

*Asking Jesus, Pt. 1*  
***Why Have You Treated Us So?***  
*Luke 2: 40-52*

**First Presbyterian Church  
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Walking is one of the best ways of talking. Being in motion frees the mind and heart. Fresh air, legs moving and blood pumping inspire the back and forth of conversation. So, I love the cover painting on this year's Lent book. Liz Swindle's "Emmaus Road," depicts Easter afternoon when two disciples talked with Jesus as they walked through a tree tunnel. A white light from back down the road illumines their path. Perhaps its source is the empty tomb from which Jesus has recently emerged. The tall, leafy dark trees would be unlikely in Israel. But Swindle depicts something beyond the literal landscape. This scene evokes Eden, the garden in which the LORD once walked with his beloved creation. We lost Eden through our sin. But with the resurrection, new creation has dawned. Our long estrangement from God is over. The earth greens forth deep, rich life. Once again, as the old hymn says, "He walks with me and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own." Can you imagine what you might ask Jesus if you had a two hour walk with him? That's the inspiration for this year's Lent focus.

This study has been transformative for me! Even after a half century of pursuing knowing Jesus, this year I came to see him through fresh eyes. I had never considered as a whole the range of requests made to him. Everyone asked things of Jesus, whether family or enemies, the broken or the proud, the seekers or the demonic. The more I read, the more I grew in awe of Christ's replies. Jesus answered with brilliance, wit, wisdom, compassion, resolute purpose, true-heartedness, keen insight and tender mercy. There's never been anyone like him in the world. Not before or since. No one comes close to this young rabbi from the north country. Just listening in on how he answered us in word and work leads me to love him more. I got so much from the preparation that I am eager to offer to be your guide through the requests and replies of Jesus we find in the gospels.

Because here's the wonder: Jesus still meets us in the record of his words and actions! With just a little imagination, we can quickly identify with the people

in the gospel accounts. This Lent, we can have a fresh encounter with Jesus by discovering how the requests others made of him remain the ones we make today. His answers to disciples and Pharisees, the wounded and the wealthy, the grieving and the self-sufficient, can become life-changing replies to *us*. Each day, we will follow a five-step pattern of exploration.

- 1) We'll pray for the Holy Spirit to speak to us as we say aloud a daily Scripture and then *read the story* that contains the request,
- 2) We'll note first just *who* is asking Jesus for something. We'll consider what's the presenting question. Just straight up, what's being requested?
- 3) But next, we'll inquire about the *question inside the question*. What does this person *really* seek to know or gain? What's the end-game here? What's revealed about the heart desires we bring to Jesus? This creates the connection between then and now.
- 4) Then, we'll look closely at how *Jesus replied*. Does he grant or deny the request? We'll see how Jesus always answered the deeper need in every question. That will allow us to consider how Jesus addresses us today. Our circumstances and culture may be different, but the desires of the human heart remain the same across the miles and centuries. The way Jesus engaged the people he met is the same way he engages us today. That will lead us to
- 5) *Our response* to Jesus in prayer. I've provided prayers that arose from my personal interaction with the story. They're meant to be a springboard for your prayers. In every case, what matters most is the way each one of us allows the material to be a launch pad for our own interactions with Christ. So, shall we try it with today's passage? The first recorded question to Jesus came when he was 12 years old. *Son, why have you treated us so?*



### **Who's Asking?**

Jesus' mother Mary asked the question after she and Joseph had searched for Jesus for three days. The family had come south from Nazareth to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. People travelled in clusters of relatives and friends, looking out for each other's children. Jesus was just a year from official

adulthood. He would not have been expected to stay right next to his parents. But panic ensued when, at the end of a day's travelling, Mary and Joseph could not find Jesus! I can scarcely imagine my parental anxiety if we had spent two nights not knowing where our child was. The city of Jerusalem had been teeming with pilgrims. With pilgrims came scoundrels and hustlers. An unaccompanied boy could have been easy prey. So his parents had to hurry back a whole long day just to begin searching the city.



They found him in the temple, discussing the Scriptures with the learned scholars. Luke describes this encounter, “And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, ‘Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been

searching for you in great distress.’” The word Mary used to describe their feelings implies tormenting distress and sorrowful, unrelieved grief. They’ve been desperate with the question, *Where’s our boy?!* So when they find him safe in the temple, all kinds of feelings shoot through them. Immense relief *and* anger and wonder they their boy has a seat with the scholars of God’s Word. But how could Jesus have stayed back without telling them? She seemed so disappointed with him!



### **The Question Within the Question**

Particularly with the first child, parents may sorrow the day they realize their child is his own person, who never really was theirs to keep, and never could stay always their little one. The ancient prophet Simeon had taken the baby Jesus in his arms to bless him. He had a quiet prediction for Mary, “A sword will pierce through your own soul also” (Luke 2: 35). So it began. Her boy was becoming a man. He was growing into his identity as the unique Son of his heavenly Father and the Christ of his people. Mary knew that, but this first of many heart stabs still stung. Parents live with the sorrow that the baby who once relied on them

for everything becomes an independent adult, even though that’s exactly how it

should be. No matter how close their mature relationship, though, there remains a touch of grief for the change.

Further, we see how this early story gets mirrored by Luke in one of his last stories. The disciples on the Emmaus Road did not know it was the risen Jesus to whom they talked. They lamented how they had hoped Jesus was “the one to redeem (Lk. 24:21). But now it was the third day since he was taken from them. Jesus was still “lost” to them and their hearts were grieved.

So, too, at times we may wonder at what seems like the absence of Jesus. It could be in seasons of rejection, illness or grief when Christ seems gone. Like we’ve lost him. Or it could be wondering why Jesus takes so long to return while the world heaves in its broken, rebellious agony. Christ’s church asks with Mary, “Why have you treated us so?” Why do you let the world persist in its resistance? Why do you let us do such terrible things to each other? You have the power to fix it, so why do you treat us so and why do you let us treat each other so?

Along a more self-centered path, I may resentfully ask Jesus, “Why must your vocation interrupt *my* travel plans?” Joseph had work back in Nazareth. The family had a schedule to keep. The adults had an agenda of what life was supposed to be about. So I may well ask, “Jesus why don’t you accommodate yourself to my plans instead of interrupting my life by making *me* seek you?” We have great ideas of how we’d like life to suit us. The inconvenience of a Savior who asks us for not less than everything can make us wonder why he treats us so.



### **Jesus’ Response**

For Jesus, this episode represented his discovery as a 12 year old that he was not just an extension of his parents’ lives. He was his own person. He had a unique, intimate orientation to his heavenly Father. Mary called him “Son,” and that was true. But Jesus’ calling as a human son required him to live faithfully as his heavenly Father’s Son. The needle of

Jesus’ heart always pointed toward the *magnetic north* of his Father’s love.

This cannot be overstated! The first question out of the gate could have deflected Jesus from his purpose. If he had stayed the boy bent on pleasing people more than pleasing his Father, his parents might have been proud, but we would

have been lost. Our deepest need was for Jesus to be the one man who truly loved God with a pure heart, loved his Father with an undivided soul, loved the LORD his God without ever hedging his bets or looking for an easier, more exciting alternative.

Jesus was not being rebellious or thoughtless to his parents. He had found his home in the Temple, where the Word of his Father was being taught and discussed. Deep realization had come upon him. It was both necessary and inevitable that finding this House of his Father, he had to linger there. His true divinity was rising in awareness.

With the big picture in view, we see that Jesus' passion for his Father made him the first truly faithful human. He was being the man we needed him to be. But that is also inconvenient to us. Jesus won't be swayed by our plans or worries or expectations. He won't become our Santa Claus. He refuses to be a God who's purpose is to help us fulfill our dreams of what makes for a good life. We cannot co-opt Jesus to our agenda. That means we can't elevate any of our dreams or ambitions above choose and still keep a close connection to him. When we choose as first something other than his Father, our connection to Jesus just recedes. We lose him for as long as the season of our rebellion lasts. Coming back will be as tedious, anxious and arduous as Mary and Joseph's exhausting day backtracking to Jerusalem. That's the price of repentance. A price well worth paying. Because we lose Jesus until we seek him where he can always be found. We seek him in his Father's house: engaged in God's Word, offering with love the eternal sacrifice of praise, sharing his Father's mission to the least of these all the way to the ends of the earth.

For Jesus is not lost. It is we who journey away from Christ. And then ask in our misery, "Why have you treated us so? Why won't you be a savior who arranges life the way I want it?" Jesus takes no delight in our anxiety. He does not sneer at the distress we feel when we've lost sight of him. He grieves all the tragedies that flow from the broken communion between God and humanity. He wants us to be reconnected. But he won't be co-opted. He won't fix the presenting problem so we can get back to life on our terms. Over and over he reminds us, "Do you not know that I must be in my Father's house, about my Father's business? That's where you'll always find me. That's where life begins. That's where love flows. That's where reconciliation occurs. The meeting place between God and man, the healing place. I'm always there. Come back to me!"

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, your Father was your necessity.  
You found your home in his house.  
You found your purpose in his presence.  
If we want you, we must orient to the Father as well.  
How merciful that you share such intimacy.  
You open your relationship with the Father to us  
As you teach us to pray like you, "Our Father..."

Still, at times, we search for you and think you have left us.  
We grow disheartened that we feel alone.  
But you remind us of the Father's words to the elder brother,  
"Child, you are always with me,  
And all that I have is yours."  
Lead us, we pray, to interrupt our personal journeys  
And seek you in the Father's House (his presence in you!)  
Where alone is fellowship and life everlasting.

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*Artists Depicting the young Jesus in the Temple:*

William Holman Hunt, 1860

Max Liebermann, 1879

James Tissot, 1890

Rembrandt, 1654