

I remember the first time I spoke a stern, “No” to my son Matthew. He had crawled over to the TV and turned the dial. I moved him away. He crawled back. I said, “No!” He looked confused. The tone of my voice, the look on my face were new to him. Not the smile he had grown accustomed to. I sensed something happened in him and between us in that moment.

In moments such as this we learn what it is that brings our parents pleasure, displeasure.

Now Jesus was not two or three in the story we have before us today, he was twelve. We have no stories of Jesus as a toddler, when he took his first step, what he spoke as his first word, whether he ever experienced a time out or a spanking. Through the Bible we know nothing of Jesus’ schooling, his friendships, whether he could run as fast or leap as high as others his age. So much of what we think about as being part of human life is lost to us when it comes to Jesus. After Jesus’ birth in scripture we have only this one story of Jesus at age twelve.

To Jerusalem for the Passover, after the festival Mary and Joseph left with their relatives and friends, thinking Jesus was with the group. But he was still in the temple – asking questions of the teachers – listening to them – amazing them with his understanding and answers. And as far as this story tells, never giving a thought to Mary and Joseph. A boy, caught up in the moment – oblivious to everything else – just like one totally connected to a video game, or collecting rocks or bugs or caught up in play. Jesus was absorbed in talking about God.

When Mary and Joseph discovered that Jesus was not journeying with them they returned to Jerusalem and after three days they found him in the temple. “Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you with great anxiety.”

We can guess what Mary and Joseph were suffering – how they must have imagined the worst – prayed yet knowing that not everything we pray for will be ours. Had this ever happened before to Jesus, to hear his mother so upset?

Jesus answered her, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?” But they did not understand what he said to them.

As people who have just heard the stories of Jesus birth, of the angel announcing the Mary’s child would be the Son of God, it is confusing to us that Mary did not understand. It is like she has forgotten all that went before, growing accustomed to thinking of Jesus as being the son of Joseph. For twelve years it has been like that – Jesus a normal child, they a normal family. But now there is a hint of what lies ahead.

In a way it comes to every family, parents and children bound in the strongest bond that life knows. When children are young mom and dad may think these children belong to them more than anyone else. But when children are grown sometimes there is marriage, or new relationships – friendships – some of these take on more importance than family.

One day Jesus would teach that those who follow him will need to hate mother or brother or sister, son or daughter. It is a harsh word. I take it to mean that God comes first for us.

Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?

But then Jesus does a most curious thing, he went home with Mary and Joseph and was obedient to them. Jesus must be about his Father’s business but not yet. The twelve year old needed to be obedient to Joseph and Mary.

There is a time for family to be first, for mother and father to be honored above all else – even for Jesus. There is a time for us to put family first when children are young and growing and needing the care and guidance of parents. But a day comes when our children no longer belong to us but belong to God. All the years the children are being raised we are preparing them for this. Not only Jesus must be about his Father’s business but each of our children as well.

This is not the only time Mary had to learn about this. When Jesus began his ministry people were talking about him, some were saying Jesus was beside himself. Mary came to take him home.

Jesus was in a house, surrounded by people who sought healing from him. Mary sent word through the crowd that she was outside. Surely she expected Jesus to come to her. But Jesus asked this question, “Who are my mother and my brothers? Whoever does the will of God is my mother and sister and brother.”

And that day Jesus did not go with her.

In this way Mary would learn that Jesus is the Son of God. One day she would learn about this in a much more painful way, seeing her son crucified. Even more than she must have wanted to take him home and keep him safe. But she would learn just how safe he really was when on the third day after the Passover the one they could not find would be among them once more – Jesus raised from the dead. Only then would she understand what it meant for Jesus to be about his Father’s business.