

November 1, 2020 Lingerin / All Saint's Day / Luke 2:41-52

The Lord be with you. I'm Terry Zehr, pastor of Senior Ministries here at Waterford Mennonite. And we are thinking about Jesus' action of lingering this morning. Sometimes lingering is pretty benign, but sometimes, like we've been seeing these past weeks, the actions of Jesus can be pretty subversive in the service of God's Kingdom. I wonder which one Jesus invites us into as we linger in our own lives.

Let me start by asking you, at least those of you who are older than 12, do you remember being 12? I do. For whatever reason that year is rather vivid to me. There were a lot of good memories for that year of my life, a lot of funny and interesting stories I could tell and have used as sermon illustrations, but let me tell you about a moment in time of being 12 that stood out, mostly because it was so different from all the goodness that I remember from this age.

I don't remember exactly what happened, but something did. And I was mad at my parents and we got into a verbal tussle which was out of character for me. And I was sent to my room, without supper until I apologized. But I was not going to apologize. I was right. They were wrong and I was fuming. I remember thinking that they didn't care about me or what was important to me so, I was just going to go somewhere else where I mattered.

So I did what perhaps a number of us have thought about. I pulled my little suitcase from under my bed, loaded it with clothes, zipped it up, marched up the stairs as loud as I could and slammed the door on my way out of the house. I was going to run away. I don't know for a fact but I'm sure that my mom was watching out the window to see what I was going to do. I took a few steps away from the door, out to the edge of the porch and then stopped. I was going to run away but where would I go? The people that I knew loved me were my grandparents but they were 450 miles away. And besides, I wasn't even sure which direction it was. And slowly I realized the futility of what I was doing and went back into the house, unpacked

my suitcase and encountered my very concerned mother standing at my bedroom door. And yes, I still had to apologize before I could have supper.

Did you ever wonder if Jesus had to apologize to his parents? We don't know enough about Jesus' childhood to answer that question. And maybe this story is as close as it gets. But this story does raise a question for me. How do you lose the Son of God? I mean, it is one thing to lose your car keys, or your glasses or even your cell phone. But, the Son of God? How do you lose the Son of God?

It takes Joseph and Mary three whole days to locate him, one of those to just get back to Jerusalem but that still meant there were two days of panic, 48 hours of further anxiety. It must have about done Joseph and Mary in. Even a couple of minutes of this can feel like a lifetime. I've experienced a few minutes before as a parent where I couldn't find one of our boys. I can't even begin to fathom 3 days.

Who knows what was going on here but the ending of Luke 2, this story, provides us with a nice window into the very human, very earthy, very mundane nature of the gospel. The same chapter in Luke that began with angels singing in the sky at Jesus' birth concludes with a down to earth story about parental error, deep panic, great relief played out on a very ordinary stage. A stage that is no different than the one that our lives play out on. And that stage is this.

Try as we might, life is unpredictable. Maybe that is why we wish that our God was more predictable. This happens and God will do this. Or to say it another way, this won't happen because God is this. Predictable. We need predictability in our lives. So did Joseph and Mary. But that is not what they got, was it? And that is often not what we get either. Our lives and God in the midst of our lives does not often fit into our nice, neat little predictable boxes. And even here at the age of 12, it's already happening. Jesus is lingering.

He didn't run away from home, but his lingering had the same effect on his parents. It caused worry, unease, alarm, anxiety. Jesus lingered. But why?

If you know the stories of the Gospel you know this wasn't the only time. As the life of Jesus unfolds, Jesus lingers. Like Jesus in the wilderness for 40 days. That is a story of lingering. Wouldn't overcoming one temptation be enough? Apparently not. And so Jesus lingers for two more temptations!

Or like when Jesus' friend Lazarus was dying. That is a story of lingering. Surely Jesus would come. Surely he would heal him. But no. It is two days before Jesus starts to come. Lazarus dies. Mary and Martha wallow in the reality of death and chaos and confusion. Lingering.

When I enter the story of Lazarus, I have to admit I'm bothered. Isn't a quick response the Christ-like thing to do when someone is in need? But Jesus lingers, staying right where he was at. But why? Does he not care for us?

Maybe I'm not understanding completely. Or maybe I'm not giving Jesus enough credit. Maybe Jesus did want to hightail it back to Bethany for his friends, but this was one of those moments when He had to submit His will to God's. Maybe it is not much different than the Wilderness temptation story. "If you are the Son of God, rush back and save your friend." Maybe Jesus was ready to go help His dying friend but the God says, "No, wait, there is something more going on here. It's not time yet." And so Jesus lingers.

But like I said, I would rather have a Jesus that is more predictable. Less lingering. Because experiencing the Jesus who lingers means having no clue sometimes. We are like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in so many ways. We cling to the belief that new life will come, but in the meantime we struggle to believe anything is happening. Because it sure doesn't feel like it.

But maybe that's the way it has to be. The word I'm after is transformation, because if transformation is anything at all, it is change from the inside out, not the outside in. Even in this story of the 12 year old Jesus, did you notice what happens? In verses 41 and 42, when this story began, we are told that "they" all went up to Jerusalem from Nazareth. But in verse 51, the Greek has the subject of the verb becoming he, as in Jesus. He went down to Nazareth and his parents are said to accompany him. Jesus the child leads the way out of Jerusalem. A transformation has taken place, in Jesus and in Joseph and Mary.

As we wait, as Jesus lingers, we are invited to relinquish control, to surrender our wills, to give up our false hopes, and realize that if anything is going to happen at all, it will have to be God's doing. And that's not easy. That is why I would like to have a predictable God. We would have a Jesus that is Christ like and shows up earlier because he is not lingering. But if that was the case, this story of the 12 year old Jesus would not exist; Mary would have nothing to treasure in her heart and Mary and Martha and Lazarus would never have known the greatness of Jesus' power to restore if he had not lingered in order to raise Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus' lingering can be rather subversive at times, don't you think? But then, whatever it takes for us to be transformed into people who have God's heart and are sensitive to God's Spirit—maybe that is what God is up to. Maybe in our hard headedness and seemingly self-sufficient lives, which is such a false illusion, we need a subversive Jesus who lingers. And so, perhaps it would be good for us to let go of our desire for a predictable God, and instead, learn how to linger like Jesus.

In that vein, I keep reflecting on a devotion that Richard Rohrer sent out in mid-September as he reflected on the turbulent time we are living in. It seems relevant for even though he doesn't use the word lingering, in many ways that is what it is about. And I wonder if this is what Jesus was doing in his moments of lingering as

he was alone in prayer or in the presence of others when all around him was falling apart.

The devotion is long so I won't try to cover it all but one morning Rohrer woke up with three sources in his mind for guidance. The first was from Etty Hillesum (1914 – 1943), a young Jewish woman who suffered much more injustice in the concentration camp than we are suffering now. She wrote: *There is a really deep well inside me. And in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there, too ... And that is all we can manage these days and also all that really matters: that we safeguard that little piece of You, God, in ourselves.* (Etty Hillesum, Westerbork transit camp)

The second was Psalm 62, written in a time of a major oppression of the Jewish people; *In God alone is my soul at rest. God is the source of my hope. In God I find shelter, my rock, and my safety. Men who think themselves important are a delusion. Put them on a scale, they are gone in a puff of wind.* - Psalm 62:5–9

And finally the third was the Irish Poet, W. B. Yeats (1865 – 1939), who wrote his poem the “Second Coming” during the horrors of the World War I and the Spanish Flu pandemic. Let me pull a few lines.

*Turning and turning in a widening circle;
The falcon cannot hear the falconer; writes Yeats.
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;*

Do you ever wonder why Jesus lingered? I've often thought that to live in the day of Jesus must have been terribly difficult. Living in a brutal period of time with crushing poverty and injustice, under the thumb of Roman oppressive occupiers. How would you not get pulled into all that was going on around you forcing you to choose on its terms?

Rohrer writes that “somehow our occupation and vocation as believers in this sad time must be to first restore the Divine Center by holding it and fully occupying it ourselves. If contemplation means

anything, it means that we can “safeguard that little piece of You, God,” as Etty Hillesum describes it.”

I think for Jesus, this is what lingering was about. Whether off alone spending time with God or being present and attentive to God's heart as he is lingering with people in their varied, unpredictable lives, Jesus is holding that Divine Center and fully occupying it. Our reaction, our expectations for Jesus as he lingers in our lives is the very fertile ground that Jesus cultivates to bring transformation to our lives. He wants us to occupy and live in this space as he lives in it.

As Rohrer writes toward the end of his reflection, “What other power do we have now? Everything else is tearing us apart, inside and out and will easily become our prison if we chose its terms. Because....

God cannot abide with us in a place of fear.

God cannot abide with us in a place of ill will or hatred.

God cannot abide with us inside a nonstop volley of claim and counterclaim.

God cannot abide with us in an endless flow of online punditry and analysis.

God cannot speak inside of so much angry noise and conscious deceit.

God cannot be found when all sides are so far from “the Falconer.”

God cannot be born except in a womb of Love.

So offer God that womb.

Maybe this sermon should be entitled, “Lingering....offering God our wombs of Love.” And as I think about the lives of those whom we remember on this All Saints Day, Mary and Francis, Betty and Martha, Rosetta and Evonna, what is remembered about them, what is celebrated from their lives is what they offered to so many others. They offered God because they had lingered as Christ worked the ground of their lives. And their lives became the space, the womb of love where God lived. Praise be to God.