

Why you should stop assuming Jesus is with you

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“Now Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem every year for the feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. But when the feast was over, as they were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but (because they assumed that he was in their group of travelers) they went a day’s journey. Then they began to look for him among their relatives and acquaintances. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Jesus were astonished at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were overwhelmed. His mother said to him, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously.” But he replied, “Why were you looking for me? Didn’t you know that I must be in my Father’s house?” Yet his parents did not understand the remark he made to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. But his mother kept all these things in her heart.” (Luke 2:41-51, NET)

Assuming Jesus is with you

Actually following Jesus can be scary. It requires constant faith, and it often results in risky life. Besides, who wants to be led around by Jesus anyway? We know where we want to go and the kind of people we want to be. We are perfectly fine with our values and conscience being formed by dominant cultural values and assumptions, that way we can take for granted our choices as being right. Well, actually following Jesus is hard. Instead of spending so much time following the presence of Jesus

today, who might send us in the mix of Samaritans, or masses of poor and hungry people, why not just assume that wherever we are, Jesus is with us? Isn't it much easier to just go with the flow, and to take for granted that Jesus blesses our dominant cultural lives? Isn't it much better to just assume that Jesus' presence and affirmation is automatic, because we call out "Lord, Lord" among a group of self-professed Christians? Why not just constantly live as Jesus' parents did when they assumed Jesus "was in their company"? When we assume that Jesus is with us, and as we live our lives patterned by dominant culture, we stay in control.

Embracing places of vulnerability

However, Jesus' parents learned a lesson about the vulnerability of life when they realized that Jesus was indeed not with them, but only "after three days" of frantic searching and after, I imagine, re-grounding one's entire life in dependency to the One who is able. No longer in control, and certainly not appearing as people who were well put together, respectable, and stoic, they were forced to jump into the underside of life where instability, vulnerability, and suffering wreak havoc. Their time in Jerusalem meant returning to the chaos of a city that is not one's own home. Factor in that they were small village rural folks, and this must have been a nightmare. Jerusalem in the gospels is described as the place where prophets are killed and where they do not know "the things that make for peace". As a place it symbolized where evil forces combined with imperial and political powers, resulting in a cycle of vicious systemic violence. Mary and Joseph willingly entered the vulnerability of life amidst political corruption, injustice, exploitation, and deep economic disparity. They embraced the vulnerability of life in search for Jesus. We too must seek for Jesus in the space of vulnerability, among people who cry to God for Jubilee. In those social spaces we can no longer take Jesus for granted, instead, we search for him with every aspect of our being.

Jesus is present in the chaos.

And in the place that kills the prophets and forgets the meaning of Shalom, in that place, in all the chaos and vulnerability of life, we will realize that Jesus has made despised places his home. Didn't you know? Didn't you know that Jesus had to be in the things of the Father and has always been drawn to tabernacle in places of chaos and vulnerability, the ground floor for God's Shalom? Didn't you know that Christ

would be found counted among those executed unjustly by society's authorities? Didn't you know that while you were turning your back on the most vulnerable and heading for comfort, Jesus was settling in and making himself at home with those that live in the midst of chaos and suffering? Didn't you know it would be Jesus in the form of a little one that would explain to the religious what God is actually doing in the world? And please don't miss the contrast here between Jesus' parents who were frantic and anxious while they searched through Jerusalem and Jesus who is calm in the midst of chaos. Jesus is right where God is at work, and participation in such a reality provides courage, joy, and reassurance in the chaos. The question is, are we ready to tap into the ultimate source for courage, joy, and reassurance even in the midst of lamenting all the violence and injustice we encounter? Are we willing to vulnerably follow Jesus to the places and people he has chosen to especially share life with? For Christians that move and live in dominant culture, the challenge is to stop assuming that Jesus' presence is automatic, as though it can be assumed and taken for granted, and instead turn towards and embrace the places of chaos where the powerful crucify people. That is where you will find Jesus hanging out, and I encourage you to join him there as he leads you into a new way of life.