city, with Christ at the heart of the church.*” Many of us are up to our ears in religious activity during the week – and certainly on a Sunday morning, which is why you're here. But where's Jesus? Do we know? Is he still with us? The work of the church chugs along pretty well, by and large. But when things go wrong, we start to panic and we can all start to assume it someone else who's at fault – isn't he with you? Weren't you praying, then? Weren't you keeping the witness going?

It's so easy to wander off without Jesus, to have our schemes and programmes, to stride off in the direction we think he's going – and then to forget about him, so that we end up not really sure where he is and what we should do about it. That's true as a church and as individual Christians. The things we're engaged in might well be quite legitimate “religious” activities – and very probably Jesus was very much involved when we started. But if we take our eyes off him and get more caught up in what we're doing that in what he wants us to do, we can lose him all together.

Jesus was about his Father's business – that's where we'll find him. He leads us in God's ways and we need constantly to be in touch with him in order to ensure that we, too, are about God's business. If we want to use the slogan that this is a church “*with Christ at the heart of it*”, we need to ensure that that really is the case. Keep reading and studying his word, the Bible. Keep praying to him and listening for his voice. Keep sharing with other Christians what God is saying and doing. Between us, we ought to be able to keep our eyes on him and not lose sight of him – but don't forget that you have some responsibility to share in that as well.