

## *Finding Jesus*

by Rev. Joseph Connolly

“When the festival had ended they started to return. But Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, something Mary and Joseph did not realize.” — Luke 2:43-44.

I have, over time, regaled you with stories about the Great State of Maine, and about the fact that Bonnie and I met at a place, an island of about 80 acres large (or small, depending on your point of view) in the middle of Penobscot Bay, owned by her extended family. Paul Johnson, her cousin, my best friend, often invites his friends to this spot.

Now, I met Bonnie on this island in 1987. But because Paul is my best friend I had been there before. Since the island has been in her family since 1898, it goes without saying that Bonnie had been on the island nearly every year of her life.

When we met I was 39 and Bonnie was 38. I think I had reached that point in life when the words which best described me were written by George Bernard Shaw and later turned into an introduction to a song lyric by Allan Lerner. I was (quote:) “a confirmed old bachelor, and likely to remain so.” Bonnie will tell you her thinking was along similar lines.

Put differently, when we met on the island we were not looking for anyone. As Bonnie puts it: we had kind of given up. And we were certainly not looking one another. Indeed, we both agree, had we met ten years earlier— which could have happened since ten years earlier I already knew Paul for 5 years— it’s unlikely we would have found one another because our heads were in a very different place. At that point we were both, in fact, looking for someone— those ten years earlier— we were looking for someone.

In short, we were together on a small island when we found one another. But neither of us was looking. (Slight pause.)

We find these words in Luke/Acts in the section commonly referred to as Luke: “When the festival had ended they started to return. But Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, something Mary and Joseph did not realize.” (Slight pause.)

As was stated when this reading was introduced, there are apocryphal gospels, works which did not make it into the canon. These contain astonishing stories about the boy Jesus striking down difficult playmates and raising them up again. The boy Jesus shaping sparrows out of clay and bringing them to life. One can readily see why these apocryphal gospels were voted off the island, or the canon called Scripture.” (Sight pause.)

For me, one of the recurring themes throughout all the Gospels, reflected here, is people try to find Jesus. People seek out Jesus.

The disciples seek a Messiah. In the Gospel we know as John the one called Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin— effectively the city council in Jerusalem— seeks out Jesus but does so at night. Nicodemus seeks Jesus at night, afraid that someone of such a high station would be seen with this revolutionary, this rabble rouser.

In this story of the twelve year old Jesus there is a lot happening and a lot to be reckoned with— everything from the fact that Jesus appears at a young age to be learned to the fact that Mary and Joseph are clearly devote Jews. They visit Jerusalem each year at Passover. I think there’s enough for a couple of sermons or at least a

couple of hours of sermonizing here.

But fear not: I will limit my observations. Indeed, let me concentrate on one way to look at this story. In fact, perhaps one reason this story finds its way into the canon is, just as in other Gospel stories, people seek Jesus.

I think there is a twofold the seeking of Jesus is interesting. First, Jesus is there. Jesus is not in hiding. Jesus is simply there. Yet people seek Jesus.

Second and as you probably know, people are not expecting the Jesus Who is there. People are largely expecting a Messiah who will overthrow, perhaps violently, the existing order, the Roman Empire. But the Messiah they get is not the Messiah they expect. The Messiah they get is a Messiah of peace.

I think we sometimes have the same problem today. The Messiah some of us want is not the Messiah Who is there. So people seek the Jesus who is not there instead of recognizing the Jesus Who is there.

I said this Thursday night, Christmas Eve. The reason we celebrate Christmas is to remind us that Christ is with us— here, now. The presence of Christ is a reality, whether or not we admit it. And because of that presence, Christ invites us to participate in the Dominion of God— here, now.

And what is that work? That work is the work of peace, hope, love, joy, freedom. Here's the short version of this message. Relax: we do not need to seek Jesus. Jesus is here. Amen.

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ENDPIECE: It is the practice of the Pastor to speak after the Closing Hymn, but before the Response and Benediction. {The first thing the pastor said was a reference to the fact that the service contained a hymn sing.} And this is a précis of what was said: "First, thank you for all your input. Second, we all have relatives who give us great, funny, silly Christmas presents. Here is mine. {The pastor removes his robe to reveal a sweatshirt emblazoned with the word *Sermonator*.} The *Sermonator*. Can't beat that, right?"

BENEDICTION: Hear now this blessing from the words of the Prophet Isaiah in the 60<sup>th</sup> chapter (Isaiah 60:19-20)— The sun shall no longer be / your light by day, / nor for brightness shall the moon / give light to you by night; / but *Yahweh*, God, will be your everlasting light, / and your God will be your glory. / Your sun shall no more go down, / or your moon withdraw itself; / for God will be your everlasting light, / and your days of mourning shall be ended. / Amen.