

A Sermon  
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Grace Baptist Church  
Bryans Road, Maryland  
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## **A Missions Moment**

Luke 2:41-52

"It's not Christmas anymore. Why is the tree still up?" That was the reaction of one of the children in our day care ministry as his class entered the sanctuary for worship time this past week. I had anticipated that kind of question, so I spoke briefly about how, though Christmas Day comes and goes, we should spend extended time reflecting on what Jesus' birth means for our lives. No matter how many times we've been to the manger, we never outgrow the need to search deeper into the significance of what happened in Bethlehem. We need to follow the lead of Mary, who "treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19).

That's what Mary did after Jesus was born. And she's still doing it twelve years later. That's when we meet her and Joseph and Jesus, being reunited at the Temple in Jerusalem. Many of you remember this story of how Jesus went missing during his family's trip back home after the Passover festival. Mary and Joseph finally locate Jesus in the Temple, and after chastising him for all the worry and anxiety he has caused, they get into further dialogue with Jesus about what he's doing, and why. What could possibly be so important that he hadn't bothered to return their phone calls or text messages? This is no way for a son to treat his parents.

Mary and Joseph's fear and frustration are certainly understandable. But their distress also becomes the occasion for Jesus to spell out his deepening awareness of his identity and purpose. In other words, what starts out as a case of a missing child becomes a full blown missions moment, revealing more about who Jesus is and what he's here to do.

"Why were you searching for me?" asks Jesus. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (v. 49). In the Greek, the phrasing of this question is ambiguous. It could be translated, "in my Father's house" (NIV), or "about my Father's business" (KJV), or maybe even "about my Father's affairs/interests." Each option has some significant factors in its favor. But whichever translation route we go, it's crucial that we not miss Jesus' emphasis on the necessity of what he's doing. "*I had to be* in my Father's house." "*I must be* about my Father's business." This is just the first of many "it is necessary" statements in Luke's Gospel. So while Jesus is still just a youth, he begins making it clear that his life isn't driven by fate, or by the political and religious forces operating around him. More than anything, his life is bound to God's design for it. What matters most is to do God's will, to fulfill God's purpose for his life.

And who is this God? Jesus refers to him as Father. Now, clearly, from what we already know, there's another father in this picture. "Son," said Mary, "why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you" (v. 48). Jesus responds sharply, though not with hostility, reminding his own parents, and all of us, that his primary identity is Son of God, not simply son of Joseph and Mary. And his life that is now twelve years underway will be guided most of all by his unique relationship with the heavenly

Father. Family love and family loyalties have their place. But they must develop and flourish under the higher love and loyalty to God.

Notice that Jesus' sense of identity and mission develop within a web of relationships, where relationship with God is at the center. And as with our Lord, so with us. None of us can discern who we are or what we're here for by disconnecting ourselves from others and turning completely inward in search of an identity. Instead, each of us is defined by the relationships we have with others, and most of all with God.

Now that we're just a week into this new year, it's important that each of us do a spiritual reset, remembering that who you are is determined by your relationship with God. True, there are other factors that go into shaping your sense of identity. Your family and ancestry. Your race, ethnicity, or nationality. The language you speak. Your educational background. Your occupation. Your income. Your address. Your age and physical condition. The friendships you form. The groups or networks to which you belong. All these things figure into your answer to the question, Who am I?

But if you confess Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life, you're saying that more than anything else, my relationship with the obedient Son of the heavenly Father, and thus my relationship with the heavenly Father, determine who I am. I don't discover my identity deep within my own ego but in the mercy and love of the Father. I don't discover my identity in what I'm able to accomplish but in what God has accomplished for me. I don't discover my identity in the things that belong to me but in the Lord to whom I belong. And because of this, I, in my life—24/7, 365 days a year—must be about the Father's business. That's the spiritual reset button that each of us needs to hit in the early stages of 2017.

There's a story told about the great Rabbi Aqiba who, on a foggy night, was walking home to his village in Galilee. Because of the darkness and fog, he misses the turn to his village and ends up going down a road that leads to a Roman garrison full of soldiers. As he approaches the fortress, he hears a voice shout over the wall, "Who are you and why are you here?" Aqiba paused, and then asked the soldier, "How much are they paying you?" "No," answered the soldier, "I said, who are you and what are you doing here?" Again Aqiba asked, "How much are they paying you?" "Uh, two denarius a day," said the soldier. And the rabbi answered, "I will give you twice that to come to my house every morning and ask me those two questions."

Tis the season for resolutions. Perhaps you made some of your own, and you've now had a week to put them to the test. Certain ones usually show up on people's lists. Lose weight. Get organized. Spend more time with family and friends. Get out of debt. Enjoy life more. Learn something new. Become a better person. And even if you're not the kind of person who gets into specific resolutions, the beginning of another year can at least stir your thinking in a general way about how you can shape what's ahead. Wouldn't it be nice if . . . I want to . . . I plan to . . . I hope to . . . I intend to . . .

But what we hear coming out of the mouth of Jesus, and what should come out of the heart and mouth of a follower of Jesus, have an even more urgent and pressing tone. Not just, Wouldn't it be nice if . . . Not just, I want to, plan to, hope to, or intend to. But, I must . . . "I must be about my Father's business." "I had to be in my Father's house." "It's necessary that I be about my father's affairs/interests." During each day that I'm given in 2017, I must . . . I have to . . . It's necessary that . . . How will you complete these declarations in ways that are in keeping with God's mission in the world? After all, there are many good things that you can be doing. But what are the best and most important things that you need to be doing? What are the things that need to take priority? What are the

things that are most pressing from a kingdom of God perspective? Though many things are significant, what things, in your life and your particular context, are most urgent?

You may not be given clear, simple, easy answers to these questions right up front. Though in some cases the answers may be obvious, in many situations you will need to be diligent and determined in searching, asking, and listening, much like Jesus himself, among the teachers, in the Temple. That was the dwelling place of God. That's where you went to meet and be molded by the Lord. That's where you went to learn, discern, and reflect on his will and his way for your life.

That's why we need this community of God's people called the church, this dwelling place of the Lord, in which we can seek and hear the will of God, and stay the course in the mission that he has for our lives, individually and together. Remember that if you confess Jesus as Lord and Savior, you belong to him and to his people. This fellowship of believers is the relational web in which you gain clarity about who you are and why you're here. You don't discern your unique identity and vocation by stepping outside the family of God and launching into your own independent quest to find yourself. Instead, you come into and dwell in the community called the church, where you search and ask and listen for what God wants you to do and how he wants you to do it.

In the classic film *The Sound of Music*, Maria, played by Julie Andrews, is searching for God's will for her life. She's a candidate for the convent, but has trouble fitting into convent life, so she's sent to be a governess overseeing the children of the Von Trapp family. That's where she hopes to find out whether she is truly meant to be a nun or whether God has something else planned for her.

Confused about her feelings for Captain Von Trapp, Maria suddenly flees and returns to the convent. She meets with the Mother Superior, who asks her why she was sent back. Maria admits that she left because she was afraid and confused and needed the sanctuary of the abbey. But Mother Superior tells her firmly, "An abbey is not to be used as an escape. What is it you can't face?"

Maria admits she may be in love with Captain Von Trapp but isn't sure. "That's what's been torturing me. I was there on God's errand. To ask for his love would have been wrong. I couldn't stay. I just couldn't." Maria faces a crucifix and says, "I'm ready at this moment to take my vows. Please help me."

Mother Superior tells her, "Maria, the love of a man and a woman is holy, too. You have a great capacity to love. What you must find out is how God wants you to spend your love." When Maria says she has pledged her life to God's service, Mother Superior answers: "My daughter, if you love this man it doesn't mean you love God less. No. You must find out. You must go back." Maria objects, but Mother Superior tells her, "Maria, these walls were not built to shut out problems. You have to face them. You have to live the life you were meant to live."

Like Maria, you're seeking and searching and working at living the life you were meant to live, finding out and figuring out how God wants you to spend your love in the world, day by day. In order for that to happen, your identity and vocation have to be grounded in a relationship with God the Father through faith in Jesus the Son. That's where you discover what you most need to be doing in order to be about the Father's business.