

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, January 5, 2025

Friends, as we continue in our worship and as we prepare to hear God's word read and proclaimed, I invite you to join me in the spirit of prayer. Let's pray together.

Spirit of peace, fall fresh upon us this day. Fall fresh upon us and quiet us that we might hear the word you have to speak to us this day, and that in hearing we might be called to lead lives of response. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Our lesson this day returns us back to the Narrative Lectionary. We took a little bit of a break during the season of Advent, but for the next two months we will be in the Gospel of Luke together. We'll be studying those texts. We're excited to see what it is the spirit reveals to us as we do that. We start this day with Luke 2: 42- 51, excuse me 41- 52. Let's listen together for God's word to each of us and to God's church.

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents were unaware of this. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously looking for you." Jesus said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them, and his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years and in divine and human favor.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of Our Lord endures forever. Amen.

Nothing will throw off your morning routine like over sleeping. On Sunday mornings I set at least two alarms depending on how tired I am. Sometimes there's a third. I have this fancy alarm clock that I got last year. It's really nice, and it plays a nice sound, but it's really easy—if you just touch it, it snoozes for 11 minutes—and it's so easy to roll over and just tap it. So I set a couple of extra alarms on my phone, not because I've ever missed a worship service, but because it is my

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers

Sunday, January 5, 2025

deepest fear that I will miss 8:30 worship service, okay? I'm terrified of the possibility. Oversleeping is the worst. So you could forgive Kate McAlister for being a little flustered after the alarm failed to go off the morning that her family was to depart early on their big vacation. The night before had been a nightmare—each of her children doing seemingly everything possible to get under their siblings' skin. So when she and her husband realized they'd overslept, they rushed out of the house, piled in their car and headed for the airport. They made it just in time for their flight. I'm sure none of y'all were late for your holiday flights this year. The story goes that the plane was somewhere between Chicago and Paris when Kate realized an error that would become the stuff of legends. From her seat in business class she shrieked her son's name aloud... pause for effect... do y'all know his name? Kevin. Yeah, you can say it like she said it if you want to. No, I'm just kidding, all right. It was... it was something, right. I don't know what Mary's voice sounded like, but you can bet it had a similar mix of horror and surprise in it when she realized that her 12-year-old son, Jesus, wasn't among the group making their way to Nazareth.

This text has much to reveal to us, things for us to pay attention to. I invite you to notice first the importance of attentiveness, the importance of attention. More than anyone in the world Mary and Joseph knew that God was working through their son, and yet, even they found it possible to forget Jesus. Isn't that us? We can know God is at work and still forget God. We can neglect to nurture his presence amongst us. I even need reminders of it. I had a friend telling me a beautiful story a couple of weeks ago that could be described in no other way but a Holy Experience. When he got done telling the story, he said, "Look at God." And I thought to myself, "Oh yeah, that was God. It wasn't just energy or the universe. That was God showing up in my friend's life." I do this for a living, y'all, and I needed to be reminded that indeed that presence was the presence of God in my friend's life. So the scripture offers us this invitation to attentiveness. It also reminds us that even those who are closest to Jesus can neglect his presence amongst them. So we are invited to claim together Christ's presence in our lives and in the world.

Notice further their searching for this Jesus. Where did they look for him? Verse 44b says, "Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends." If you over this holiday season found Christ among your relatives and your friends, you are blessed, blessed indeed. Many wouldn't start there to find Jesus... amongst their family, but they did amongst this traveling crew heading from Jerusalem. They try to find Jesus, and they can't, and so they return to Jerusalem; and the scripture tells us that they looked for three days for him. I've been to Jerusalem, some of y'all probably have too. It ain't a big place. It was even smaller then, right, and they looked and looked. You can imagine an anxious Mom and Dad walking the streets of that ancient town screaming out their son's name, asking if anyone has seen him. And isn't that us? More often finding ourselves searching for Jesus with great anxiety. But where do they neglect to look? The

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, January 5, 2025

temple, the church. The scripture offers us an invitation to rediscover Jesus in the church. The church is the place in which they find Jesus, Mary and Joseph do, among the people of that community in the midst of study. Some of you find it easy to find Jesus in the church. Perhaps it's the architecture that brings awe and a sense of the holy. Or for others of you it's not simply the building of the church but indeed the body of Christ that is the church. It's amongst the people that you see Jesus in the midst of worship or in the midst of serving. But I think too often we neglect this first lesson of the Adolescent Christ, that Jesus is to be found here in the church amongst God's people, amongst this great Cloud.

Notice further the model of faithfulness that Jesus offers. They find him, scripture says, seated at the feet of some learned folks, listening and asking questions in the church. I talk to many of you, and you speak of being in a particular season of now parenting your parents. It's a beautiful thing to not only be able to do but also to receive as a parent. Jesus is parenting his parents even as an adolescent boy. He is showing them that the church is the place to ask significant questions of life and existence, and isn't that us, with all sorts of questions to ask and thoughts to share? Jesus's model of faithfulness emphasizes the significance of the church, the temple, the community. Jesus is teaching us that the church should be a place for asking questions. In verse 46, "After three days they found him in the temple sitting among the teachers listening to them and asking them questions." But verse 47 gives us something more—"And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers." And so verse 46 seems to insinuate that this is a one-way conversation between Jesus asking the questions of these learned folks, but verse 47 tells us it's much more of a conversation, holy and reciprocal in nature, because they must be asking him some questions too if they're amazed at his answers. He was asking them questions and they were asking him questions. He stays in the church. and not just that, he engages in the work of discipleship. There's something beautiful that this scripture offers us as an invitation to re-engage our most vital questions in the church.

Some will say then that when Jesus grows up, he goes out from the church and spends most of his public ministry away from the church. It's not altogether true, but it's...it's very true. He does go out. Scripture also attests to him spending much time in quiet and reflection and in the temple as well. Jesus is offering us in this text a pattern. He establishes here the church, the physical space and the community as the incubator, the place that nurtures his faith, the place where he can ask questions and lean in and learn and grow so that he may go out into the world and serve. Many of us feel that we have graduated from the community, from the church, and now we are doing what God has called us to outside of these walls. And we should feel good about the work that is happening outside of the walls of this place, but we ought not neglect the pattern that Jesus establishes here that the church becomes for us forever and always a place to return to, to

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, January 5, 2025

be nurtured in. It is the place to learn and to grow, to prepare us to go out into the world. Go out, yes, but come back over and over and over again.

Notice finally the hope and the promise of our scripture this day. It comes to us in the final verse of the scripture that we read, verse 52. The hope for us is that even Jesus is a work in progress, perfect in every way; and yet verse 52 tells us, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years and in Divine and human favor.” Even Jesus was one who had the ability to increase somehow in wisdom and in years. Everyone grows old, but very few people grow up. Jesus, Jesus not only advances in years, but he grows in wisdom, in soul wisdom in heart wisdom in mind wisdom. He grows in these ways because he's not done, not done becoming the fuller and fuller manifestation of the Incarnate, the incarnation of God amongst us.

So perhaps this morning you need to be reminded of the importance of attention, that no matter your circumstances, Jesus is present with you on the journey. Even if you think you've left him behind. Perhaps this morning you've shown up to church for the first time in a while, and you need to be reminded that this is a place where you can bring the most significant questions of your life and trust that there are people here who want to entertain similar questions. Or if not, they'll sit with you while you do it. Perhaps this morning you need to be reminded of what the model is, and that is that you bring your questions here and then you go out into the world and then you come back in with even more questions. Then you go back out into the world. Or perhaps you need to be reminded that none of us are finished products, that even the most learned and wise and holy amongst us can increase, not only in the years that we are given but in wisdom and in favor.

I want to tell you that one of the lessons I think we need to take from this is the boldness with which Jesus created space in the temple that day. It doesn't tell us that Jesus walked into an existing Sunday School class to ask these questions and to grow. It doesn't tell us that he just jumped into a ministry that already existed. Jesus created this space for himself within the church, a place where he could be nurtured and also nourish those around him. I have to tell you in the four years I've been here there are many beautiful and good things that have come from spaces that are already created here. You might join in a PW Circle this week, something that preexists. It already exists, right. You will join in. It will be beautiful and good and nourishing to you. There are other times in different points of our journey where we must create spaces within the church to do the things that we think God is calling us to. One of the most beautiful things that's happened here at Idlewild over the last 6 months or so is that there was a...there was a person in our congregation who had navigated deep grief from the death of their spouse, and they raised their hand and they said, “I want to create a space for people to be cared for and

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers

Sunday, January 5, 2025

nourished within the church as they are caretakers for those that they love.” We put this out there and some of you participate in this. We have a caregiver support group now, and they meet regularly, and Mary has helped them get going but it has been lay-led in many ways. I always...I kind of think of this as Jesus elbowing his way into the temple, creating the space for what he needed to grow in wisdom and knowledge, right. The church is a place for that, whether it's in a Bible study or some new kind of service or some new kind of care and support. Hear this as your invitation to find spaces here and create spaces here. The God that we know in Jesus Christ models that for us. So this day on this Epiphany, we celebrate the Epiphany of Our Lord, may you be called to attentiveness. May you notice the model of faithfulness. May you trust that in the church you may find Christ, and may you always remember that this journey that we are on is one of continually being made more and more perfect in the image of the one that we know in Jesus, the Christ. There is room for increase in you and in me and, indeed, all creation.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, Mother of us all. Amen.