

# A NON-ANXIOUS SAVIOUR

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**LUKE 2:41-50**

**LETHBRIDGE MENNONITE CHURCH**

**BY: RYAN DUECK**

**JULY 12, 2015/7<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

We are in the second week of our summer series on “the footsteps of Jesus.”

As I said last week, we quite naturally gravitate to the *words* of Jesus; but it’s also important to look at the general way that Jesus goes about his daily activities, the way that he lives his life, the things he prioritizes, the ways in which he interacts with people, the choices he makes.

In today’s story, we see a Jesus who stays behind in the temple, a Jesus who *lingers*.

Lingering isn’t something that we are very good at in twenty-first century North America.

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Last year some time, I was driving somewhere and listening to a podcast about religion and spirituality in Canada. The topic of conversation was the “crazy busy” lives that many of us lead, what this says about us, how it affects our spiritual lives, etc.

I was listening to this podcast on my way *from* a meeting *to* the hospital after spending a good chunk of a morning I had hoped would include some sermon prep time responding to nearly thirty emails.

Once I was done at the hospital, the rest of my day would include racing back for my Nick’s volleyball game, then taking him and Claire back into the city where she would go to swim club and Nick and I would race to Naomi’s parents’ house for a quick supper.

After that, I would drop Nick off for guitar lessons a bit early so I would have time to pick Claire up from swim club and get her something to eat before guitar lessons ended.

Then, at around 8:00, we would be home.

Naomi wouldn't be home yet as she had a meeting that began after her full workday, and she wasn't sure when it would be done.

The theme of the podcast that day was a little ironic.

This schedule doesn't describe *every* day in our lives, but it's not that unusual either. And based on conversations and observations of those around me, I know that it's not uncommon for others, either.

What's the usual first response when you ask someone how they're doing? "Good... busy... you know."

Yes. I do know.

You would think that all this goodness and busyness would mean all kinds of wonderfully fulfilled people. But it doesn't seem to. At least not all the time.

Once the conversation moves past the obligatory first lines, we usually *complain* about how busy we are. Maybe this is all part of the performance. We like others to know that it isn't easy for us to be so busy and important, after all. Maybe.

But my sense is that people seem to be genuinely stretched and strained, that all this busyness takes a toll on relationships, on satisfaction and fulfillment in life.

We get a million little things done in a day, but do we do them *well*?

When we collapse into our beds at night, we can check off a lot of tasks that got done, but were we truly able to *give* ourselves to any of them without frantically looking ahead to the next one?

And, of course, this mentality shows up in churches as well. If we're good at being busy *anyway*, how much more if there is a spiritual veneer added to our busyness!

We're busy for God, we're building the kingdom, after all. It is *virtuous* to be doing things for Jesus, right?

And if we're *not* busy for God? Well, what does that say about the state of our souls?

And so, we hear about programs and “opportunities” and conferences and speakers and studies and retreats and workshops and endless other busy religious things.

Some of this is good. I think.

And it’s not just those of us in the workaday world who feel this way.

I spent this week at Camp Valaqua doing chapels for their counselor and staff orientation week.

Part of this involved listening to their faith stories around campfires each night. I was struck by how often I heard some variation of the following story: “My faith is kind of up and down... I don’t think it’s good enough... I worry that I’m not doing enough or being enough for God.”

Over and over I sensed this subterranean *anxiety* that we always need to be doing *more*.

Brian Zahnd is a pastor and writer from Missouri that I have recently come to appreciate. He recently remarked that most of us tend to live in the shadow of a **painful past**, an **anxious future**, and a **distracted present**.

I think he’s absolutely right.

We marinate on past failures, we worry about the future, and we have a hard time focusing in the present!

So often, we live our lives at a frantic pace to compensate for our anxieties in all three directions.

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In his prophetic vision of the future, the prophet Isaiah famously said, “and a little child shall lead them” (Isaiah 11:6).

In our text this morning, this is literally true. We are led, instructed, taught by a child, 12-year-old Jesus of Nazareth, who we see lingering in the Jerusalem temple long after his parents and the rest of his family had begun their journey back home after Passover celebrations.

It's easy to wonder what on earth Mary and Joseph were thinking! How could they just not notice that their son was gone for a whole day?!

But there was a deeply communal nature about much first century Jewish life that is mostly foreign to us today. Travel to and from Jerusalem for Passover would have been a massive group undertaking involving many people—friends, family, villages.

It would have been kind of like a big traveling party, with kids roaming to and fro, sometimes with this group of people, sometimes with that one. So it's not out of the question that it would take Jesus' parents a day to notice Jesus' absence.

And what was Jesus doing besides inconveniencing and worrying his parents?

Well, he was in temple, as we've already noted. It's even more interesting to note what he was *doing* in the temple.

He was Listening. He was asking questions.

This twelve-year-old boy is, evidently, engaging with the leading minds of his people in the most significant place of their religious, social, and political life—the place that was associated with God's presence among his people.

Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

His parents, on the other hand, are less impressed with the intelligence of their son than they are annoyed at his thoughtlessness!

His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

Jesus' response is well known.

"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

As if it were the most obvious thing in the world that a twelve-year-old boy from the country would be holding theological court in the Jerusalem temple.

As if his parents should have known that even as a boy Jesus was “about his Father’s business,” that he had a strong sense of his destiny and purpose, the role he would play in Israel’s story.

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But let’s leave aside, for a moment, the symbolic significance of Jesus in the temple even at this young age.

**Let’s focus on the simple fact that on a family pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Jesus felt free to stay behind, to *linger*.**

It’s interesting to observe Jesus’ general approach to life, whether as a 12 year old boy or, later, during his public ministry as an adult.

You would think that if Jesus knew that he only had a few decades on earth to get all of his Messiah stuff done, that he would’ve been frantically active.

So many people to heal, so much injustice to challenge, so much information to get out there (and he couldn’t even rely on Facebook to help him out!)

He had so much to do and so little time in which to do it. You’d think Jesus would be all action all the time.

But this isn’t what we see. I took a quick tour through the gospel of Matthew yesterday, and I was struck by the pace at which Jesus lived his life.

- We see Jesus snoozing on a boat while the storm rages—and then rebuking his disciples for the lack of faith that their fear and anxiety apparently betrayed (Matthew 8:23-27).
- We see him dismissing crowds so that he can have time to pray (Matthew 14).
- We hear his words about not worrying, not being anxious about what the days ahead will hold (Matthew 6:25)
- We see him *sitting down* on a hillside to teach the Beatitudes, not ascending some prominent lectern in Jerusalem (Matthew 5)
- We see him retreating to a “solitary place” after hearing about the beheading of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:13).

We could enumerate many more examples, but even this brief glance makes it clear that Jesus is not in a rush.

I often hear a term at pastors' conferences or counseling workshops about the importance of having a "non-anxious presence."

**When I read the gospels, I see in Jesus a non-anxious Saviour.**

Jesus is not the frantically self-important CEO of the fortune five hundred company who lives on his Blackberry.

He is not the carefully crafted politician traveling with an entourage who has his schedule managed down to the second.

He is not the spiritual guru with the schedule crammed full of speaking engagements and book signings.

We see something very different with Jesus.

We see him *walking* around from village to village, spending extended periods of time here, moving on more quickly there, healing this person but presumably not that person, spending time to teach here and there...

We don't ever get the impression that Jesus is slavishly tied to his schedule, as if he has a fixed number of daily appointments that he cannot fail to attend to.

Jesus knows where he is going and what he is about—he knows that his journey will end in Jerusalem—but in the three years of his public ministry, he generally seems unhurried, flexible, relaxed.

He has time for people. He is fully present wherever he is. He has time for his course to be rerouted by the promptings of the Spirit.

He is open to being surprised by encounters with people like Roman centurions and Samaritan women.

Jesus moves at his own pace. He moves at a *human* pace.

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Jesus shows us, even as a 12 year old boy, what an unhurried, non-anxious life looks like—a life fully given over in trust to his heavenly Father.

What would our lives look like, I wonder, if they were characterized by this kind of deep and settled trust in the Father?

What would our lives look like if we truly believed that all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well, as the medieval mystic Julian of Norwich famously said?

How would we live and move through our days if we believed that there was no trouble that could befall us, nothing that could take us beyond the loving embrace and promised future of our God?

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But even though we can learn from Jesus—here and elsewhere in the gospels—the importance of slowing down and being present, this text probably wasn't written primarily to dispense lifestyle advice for hyper-busy postmoderns.

So much of Scripture contains themes that reappear and weave their way throughout other parts of the narrative.

We have heard the story of Jesus lingering in Jerusalem and of people who loved him very much thinking for three days that they had lost him

**Fast forward twenty or so years and we see another three day period where people who loved Jesus very much think that they have lost him and find him again three days later.**

I'm referring, of course, to a crucifixion and an empty tomb.

When we read this story of the boy Jesus in the temple, we can't think of where the story is going.

The same Jesus who sat in the Jerusalem temple talking theology with the Jewish religious leaders would later find himself directly in their firing line.

The same Jesus who had once impressed the Temple elites with his knowledge and insight, would incite them to rage when he cracked the whip and overturned tables in a prophetic judgment of this same temple.

The same Jesus who had stayed behind debating theology after Passover (which celebrated the liberation of his people from slavery in Exodus) would in dying and rising from the dead offer a new, *final* liberation for all people.

The same Jesus who had to be in his “Father’s house” as a boy would as a young man claim to be the *new* temple for the *new* Israel, torn down and rebuilt for the life of all.

What we see, throughout the gospels, is a Jesus who defies expectations and refuses to give people what they expect or even want from a Messiah, who refuses to conform to expectations, who refuses to move at the pace of human demands, but **who is always moving at the pace of God and God’s plan.**

We see a Jesus who is always about his Father’s business, even if it can sometimes take a while for us to figure out and embrace just what this business is.

And we are to be about Jesus’ business in the same way that he was about his Father’s business.

1. **Jesus teaches us to slow down.** It’s ok to linger, to spend time with people, to be open to the courses of our days being redirected by the Spirit. We can learn from Jesus’ pace—the non-anxious ways in which he moved through his days, even though he literally had the weight of the world on his shoulders.
2. **Jesus teaches us to trust.** Trust that the story we are a part of is in good hands. Be open to a Saviour who unsettles, surprises, perhaps even shocks and offends you. Be open to the story taking a turn that you might never have expected. And, perhaps most importantly, to yield our lives in surrender to this Jesus who died that we might live.

May God help us to be about Jesus’ business in the non-anxious ways that he was about his Father’s business.

Amen.

