

Epiphany - 6 January 2018 - Hermannsburg KZN

Luke 2:41-52

Losing Jesus - Finding Jesus

Dear congregation,

Occasionally I come across the presidential motorcade when I travel between Pretoria and Johannesburg. A whole lot of black cars, surrounded by a fleet of police vehicles, all with blue lights. One never knows in which of the cars the president is sitting - that is part of the strategy.

Now imagine if, after some big event, the motorcade travels back to the presidential residence, and upon arrival it turns out that the president is in none of the cars? It is difficult to imagine, but I assume that, should it happen, many people will be fired.

The story that I have chosen for the sermon tells us of someone *losing* Jesus. But it is not just any one. The ones losing Jesus are Mary and Joseph, his parents. They don't just lose him for an hour or two - but for three days! And it takes them a whole day to realise that they have lost him. Incredible. The story is told at the end of Luke 2, the chapter that tells about the wonderful birth of Jesus, wonderful in the sense that the miserable circumstances in the stable were overshadowed by heavenly choirs, scenes of worship and amazement. It tells us about the encounter of the young parents in the temple with Simeon and Hannah who hold the baby and proclaim that they have now seen the salvation of the Lord. Every time we then read: Mary kept all these words in her heart.

Mary and Joseph - entrusted with the care of the Son of God. And now, at the end of this chapter we read that they lose him!

Let us hear the story Luke 2:41-52

Parents losing a 12 year old son- that will make headlines even in our messy times. But foster parents losing the Son of God - that is even worse than the presidential body guard losing the president!

And yet - it happened. After all these years, after all the wonderful incidents that Mary and Joseph experienced with and around Jesus, after all

that they "kept in their hearts" - as he turns 12, the age were Jewish boys are seen to become adults - they lose him!

During last weeks eEquip retreat I spend a day with the children attending, and told them this story. What made it fascinating for me was the fact that their age ranged from 10-15, with three being 11 or 12 years old.

So I realised again how young, and how dependent, a 12 year old is. Even if the culture declares him an adult, Jesus still was totally dependent on the care and protection of his parents. And they lose him!

Today is Epiphany Sunday. The theme of the day is the light that shines in darkness, the Messiah of the world that appears to the world. In the gospel (Matthew 2, 1-12) we heard about the Magi from the east journeying for weeks, perhaps months, to find this Messiah. They find him, and rejoice. We are singing about Jesus our Saviour, who has come, about heaven and earth rejoicing. And now we read this story which tells us how the custodians of this light of the world lose him!

I love Church history. And I can confirm that this is not the last time that the custodians of Christ lost him. Studying the history it seems that sometimes the Church had lost Christ for years, decades, even centuries. The worst is that it seems that no one noticed. It is as if every body assumed that Jesus would be somewhere in our midst, but that he is definitely travelling with us. Only history then shows that they had lost him, that they were travelling without him.

We have just completed the sixth eEquip retreat. Our topic was "Hope and a future". It is based on a verse from Jeremiah 29, 11; where God speaks to Judah during a time of total disaster and crisis. Every thing is in a mess, large portions of the leadership had been captured and taken into exile, the rest was to follow soon. Into this messy situation God then says: I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future".

Hope in messy times! We looked at the mess, and asked how it came about, and how a way forward could look.

How can it be that a country like South Africa, where the large majority of

the population is Christian, ranks tops with regards to violence and abuse, crime and racial division? Based on today's text I can ask: Have we lost Jesus? Have we as Christians, those who are supposed to be custodians of Christ, lost him?

History shows us how often it has happened, and, more importantly, that it always took some time before the church realised it - just as Mary and Joseph when losing Jesus.

When Martin Luther "started" the reformation, he actually did not start it. For three hundred years before him there were hundreds, thousands of people already saying something similar, but the Church resisted them, declared them heretics, executed them, all the time assuming that Jesus was on their side, that Jesus travelled with them.

If we look at the history of the Lutheran Church we need to acknowledge: Although we regarded ourselves as the true custodians of the gospel of Christ, we too lost him time and again. During the time of the third Reich the German Protestant Church officially sanctioned Hitler and joined the battle cry: Gott mit uns - God with us. Those who stated that God was NOT with us were silenced, sidelined, imprisoned or even executed.

A huge portion of the mess that we find ourselves in is due to Christians "travelling without Christ", but assuming that he is somehow with us.

In this text the parents of Jesus look for him for three days before finding him. Jesus's reply to them is astonishing: You should have known were to find me! I need to be "in my Father's house"

If you read this verse in various translations you will find that Jesus does not refer to the temple, but says: I need to be where my Father is.

What do we do when we have lost Jesus? Where do we need to look for him? We need to look where God is at work. Part of this is to ask: Where am I on a road that is clearly in conflict with God's commandments, clearly in conflict with the teachings of Jesus. Then I cannot assume that he is journeying with me. I need to turn around and ask: where do I need the teachings of Jesus, his guidance to transform me?

Mary and Joseph found him in the temple, the little 12 year old teaching

wise theologians and asking them questions that leave them astonished. Where do I find Jesus? I find him when I am prepared to listen- to read in the Bible, during my daily devotion. I will find him when he asks difficult questions, when he challenges me, my opinions, prejudices. I will find him when he shows me God's way, God's passion.

Epiphany - the magi travelled far and when they found Christ, they bowed down and worshipped him.

Mary and Joseph travelled far before realising they had lost Christ.

Epiphany - the light is shining in the darkness. Christ is there! The saviour is there. But are we where he is?

Today, at the beginning of 2019, year of election, time of much tension and unrest, we are invited to "turn around", to look for Jesus and then make sure that we journey with him, rather than just assuming that he is somewhere in our midst.

I hope to start every day with the question: Lord, am I still travelling with you? Am I where you are? Let me see your light, let it guide me through darkness!

Amen

Horst Müller, Bishop, ELCSA(N-T) Email: hmuller@elcsant.org.za