

LUKE 2:41-52

Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of Passover. And when Jesus was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When it ended, they started to return, but the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem and his parents did not know it. 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? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."

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. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

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

RELOCATING

Luke 2:41-52

USA Today recently featured a moving interview with Steven Adams, a retired staff sergeant who served four tours of duty in Afghanistan making many friends among the Afghan people during that time. When the Taliban seized control of the country, those who worked with us as interpreters and fought alongside us were being hunted down (and still are). As soon as their President resigned and fled the country, Adams said his cell phone lighted up like a Christmas tree with calls from those he had stayed in touch who were seeking his help in escaping.

The article relates the details of one of his friend's harrowing journey of traveling to the airport with his wife and two young children. They left family and everything behind except the clothes on their backs and risked getting through numerous check points where he could have been identified, arrested and certainly executed. It took several days as contacts were established and a plan was formulated. Many people risked their own lives to help them in the logistics and documentations. They barely made it to the airport in time to catch the flight on which they were scheduled and were soon blessedly on their way to a new home. Weeks later, they relocated to the same small town in eastern Pennsylvania where Adams himself resides.

Establishing a new home is a complicated and arduous task requiring fortitude, endurance and plenty of assistance from God's angels along the way. Everything is new. Think about that! These refugees had no money, no housing, no jobs, no schools, no furniture, no transportation and to make matters even more stressful, only a nominal command of English.

Naturally, this is an extreme case, but those of you who immigrated from Africa well know many of the issues the Afghans faced and you yourselves have gone through the whole process of finding housing, transportation, jobs, a church, facing language challenges, getting a driver's license—the list is endless. It has required you to rise up and meet the future with faith and hard work. Unless we remain in the home we were born into, we have all had similar experiences multiple times throughout our lives. In fact, it all began the moment we left the womb and entered the big, bad world.

Of course, there are many more ways to Relocate than just physical space. When we change careers; when we marry—or divorce; when we decide to confront our own counterproductive behaviors or habits; when we bring children into the world—in all of these actions, we are engaged in Relocating.

Jesus did this. In truth, there is very little talked about Jesus' early life. We know his father was a carpenter so it is very likely that he was learning the trade. Carpentry requires a lot of

skills and creativity and good carpenters have always been in demand and earn excellent wages. So as an apprentice, you could hope to have a stimulating and lucrative career.

But that was not what Jesus wanted. Rather, he envisioned himself as a rabbi, a scholar of the Torah. So, if he wanted to fulfill his dream, he had to Relocate, as it were. I wonder how this father felt about that. It wasn't that Jesus wished to pursue a less respected career. Rabbis are highly respected within the Jewish community. Nevertheless, it was not what Jesus' father envisioned for him.

Jesus was driven by a burning passion to bring to the people a God-centered way of living which would manifest the Divine will for the world. He wanted to build the kingdom of God on earth. But he had to Relocate from the priorities his parents were placing upon him. According to the story, they reigned him in pretty quickly. How could you blame them? They trusted him to be with his friends on their journey home from Jerusalem, but without telling anyone, he chose to stay behind and pursue his dream. It

was his first step in Relocating. It wouldn't be his last.

In my path to the ministry, I Relocated several times. I received my initial Call during the course of my nine-month long confirmation class when I was twelve. I knew in my gut that I wanted to be a minister. At the time, I knew nothing about my great grandmother sitting me on her lap when I was infant and announced: "This one I dedicate to the ministry."

That notwithstanding, when I made my intentions known to my parents, their response disappointed me. My father in particular was skeptical of my desires and dismissive of the entire notion. In his mind, I was a twelve-year-old boy who really didn't have a clue yet and in an ongoing effort to dissuade me, he would seize upon various aspects of my personality or behavior he didn't like. When I said or did something he considered inappropriate he would shame me saying: "And you want to be a minister!"

That hurt!

This all led me to agree with them that I was not holy enough. So, I eventually gave up the idea and enrolled at Miami

in pre-law. It took me only one trimester to understand that a legal career was not what I wanted for myself. Time to Relocate! I changed my major to religion, formed a relationship to the senior pastor at the Oxford church; was taken under care of the Miami Presbytery; enrolled in seminary and ordained in 1975.

As we evolve throughout our lifespans, we may need to Relocate frequently. Our circumstances change. We aren't the same person we were 20 years ago. We gain in experience and wisdom. The very concept of Home can change. So we have to listen to our inner voice where God speaks to us. God led Jesus. God will lead us too. We will face obstacles. It is all part of Relocating. Don't be afraid. The Lord is with us always.

Reverend Thomas Dunlap

December 26, 2021