

Series: Where's Jesus?
January 10, 2021
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Church, Hope, KOG
Luke 2:41-52

You know what is also so annoying in life? Trying to find something but you do not know where to look. A common statement for African mother's, at least because that is what my experience is, "You never see anything?" Anyone had that experience?

Okay, if you did not grow up with an African mom, let me invite you to the story. They leave the kitchen, come to the living room then send you to find something in the kitchen where they just came from.

And when you are a kid you have a special gift of not finding anything. Mostly because you are distracted and also just trying to reconcile what just happened. Plus finding ways to say that while not endangering your own life. So moms got used to saying, "You never see anything?"

You know what would have helped? If someone just said, there is where to find it.

As an adult, the things I never seem to find are the other sock yet you wore it, cleaned 'em but they just disappear.

Keys. Have you ever wished to have one of those gadgets that you can ping to show you where your keys are? A few Sunday mornings I have been trapped in the house because I could not get the same keys I used to get in the night before. And they have a thing about disappearing on Sunday mornings when I am under pressure to get here early.

My personal 'favourite' is my glasses. I never seem to know where my glasses are sometimes. And I remember one Sunday coming here without my glasses coz I could not find them and I struggled to see my notes. Yet the worst is when they are hiding on your face. I have looked for my glasses while wearing them.

It is so annoying when you look for something but you don't know where to look, to begin with. So we will talk a little about that this month. 2021 is not the year to spend time looking where you cannot find what you need. And you know what that is? People are trying to find life, people are trying to find Jesus. Where is Jesus? Where can we find the Lord of life.

In fact, there is an exhortation from an ancient prophet who said,

"So turn your attention and seek the Eternal One while it is still possible;

call on Him while He is nearby.”

Isaiah 55:6

And the thing is God is close to all of us. If you get nothing today, maybe because something is distracting you, here this one thing, God is close to all who call on Him. And this was Jesus' main message, that God and his Kingdom are within reach.

Yet let us not spend 2021 looking for glasses that are in our faces. Where can we look? In a world that desperately needs God, where is Jesus?

We have come from a year of disruption. As much as some things are still the same we are all kinda glad to be done with 2020. It's gone my people and even while we walk this path still there is a sense of hope and renewed freshness.

Yet there are valuable lessons that have been picked from living through the year of the pandemic. One being life is precious and fragile. And that has people wanting to actually be fully alive as we walk into 2021.

Now that lesson is tied to the next one. We have learned that there has to be more than this. There has to be more than an 8 to 5. There is certainly more than just a good house and all the material things we can want. Or even a vaccine and news of one. Being fully alive is that something bigger that we have searched for.

And I really believe that is Jesus Christ. Following Jesus brings us to life amazingly and fully. He came to give us life and life in all its fullness. If you wanna do 2021 well, you will be better at life if you follow Jesus. And humanity's desperate need for God was laid bare for all of us to see.

Even though everything was disrupted, our deep need for God was not. If anything, we became more aware of it. While at the same time learning we are not in control. Anything and everything can change in a moment.

That is why we talked about planting ourselves in the unchanging. Because if everything around us is unchanging we need to find what does not change so that our souls are not obliterated. If you are still hanging on to some sort of idea that you are in control, come on, wake up.

So as we step into the new year with so much hope, here schools are opening and we are waiting for March for the curfew to be lifted and all that. How do we address some of those true things that are true regardless of the kind of year?

One, life is fragile so be fully alive. Two, we desperately need Jesus coz only he can make us fully alive while ditching the false impression of control. So where is Jesus? Let us have a

conversation about where we find Jesus. If Jesus is the source of life and life in all its fullness, then where can we find Jesus?

And we will do this by looking at where Jesus himself would go. Because where a person goes, there you will find them. I feel like that would be one of those statements you sometimes find in the proverbs or in the book called Ecclesiastes.

Where a person goes, there you will find them. And this should also inform the believer and the church on where they are being sent to. Because we are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus. We are called to be Jesus to a lost and ailing world.

One day Jesus and his family made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This was such an important part of being Jewish. Each family tried to make this trip to the temple in Jerusalem. So this was a time that was so crowded and full of everything happening. So let's get into the story...

Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. When Jesus was twelve years old, they attended the festival as usual. After the celebration was over, they started home to Nazareth, but Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn't miss him at first, because they assumed he was among the other travellers. But when he didn't show up that evening, they started looking for him among their relatives and friends.

When they couldn't find him, they went back to Jerusalem to search for him there. Three days later they finally discovered him in the Temple, sitting among the religious teachers, listening to them and asking questions. All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

His parents didn't know what to think. "Son," his mother said to him, "why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you everywhere."

"But why did you need to search?" he asked. "Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they didn't understand what he meant.

Then he returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. And his mother stored all these things in her heart.

Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and all the people.

This is the first time we see Jesus in a stop that will become commonplace for him, the temple, the first place we find Jesus at is at the temple, his father's house. A place of worship. Our equivalent would be the church.

He was 12 here but we can safely bet that he made this pilgrimage every year. And even aside from the pilgrimage, they would go to the local centres of worship called the synagogue. Communal worship was important to Jesus. To join the rest of believers in worship even though there was a lot of things about how it was done that he went up against he was given to communal worship.

In fact, when Jesus makes some call his mission statement at the launch of his ministry, he does this in a synagogue.

This is a time when the church has been bashed for quite a while. In fact, it has even seemed woke to try not to associate with the word church. The church is God's idea. Gathering to worship is God's idea to heal the world and there is no plan B.

He intended that this is one of the places we would find him. Even when we may have trouble with church, God has not given up on the church, and it is still his plan A. Church history can be troubling sometimes. Church's engagement in politics can be troubling sometimes yet God has not abandoned the church and neither should you.

After all, we know how critical Jesus was of religious leaders and their political choices and oppression of people. Yet Jesus was often found gathered with other believers over and over again.

This means that we too can and should be ready to point out where church and church leadership goes wrong without necessarily giving up on the church. On gathering together. The world needs the church.

I think it says so much about the generosity of God our father that despite the mess we make of things as the church he still gives himself to us and is available. This was his idea.

When the disciples finally had the revelation of who Jesus is, he said that on that revelation would he build his ecclesia, which we translate church. This word was borrowed from the greek and it meant a political gathering of people. Almost like a popular rally. There was no doubt in those who heard this knew exactly what Jesus meant and it's political implications.

One Jesus was saying that He is King and if Jesus is King, Caesar was not. That was a huge political statement and so when he said he would establish an ekklesia it further confirmed what he was saying. Yet the Kingdom was not of this world and would be different from how people did politics. Yet it was so clear that he was saying if he is King no one else was.

And this is the year we see movements in the political sphere like never before. Things happening in the US leading to the January 20. Britain has officially left the EU. Chaos in Ghana's capital last week BBI politics is ramping up here in Kenya.

Jesus has something to say about political situations. As the world is being sucked into versions of extreme nationalism or even the deception of 'Christian Nationalism' we ought to be careful to know where we are putting our allegiance.

We might yet see these motions grow a bit more over time. As people desperately need hope and politicians then offer themselves up as false messiahs. The events of the last few years politically both here and globally are hard to take back and may continue to grow until the fruit of what the world is planting comes to completion. It is time even more for the church to stand. And in the words of Paul, after we have done everything to stand, we should stand firm.

Because if Jesus is King over our lives Uhuru and Raila and Ruto are not. If Jesus is King over our lives Trump and Biden are not and neither is Boris. If Jesus is King then we belong to His church and not the church of our political parties.

You see politicians offer themselves up as alternative messiahs and some outrightly call themselves that or even the second coming.

So Jesus was very clear about this, an invitation to even a different kind of politics and just like there are gatherings in that, there is a gathering here too. Because this is the kind of gathering that would move against the Kingdom and the powers of darkness and the gates of hell will not be able to stand. Jesus is inviting us to a gathering, the same gathering he started off at. A gathering he kept being part of and even dreamt to be part of the redemption of the church.

Really the invitation is to a place of communal worship and the public reading of the word. To a place to share communion, joining both the global church in fellowship and all church in history. That is what we call the communion of believers.

If you are looking for God, maybe for the first time or as someone who has been journeying for a while as a believer, I encourage you to not stop gathering as others are in the habit of doing.

Some quit because they have been hurt. Others because they were disappointed by how the church led. But don't be in the habit of not gathering if you want to quit. Others because they have found smaller groups and can pray at home. Yet that was meant to go hand in hand with this.

If you want to see where Jesus is, you will find him in the messy temple, in his father's house.

And I am not unaware of the public health challenges of meeting in the pandemic years. In fact, I am inviting us to pray that this will pass so that we can all gather again. I am inviting us to pray so that we can be creative even in the ways we can gather. So that we are loving

each other and our community. Yet I am inviting us to take every opportunity to gather. Even if it is with strict public health restrictions and guidelines.

Here is the thing, if you are finding faith? Faith comes by hearing... this is where you hear. If you are facing a mountain of doubt or losing faith it feels like..." Faith comes through hearing God's word" and this is where you hear it.

Your community will believe for you and in you. Here your community will love you not because you believe the same stuff, but because God loves you.

And if you are ever in that place, come nonetheless. Come for the good music, come for the friendships and the pastor's failed jokes but come nonetheless. Again, faith comes by hearing God's word and this is where you will hear it.

If you are in the world and you feel like totally the-other because of your race, tribal language, political affiliation or God knows what else, this is where you come. God's house was meant to be a house of prayer for all nations. This is where the dividing walls of division are broken and then the nation is healed.

If you are a believer longing to grow in Jesus, it is in the father's house that there is fullness of joy. The fruits of the Holy Spirit Joy, peace, love, patience you get to see them born as you sit in the community because we are forced to get out of our comfort zone. People not like us, people in different level of the faith journey. Even unbelievers or a pastor we do not always agree with.

This is where you will find the least of these, the poor and the broken may not always find their way to your door but in church, they will be sitting next to you. Maybe six feet apart but they are there not of any choice of your own. And it is in learning to love the least of these that we learn to love Jesus. But they won't come to your house. Especially with how the world continues to organise itself where people of different social strata live in different places, eat in different places.

This is the place where you will be moved by the Holy Spirit to overcome things he is calling you out of in a way that eventually you will not wait to meet them here rather you will go find them.

If you are hurting or grieving. And because of pain, you can no longer sing. It is in the father's house that you will find people who will grieve with the grieving and joy with the joyous. Here is where your community sings over you God's goodness during your dark night of the soul when you cannot sing.

If you are looking for life, you are looking for Jesus. And you find Jesus where he went.

There have been movements in the past few years to undermine the public gathering of believers. Now listen I am not talking about the public health issues of last year. I think that in some ways the best way for the church to love the city was to not gather or gather in limited ways.

But there have been years of believers moving away from the communal gathering because it was not perfect or it was not convenient. They did not like the songs or the pastor or it did not fulfil them or it was just too hard to get up in the morning.

And coming off 2020 it may have become easy to just give up on gathering altogether and my invitation is to not. Where is Jesus? You will find him

And after 2020 people have been forced to review why they went to church. People have discovered even the joys of not going to church if you can watch it online.

But let us not lose the wonder of public gathering. Let us be creative in the ways we can gather in these times but gather we must.

Actually, the church is God's idea. Did you not know that I am supposed to be at my father's house? Do you know that you are supposed to be in your father's house?